

Journal of Comparative Theology

at Harvard Divinity School

Contents

Editors' Introduction

I

Of Bliss and Love: Methodological 'Play' in Hindu-Christian Comparative Theology, by John M. Allison

3

Subjectivity of Christ and the Coherence of the Incarnation: A Critical Reading of the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria from a Madhyamaka Perspective, by Wanjoong Kim

20

Reading Across Traditions: Comparing the Theological Anthropologies of Ramanuja and Augustine of Hippo, by Jacob Prahlow

40

Reflection

Building Bridges: A Friendship Forged Through Interreligious Dialogue

58

The Journal of Comparative Theology is an online publication in which graduate students and emerging scholars share articles that seek to understand a particular faith in theological dialogue with one or more religious traditions.



EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

THE EDITORS AT THE *Journal of Comparative Theology* are excited to publish the fifth edition of this graduate student journal. The *JCT* has been publishing annual issues for five years now, and has also experienced a steady growth of interest. It appears that the field of comparative theology is continuing to expand, reaching undergraduate and graduate students far and wide.

In this issue, we have a fine collection of articles that engage the comparative theological methodology in unique ways. In the first article, "Of Bliss and Love: Methodological 'Play' in Hindu-Christian Comparative Theology", John Matthew Allison offers an insightful review of the latest theories in the field of comparative theology before entering into a playful and constructive exercise in comparative reading between the Christian theologies of David Bentley Hart and Jürgen Moltmann and the Hindu theology of Śrī Aurobindo.

In the second article, "Subjectivity of Christ and the Coherence of the Incarnation: A Critical Reading of the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria from a Madhyamaka Perspective", Wanjoong Kim puts forward a thought-provoking reading of Cyril's Christology through the lens of Nāgārjuna's logic.

The third article, “Reading Across Traditions: Comparing the Theological Anthropologies of Ramanuja and Augustine of Hippo”, by Jacob Prahlow, creatively juxtaposes two theological anthropologies, which, despite separation of time, space, and religious tradition, when read together create a fruitful comparison.

This issue ends with the first reflection piece from a scholar in the field, Echol Nix, Jr. We hope to include a section like this in all issues to come.

The editors are continuously grateful for the support of Francis X. Clooney, S.J., Parkman Professor of Divinity and Professor of Comparative Theology at Harvard Divinity School, and Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions.

Let me end by thanking all of the *Journal's* readers for their continued interest and support as well. Enjoy this issue and continue to spread the word about the *JCT* to religious and theological studies departments both nationwide and abroad. Please, do not forget to add yourself to our mailing list via the website, and to “like us” on Facebook.

The Editors
Journal of Comparative Theology

Of Bliss and Love: Methodological 'Play' in Hindu-Christian Comparative Theology

By John Matthew Allison



UNIVERSALITY, PARTICULARITY, AND COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY

*For / perfect beauty, narrowed down and reproduced,
/ might be a frail shield to an avalanche of /
reorganization.*

A.R. Ammons¹

As defined by Francis X. Clooney and James Fredericks, comparative theology (CT) is a revisionist, constructive project in which two or more religious traditions are critically correlated with each other.² Adherents of CT seek equilibrium between the discipline of “comparative religions” and the “theology of

religions.” They do so by attempting to avoid the type of a priori discourse characteristic of traditional theology of religions (which may inflict ideological violence against the self-understanding of religious others) while still acknowledging their adherence to a religious tradition. In other words, CT is a confessional discipline practiced by theologians who wish to avoid the a priori rigidity of the theology of religions despite being committed believers themselves.

Clooney writes that the goal of CT is not so much about judging which religion is the “true” one but about “learning across religious

¹ A.R. Ammons, *Garbage: a Poem* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), p. 46

² See, e.g. Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2011) and James L. Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), pp. 97-112.

borders" in a way that discloses the truth of one's own faith in terms of another faith.³ As such, one might follow Marianne Moyaert in defining this kind of interreligious theology as a "particularist" practice because the comparative theologian is self-consciously and always already embedded within what Hans-Georg Gadamer famously terms a particular "horizon" of meaning.⁴ But the defining difference between this particularism and the theology of religions approach to comparison is that the former's truth claims are a posteriori in kind, the latter a priori. As Marianne Moyaert puts it, interreligious comparison is grounded within a particular religious tradition but is a posteriori "hermeneutically open" to learning from religious others. And this requires that the self-understanding of another is allowed to be "the norm" for dialogue and comparison, which creates a space for potential transformation across religious borders.⁵

The motivations for hermeneutical openness are, of course, dependent upon the convictions of each comparative theologian. So Clooney, for instance, envisions the practice of CT as a series of carefully crafted, trial-and-error experiments from which truth hypotheses are formulated and subjected to "dialogical testing"⁶ in order to "deepen" one's knowledge of God potentially.⁷ To be sure, lest Clooney be accused of falling into a kind of theological positivism whereby the comparative theologian would eventually

arrive at some absolute position of truth, Clooney asserts that comparison is an "endless, intensifying spiral of reading" due to the particularity of human finitude, linguisticity, and imagination.⁸ In this sense, then, one may fairly compare CT to David Tracy's description of postmodern theologians, who acknowledge the fragmentary nature of knowing yet are dedicated to gathering and comparing "fragments" together in the never-ending pursuit of truth.⁹

Given the hermeneutical openness that marks CT, I define its logic as that of *particularity seeking universal context*. Why? The comparative theologian practices comparison in order to understand both her particular faith in terms of the context of religious others' "universality" (what is outside her faith) and others' universality in terms of her own "particularity" (what is inside her faith). Here, truth is not pursued by thinking the universal qua universal (the discredited dream of seeing from a proverbial "view from nowhere") or the particular qua particular (a logic that devolves into worldview isolationism), but in engaging with the particular qua universal or the universal qua particular. At core, then, one of the strengths of CT's hermeneutical openness is its recognition of both the contextuality and relationality of *all* religious identities and theologies. Along these lines, I follow philosopher and scholar of Judaism Elliot

³ Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, pp. 15-16.

⁴ On Gadamer's formulation of the idea of "horizon," see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and method* (New York: Continuum, 2004), esp. pp. 300-305, 366-367.

⁵ Marianne Moyaert, *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality* (Rodopi: Amsterdam, 2011), p. 48.

⁶ Francis X. Clooney, "Comparative Theology: A Review of Recent Books," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 521-50, p. 521.

⁷ Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, p. 111.

⁸ Ibid., p. 127; the imagination is a reoccurring theme in Clooney's work; see, e.g. Clooney, "God for Us," in *Comparative Theology*, pp. 128-151 and his recent "Balthasarian" inspired theopoetics: idem., *His Hiding Place is Darkness: A Hindu-Catholic Theopoetics of Divine Absence* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

⁹ David Tracy, "Form and Fragment: The Recovery of the Hidden and Incomprehensible God," in *Reflections Center of Theological Inquiry* 3 (Autumn 2000): 62-88.

“At core, then, one of the strengths of comparative theology’s hermeneutical openness is its recognition of both the contextuality and relationality of all religious identities and theologies.”

Wolfson’s formulation of the relationship between the particular and universal whereby the particular is “indexical” of the universal. This does not signify recourse to essentialization but is an acknowledgement that, as Wolfson paradoxically puts it, “the determinacy of the universal is always in the process of being determined by the indeterminacy that is the particular and the indeterminacy of the particular is always in the process of being determined by the determinacy that is the universal.”¹⁰ Wolfson elaborates elsewhere: “One is veritably the singularity of oneself insofar as one is otherwise than oneself, that the exteriority of the interior... is gauged by interiority of the exterior, that individuality consists of embracing an alterity that is... universalizable: *the difference between us is what invariably makes us the same.*”¹¹ This language is, of course, dizzying. But Wolfson’s basic point is that one’s “interior” identity is constituted by the “exterior” identities of others (and vice versa), and this entails that one’s context as particular is universalized in its very contextuality. Or that, said differently—and noting that context means literally a “weaving together (*con-textus*) or both universal and local

processes”¹²—the “other” is universalizably the same as the “self” insofar as both are different from each other. Particularity is, in this sense, universal.

In addition to such hermeneutical issues of “intelligibility” that might motivate Christian theologians to engage CT, there are also resources that pertain to the “appropriateness” of CT from within Christianity itself.¹³ In this context, John Thatamanil is helpful. Paring the commandment to bear no false witness against your neighbor with the “Golden Rule,” he argues that just as we would desire religious others to be open to learning from us, so we should seek to do the same for religious others. Thus, for Thatamanil, the Golden Rule dictates epistemologically that we should take non-Christian truths claims seriously without committing ourselves to an a priori position of some kind about the truth or falsity of those claims.¹⁴ In sum, CT, as I understand it from a Christian perspective, is a revisionist theological project motivated by both issues of “intelligibility” and “appropriateness,” and it refers to the process of critical comparison of religions. Furthermore, its goal is the elucidation of the “universal” significance of others’ faiths in terms of one’s own “particular” faith and vice versa.

Having now defined the parameters of the discipline, what does comparison exactly look like in CT? Albert Einstein once commented in a letter to French mathematician Jacques S.

¹⁰ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Giving Beyond the Gift: Apophasis and Overcoming Theomania* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2014), pp. xiii-xiv.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. xiv; emphasis added.

¹² Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), p. 23; emphasis original.

¹³ The distinction between “intelligibility” and “appropriateness” is drawn from Schubert Ogden’s well-known essay “What is Theology?” See Schubert Ogden, *Journal of Religion*, 52:1 (1972): 22-40.

¹⁴ See John Thatamanil, *The Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and the Human Predicament: An East-West Conversation* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press: 2006), p. xi.

Hadamard that “combinatory play seems to be the essential feature in productive thought.”¹⁵ It is arguable that this idea of “combinatory play” is perhaps what sets CT apart from traditional models of Christian theological engagement with other religions. For CT, especially as articulated in the work of Hugh Nicholson, may be thought of not only as a project whereby truth is uncovered, but also *constructed* via interreligious comparison.

In *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (2011), Nicholson argues that comparative theologians must self-reflexively acknowledge the ideological commitments that construct their comparative projects in order to avoid the perpetuation of ideology. Indeed, invoking the controversial work of Carl Schmitt, Nicholson argues that “the political” is inescapable in religious discourse because all religion “is implicated, even if only indirectly, in relations of religious *rivalry*.”¹⁶ This entails two related points of hermeneutic suspicion for Nicholson: First, if the political/exclusionary dimensions of religious identity are unacknowledged or actively repressed (as, for example, in classic pluralist theologies whose adherents often deny the meta-exclusivism at the heart of their project), this enacts a certain type of ideological discourse that he terms “hegemonic.”¹⁷ Hegemonic discourse’s ideological power to appear objective is directly correlated to the extent that it represses its own exclusionary genesis, that is, hides the fact that it has excluded anything at all in forming its identity. In hegemonic discourse, then, those beliefs or identities that genuinely differ from that discourse are concealed. Second, if a

religious individual or community instead openly acknowledges the exclusionary character of identity, but religious others are then not considered to have legitimate (though competitive) claims to truth, Nicholson argues that a “polemical” ideology is at work. For in polemical discourse, there is the acknowledgement of differences between self and other but a hostile refusal to *respect* those differences. Here, otherness is not tolerated, much less valued. Rather, the religious other is an enemy whose destruction—be it literal or ideological—is required in order for the polemicist’s own identity to exist.

Nicholson’s argues that despite the inescapability of exclusion, hegemonic and polemic ideologies do not follow necessarily from religious belonging. Indeed, he contends that CT’s usefulness lies precisely in its ability to recognize its own political interests but also to decry the illusion of “essentialized contrasts between religious communities.”¹⁸ That is, in being able to expose the political motivations and the constructed relationality of all models of self and other, comparative theologians are free to be hermeneutically open to religious others potentially. In Nicholson’s brand of CT, then, the differences between self and other are not overlooked or refused the right to exist but are seen *as* different and so deserving of careful respect. In other words, re-reading Nicholson in terms of Wolfson’s contention that “the difference between us is what invariably makes us the same,” we see that Nicholson’s analysis offers a way for comparativists to acknowledge differential particularities between themselves and others even while acknowledging the

¹⁵ Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1954), p. 35.

¹⁶ Hugh Nicholson, *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 195; emphasis added.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7; for Nicholson’s more in-depth critique of theological pluralism as hegemonic, see pp. 4-6, 8, 14, 27-29, and 34.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

“universal” relationality of all identities. For if every “interior” identity is relationally constituted by what it “exteriorly” excludes in the act of identity formation, this fact deconstructs both hegemonic and polemical discourse: the former due to the particularized nature of universality, and the latter due to the universalized nature of particularity.

Moving from a hermeneutics of suspicion to a more constructive hermeneutics, Nicholson argues that the “New Comparativism”¹⁹ can be a powerful tool for CT. Drawing on the work of Jonathan Z. Smith and the turn from genealogical to analogical comparison in the field of comparative religions, Nicholson argues that CT theorists would benefit from treating “religion” as a discursive rather than extra-linguistic phenomenon.²⁰ Why? As Smith famously writes, “Comparison does necessarily tell us how things ‘are,’” but “like models and metaphors, comparison tells us how things might be conceived, how they might be ‘re-described.’”²¹ And so, in conceptualizing comparison analogically, Smith opens up the door for thinking outside the realm of historically related religious phenomena via the process of comparative “juxtaposition.” As Nicholson makes clear, Smith’s version of analogical juxtaposition is essentially an aesthetic rather than essentialist approach to religious data since it is a creative enterprise and a work of the imagination.

~

Sam Gill has elsewhere described Smith’s type of analogical juxtaposition as “play.”²² Utilizing Smith’s well-known contention that “map is not territory,” Gill observes that “all religion occurs as the inevitable play between map and territory.”²³ Smith, of course, reverses the traditional understanding of the relationship between map and territory in asserting that maps are all that scholars of religion really possess, for maps and models belong only to the Baudrillardian “precession of simulacra.”²⁴ This is because what were once believed to be the territories of religion mapped out in the act of comparison are in fact *projections* of scholars’ own maps, Smith argues. As he puts it, comparison is how “we ‘re-vision’ phenomena as *our* data in order to solve *our* theoretical problems,” a fact which entails that there is no innocent reading of religious territory unmarred from prejudice or agenda.²⁵ Indeed, all comparisons reveal some aspects of the phenomenon under investigation at the cost of *other* aspects that are *concealed*, which means that there is no known way to get “behind” one’s constructed, discursive map of the territory to territory completely and totally revealed. As Clooney writes in his work, “language is not only *about* the world, but constitutive of it.”²⁶ Significantly, then, in acknowledging the impossibility of access to “territory” behind “map,” Smith advocates that this liberates scholars to create *new* maps and

¹⁹ See William E. Paden, “Elements of a New Comparison,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8:1 (1996): 15-20; Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); and idem., *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

²⁰ See Nicholson, *Comparative Theology*, p. 40.

²¹ Ibid., p. 97; echoing Gadamer, one might say Smithian comparison belongs to the *Geisteswissenschaften* and the tradition of *Bildung*, not the *Naturwissenschaften*; see Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 16.

²² Sam Gill, “No Place to Stand: Jonathan Z. Smith as *Homo Ludens*: The Academic Study of Religion Sub Specie Ludi,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66/2 (1998): 283-312.

²³ Ibid., p. 310.

²⁴ Jean Baudrillard quoted in ibid., p. 312.

²⁵ Smith, quoted in Nicholson, *Comparative Theology*, p. 97.

²⁶ Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, p. 85; emphasis original.

analogies between genealogically isolated phenomena that otherwise would not be compared in essentialist models of religion. Thus unlike an essentialist brand of comparison, Gill follows Smith and asserts that analogical comparativists are free to assume new standpoints and to draw previously unseen aesthetic connections between phenomena, “however temporarily” held or “absurd” such standpoints might be. Here, comparativists own up to the constructed and so open-ended nature of comparison and engage in combinatory play.²⁷

While Nicholson follows Smith in arguing that analogical comparison frees comparative theologians from having to engage in “direct, genealogical connections” among phenomena, he does not refer to analogical comparison as “play” per se.²⁸ But in applying the “New Comparativism” to CT, Nicholson’s analysis offers potential resources for rethinking CT precisely *as* play. For in approaching comparison in terms of analogy rather than genealogy, theologians can approach CT as a creative process of truth-production between two maps of reality. Here, the meanings of religious phenomena are not described objectively but treated as works of art whose meaning is in part constructed in the very act of comparison. New maps of two or more phenomena are imagined and drawn which then reveal new aspects of the phenomena while concealing others, for the event of comparison will always change how we think,

see, and play. To be clear, Smith is not arguing for a purely subjectivist model of comparison that allows comparativists to draw any map they like. Rather, emphasizing that comparison is never simply an act of re-presentation means that even the most faithful interpretation is *not* simply mimetic. As Gadamer writes, the very act of “bringing-forth” a phenomenon in “presentation (*Darstellung*)” is itself an irreducibly interpretive act;²⁹ or as James Taylor explains in a Ricoeurian context, each interpretation or translation is “a legitimate work in its own right” that brings to light previously unseen aspects of a phenomenon.³⁰ Thus, similar to Gadamer, one might say that in thinking analogically about comparison, CT shifts its focus from “method” to “truth” and so leaves behind the idea of representationalism in favor of openness to the event of truth itself. If so, comparativists may be said to be taking part in the process of playing/mapping and being played/mapped in an open-ended, dialectical process of “a transformation into the true”; for in “being presented in play, what *is* emerges. It produces and brings to light what is otherwise constantly hidden and withdrawn.”³¹ In other words, comparative theology is an enterprise whereby one may take on new, unexpected perspectives heretofore hidden or unknown.

“Theologians can approach comparative theology as a creative process of truth-production between two maps of reality.”

²⁷ Gill, “No Place to Stand,” p. 312.

²⁸ Nicholson, *Comparative Theology*, p. 104.

²⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 114-115.

³⁰ James Taylor, “Translation as Hospitality,” in *Hosting the Stranger: Between Religions*, ed. Richard Kearney and James Taylor (New York, NY: Continuum, 2011), p. 16.

³¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 112; emphasis added; again, in a Wolfsonian register, one might say that a particular “truth” that is brought to light in being played by a work of art is shown to have universal significance insofar as it is recognized in terms of one’s own universalized particularity: “what we experience in a work of art... is how true it is, i.e. to what extent one knows and recognizes something and oneself” (ibid., 113).

~

GOD'S GLORY, CREATION, AND PLAY

In concluding this section, one can see that the critical deconstruction of hegemonic and polemical ideologies (read in terms of universality and particularity), together with an account of analogical comparison, offers a new way to see CT: in this formulation of CT, comparison may be approached as an improvisational aesthetics of play.³² But as Gadamer clarifies, play is not a subjective state or something one *does*; rather, what “holds the player in its spell, draws him into play, and keeps him there is the game itself.”³³ Therefore, one might say that CT is indeed a game of hide-and-go-seek into which the theologian is drawn and in which she risks her particularity in exposing herself to the “universality” of religious others. That is, she takes part in the artistic improvisation of revealing and concealing (or as Smith says, in consenting to temporary, “absurd” standpoints of comparison). As such, the act of comparative theologizing itself can be seen as its own reward insofar as CT is thought of as play that is intrinsically good, an aesthetic joy—“the joy of knowing *more* than is already familiar.”³⁴ And this means that the comparativist is not only concerned with propositional truth, but is also a type of *artist* interreligiously engaged with the formal dimensions and *beauty* of truths.

Having now outlined an approach to CT, what might an actual comparison look like? Here I offer a comparison between the concept of “play” in the Christian theologies of David Bentley Hart and Jürgen Moltmann and the Hindu work of Śrī Aurobindo.

There is a recurring problem that arises in Christian thought, which runs something like this: if God is perfect, perfection meaning that God does not *need* anything outside of Godself, why is it that God made the universe? At stake here is the “aseity” of God, that is, God’s supposedly self-contained, transcendent perfection apart from created immanence.

One finds a cluster of Biblical responses as to why God made creation that can be grouped provisionally into two categories: (a) Creation is *for* God and (b) creation is *for* itself. (a) Thus one reads that Christ “is the image of the invisible God... all things have been created through and for him” (Col. 1:15-16), and also that “you created all things, and by your will [*theléma*] they existed” (*theléma* signifying “desire” and “pleasure”). One here also thinks of God’s speeches in Job 38-41, in which the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* of creation’s many kinds of inhuman grandeur—such as the “mighty strength” and “splendid frame” of the wild Leviathan (41:12)—make up “the great acts of God” (40:19).

(b) Inversely, one finds God in both Genesis and the Psalms giving humanity “dominion” over everything (Gen. 1:27-28; Ps. 8:5-9)—creation is to be for human beings. But instead of positing that these two responses involve differing concepts of creation, one most often finds in scripture the idea that creation is neither truly *for* itself only nor *for* God only. Rather, as one reads in Isaiah 43:1, “You [Israel] are my

³² See Jeffery D. Long, “Solidarity through Polyphony” in *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation*, ed. Francis X. Clooney (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2010): 171-190, and Nathan Crawford, *Theology as Improvisation: A Study in the Musical Nature of Theological Thinking* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2013) for two aesthetic approaches to theological thinking from a musical perspective.

³³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 104-106.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 113; emphasis original.

witnesses,' declares the Lord, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.'" That is, creation exists in order to know God and to partake in God's own desire, which is that "the glory of God" might be known (Phil. 2:11). It is God's glory to make creation and creation's glory to glorify God. But what does "glory" mean here?

The word "glory" is often used to translate both the Hebrew *kabod* ("weight," "heaviness," "significance") and the Greek *doxa* ("opinion," "honor"). In the Old Testament, *kabod* most often signifies the physical presence of God, normally seen as a fire, light, or luminous darkness (Exod. 24, 17 33:19; Ezek. 1:27-28); and in the New Testament, divine presence is often similarly conceptualized in terms of light or fire (Matt. 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36, 2:8-10; Acts 2:1-31): the incarnate Christ is the "radiance of the glory of God" (Heb. 1:3). But it is not God alone who possesses glory. Indeed, humans are "crowned with glory" (Ps. 8:5) according to the Psalmist; and as Jesus commands his disciples, they are to let their "light shine" so that others may see good works and therefore give "glory" to God (Matt. 5:16). The idea here is that somehow human action is, even if only figuratively, a mirror of God's glory. In such Biblical passages, one finds the idea that there is glory in creation and so creation is "good" (Gen. 1; Ps. 34:8). Thus one reads of "angels" and "morning stars" celebrating it (Job 38:7) and of "wisdom" (*chokma*), who took part in its making (Prov. 3:19, 8:22)—*chokma* is God's "delight"—

rejoicing before God's "inhabited world and delighting in the human race" (8:31). That creation is delightful means that it is intrinsically good and beautiful, an idea David Bentley Hart puts succinctly: "Creation's being is God's pleasure, creation's beauty God's glory."³⁵ Hart puts beauty at the center of his theology of creation and asserts that though it is an "unnecessary" gift from God, creation is in fact the *theatrum gloriae Dei* since it participates in God's glory.³⁶ Furthermore, creation's glory is *dynamically* related to God, partaking in both the intimacy and distance of the divine, and as such is "definitely placed, but is always serially consequent upon and open to an infinity of perspectives."³⁷ That is, "beauty crosses boundaries" in the movement between the infinite and the finite, which is not a dialectical process but a "musical" play of the ceaseless novelty and the unfolding of transcendent glory in and through immanent glory.³⁸

So the distinction between creation as either for God or for itself reveals itself as a false dichotomy because God does not bring about creation for some reason other than love of creation itself—immanent creation is beautiful and glorious, and God takes pleasure in it for its own sake. As such, the question as to what motivates God to create the world has no explanation properly speaking, because God's creative love simply *is*. In other words, it is God's very Trinitarian character to "other" Godself since God is love (1 John 4:8), and love freely desires otherness, which means that creation is produced by an "agapic" *eros* or "erotic" *agape*.³⁹ For since God's loving desire

³⁵ David B. Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 252; for Hart's own recent foray into interreligiously-flavored theology, see idem., *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

³⁶ Hart, *Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 21.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 21-25.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 20; cf. pp. 260-74.

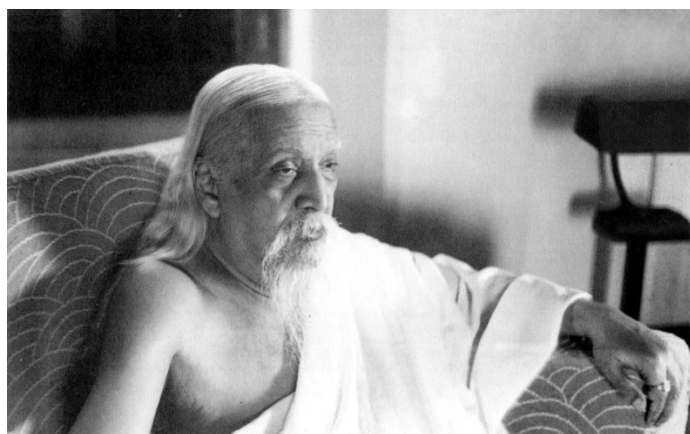
creates otherness, and God's love is a good love, creation is good; and this means that it is beautiful, desirable, and enjoyable to God in and of itself. In this way, Christianity makes a radical break with certain formulations of anti-somatic Platonism and Gnosticism in that immanence, though dependent on the transcendent Good for its existence, is not a *deficient* form of goodness but possesses its own goodness and beauty that foreshadows the beatific vision.⁴⁰

A similar Christian approach to the relationship between God, glory, and creation is also found in Jürgen Moltmann's essay, "The First Liberated Men in Creation" (1972). Here he asserts that creation derives from "God's *good will or pleasure*. Hence the creation is God's play, a play of his groundless and inscrutable wisdom. It is the realm in which God displays his glory."⁴¹ Moltmann argues that, in Western society, the sense of the intrinsic value of play, or the very idea of intrinsic value *itself*, has been repressed and forgotten, which has serious theological ramifications for Moltmann. Indeed, he sees joy as the very meaning of human life, which derives from play, and which itself is archetypally derived from God's own "infinite pleasure" of play.⁴² Thus life, for Moltmann, is not *for* anything except an enjoyment thereof—it is its own glory. As he writes, human creation is unconditionally "justified" and "beautiful" regardless of whatever humanity accomplishes or not because *God* is "beautiful" and creation participates in that divine beauty.⁴³

THE "PLAY" OF CREATION IN ŚRĪ AUROBINDO

Līlā ("play," "sport," or "drama") is a Sanskrit term referring to the effortless and spontaneous relationship between the immanent universe (*māyā*) and the transcendent principle of reality in both of its personal theistic formulations (Īśvara or Bhagavān) and impersonal non-theistic formulations (Brahman). The concept of *līlā* is found throughout many branches of Hinduism. Traditionally, it is associated with the activities of the goddesses Lakṣmī and Lalitā in Śāktism, refers to the manifestations of Brahman in Vedānta, and is used in Vaiṣṇavism to describe the worldly activities of Viṣṇu's *avatāra*. Vaiṣṇavite renderings of *līlā* are especially associated with both Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, which is why the *Rāmāyaṇa* is said to be Rāma's "play." In the same way, Kṛṣṇa's mischievous childhood and his erotic, pastoral adventures with the *gopīs* and Rādhā as Kṛṣṇa Gopāla (both found in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*) are spoken of as his *līlā*, too.

In the 20th century, the cosmogonic rendering of *līlā* has figured centrally in the work of Śrī



Śrī Aurobindo (1872-1950)

⁴⁰ The eschatological dimensions of creation's beauty is emphasized in Jürgen Moltmann, "The First Liberated Men in Creation," in *Theology of Play*, trans. Reinhard Ulrich (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972): 1-75; pp. 2-3.

⁴¹ Moltmann, "The First Liberated Men," p. 17; emphasis original.

⁴² Ibid., p. 19.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 43.

Aurobindo, who is perhaps the most articulate modern Hindu theologian of *līlā*. His system of “Integral Yoga” focuses upon both the attainment of “Supramental Consciousness” and the perfection of the body, meaning that it is the “paradox and *glory* of human beings...to achieve the divine life from within human bodies.”⁴⁴ As such, Aurobindo’s system is that of a mystical anthropology wherein humans, and the whole of the universe of *māyā* (“illusion”), are *manifestations* of the impersonal Brahman. “Integral Yoga” is thus not founded upon a notion of theistic creation; rather, Aurobindo has a non-dualistic approach to the universe, seeing it in terms of a process of divine *involution* (Brahman manifested “downward” as immanent Mind, Life, and Matter) and divine *evolution* (Brahman manifested “upward” as transcendent Pure Bliss, Pure Consciousness, and Pure Being), both of which are mediated by the “Supermind” (a collective Consciousness between the realms of transcendence and immanence).

Drawing on *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* II.6 (“from Delight all these beings are born, by Delight they exist and grow, to Delight they return”)⁴⁵ and *Kena Upaniṣad* IV.6 where it is said, “Brahman is bliss,” Aurobindo identifies Brahman with “Delight.”⁴⁶ Asking why the universe is manifested if Brahman needs nothing, desires nothing, and is not compelled by anything, Aurobindo answers that it can be “only for one reason, for delight.”⁴⁷ If it sounds

peculiar that Aurobindo identifies Brahman with delight, it is arguable that Aurobindo’s theological presupposition here may be that Brahman *is* as Brahman *does*. In other words, Brahman’s delight in creating (what Brahman does) is no different than identity as delight (what Brahman is); as such, Brahman can be identified with *ānanda*. For Brahman is self-contained, perfect, infinite, but Brahman also contains the potential for movement—what he terms *śakti* (“Force” or “energy”)—and takes delight in manifesting in an infinity of immanent forms. *Saccidānanda*—Aurobindo’s term for the triune unity of Existence (*sat*), Consciousness (*cit*), and Bliss (*ānanda*)—enjoys expressing itself in many ways since self-expression is its fundamental nature.⁴⁸ Significantly, Aurobindo states that *Saccidānanda*’s creative / involutionary nature is *self-chosen*.⁴⁹ *Sacidānanda*’s is utterly and totally free—an assertion that is undeniably reminiscent of the medieval Christian “voluntarism” debates over God’s freedom (as well as David Bentley Hart’s aforementioned insistence of the “non-necessity” of creation).

For Aurobindo, *Saccidānanda* is hidden yet fully present within all things here in *māyā*. As such, he clarifies that the world is not “unreal” or even lacking eternal existence, for all particular forms will vanish, but “Form itself, World in itself are eternal,” because there never was or will be a time when Delight is not, via *śakti*, taking delight in itself.⁵⁰ In linking Brahman to

⁴⁴ Martin Sebastin Kallungal, “Introducing Sri Aurobindo,” in *Mystical Anthropology: Cross Religious Perspectives: Interdisciplinary Reflections on the Arnhem Mystical Sermons and Sri Aurobindo*, ed. Ineke Cornet, Rob Faesen, and Martin Sebastin Kallungal (Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2012), p. 19; emphasis added.

⁴⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine: Book One and Book Two* (Pondicherry, (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1973), p. 91.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 100.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 91.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 92; M.P. Pandit *Glossary of Sanskrit Terms in Sri Aurobindo’s Works* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1973), p. 56, defines *saccidānanda* as the unity “of transcendent existence, self-awareness and self-delight.”

⁴⁹ Aurobindo, *Life Divine, Book One*, p. 90.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 102.

māyā as an inseparable, energetic process of unity-in-difference, Aurobindo attempts to differentiate himself from Śaṅkara's monistic Advaita (which he claims elevates unity over difference), Rāmānuja's *Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta* brand of qualified nondualism (for apparently not emphasizing unity enough), and Madhvācārya's dualism (for not recognizing unity at all). For Aurobindo, by contrast, the universe is illusionary but not in the sense of lacking reality; rather, this realm of particular beings is only *part* of the larger universal picture. Indeed, this realm of multiplicity is *also* a manifestation of an infinite unity, the former of which is the latter's delight. It is "Lila, the play, the child's joy, the poet's joy, the actor's joy, the mechanic's joy of the Soul of things eternally young, perpetually inexhaustible, creating and re-creating Himself in Himself for the sheer bliss of that self-creation, of that self-representation—Himself the play, Himself the player, Himself the playground."⁵¹ This eternal play, then, is its *own* good for Aurobindo. Delight delights in losing itself in the delight of the multiplicitous forms of the universe and then rediscovering, or "self-finding" itself.⁵² That the universe is good in and of itself is significant for Aurobindo. He writes, "If we reject the mental and physical in our attraction to the spiritual, we neither fulfill God integrally, nor satisfy the conditions of His self-manifestation. . . . However high we climb, even though it be to the Non-Being itself, we climb ill

if we forget our base."⁵³ But what is the "base" of his spirituality?

Aurobindo understood his nondualistic system in terms of the integration of Advaita Vedānta, from which he drew his notions of Brahman, and Tantra, from which he drew his idea of *śakti* ("Force" or "energy").⁵⁴ To be sure, Aurobindo never himself explicitly used the term "Tantric" to refer to Integral Yoga, but his psycho-physical method for evolving spiritual potentiality centered around the *kuṇḍalinī* serpent coiled at the base of the spine.⁵⁵ As Aurobindo wrote, this universal, cosmic *śakti*—once awakened through yogic and breathing exercises—should be drawn up through the six *chakras* ("wheels") running up the spine until the *śakti* leaves through the top of the head (the *sahasrā chakra*) until one is united with *ānanda*.⁵⁶ That humanity therefore is the "Divine in the individual ascending back out of limited Nature to its own proper divinity"⁵⁷ does not mean Aurobindo is anti-somatically devaluing the material world, for indeed *śakti* lies at the very heart of his thinking. Thus he writes, "the secret... is to enjoy her [*śakti*] in the soul as one who enjoys a woman with the body,"⁵⁸ for the material universe is an integral part of *Saccidānanda*—creation is *līlārtha* and Brahman's Delight. And it is human bliss, too.

The implications of having *ānanda* and *śakti* at the center of Integral Yoga is this: Despite the self-contained perfection of Brahman, it is in

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 103.

⁵² Ibid., 110.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 37.

⁵⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo on the Tantra* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972), p. 39.

⁵⁵ The exception to this is founded in his personal correspondences in which he freely refers to Tantra (Kripal, *Esalen*, n. 23, p. 477); for an earlier interpretations of "tantra" in Aurobindo, see Kees Bolle, "Tantric Elements in Sri Aurobindo," *Numen* 9/2 (September 1962): 123-42.

⁵⁶ Aurobindo, *On the Tantra*, p. 12.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 140.

⁵⁸ Aurobindo, quoted in Kripal, *Esalen*, p. 64.

fact by *kāma* ("desire") that Delight freely brings the universe into being: "desire is the lever by which the divine Life-principle effects its end of self-affirmation in the universe and the attempt to extinguish it in the interests of inertia is a denial of the divine Life-principle, a Will-not-to-be which is necessarily ignorance."⁵⁹ Again, for Aurobindo, the material universe is its own desirable good—it is *rasa* ("aesthetic delight," "the essential delight-giving quality of things").⁶⁰ In the last chapter of *The Life Divine* he writes that "to be and to be fully is Nature's aim in us, but to be fully is to be wholly conscious of one's being," which means realizing the unity-in-difference of one's Supramental Consciousness, which is the irreducible plays *between* spiritual transcendence and material immanence.⁶¹ Thus it is not in spite of material Nature but *through* it that the realization of Supramental Consciousness occurs.

In light of this play and delight in reality, Aurobindo argues that true *rasa* does not derive from repeating what has been done before. Indeed, given the evolutionary center of his system, it is no surprise that in speaking of aesthetics, he writes that "there is no obligation to copy faithfully from life."⁶² Indeed, he writes that the greatest aestheticians are those who bring out the previously unseen spiritual depth in things—they "open us up to new realms of vision, new realms of being, our own and the world's."⁶³ And as such, we can see that, for Aurobindo, the *līlā* of *ānanda* dictates that one should always seek to self-express and experience *rasa* in new ways. There is a

cosmogonic aesthetics at the very heart of his theology.

DIVINE BEAUTY, DIVINE NOVELTY

What similarities and differences might come to light in analogically juxtaposing Hart and Moltmann's conceptions of "play" and "glory" to Aurobindo's conceptions of *līlā* and *ānanda*? And how might one improvisationally play with the very idea of "play" in the comparative Hindu-Christian context? In this section, I do not so much seek to map out the "essential" similarities or differences between "Hindu" and "Christian" cosmogonies; rather I am attempting to play in the very idea of "play" itself across religious borders. Significantly, I do not wish to "de-politicize" Moltmann, Hart and Aurobindo in supposing that they are saying the "same" thing; rather, I hope to construct something aesthetically novel across religious borders, which potentially opens up new ways of thinking about creation and play in a Hindu-Christian comparative theological context.

In comparing the formulations of Christian and Hindu play, the first and simplest observation to make is that Moltmann, Hart and Aurobindo have very different conceptions of the universe in important ways: the former pair begins with theistic creation, the latter with the manifestations of a (im)personal Consciousness. The former pair's system functions on a form of ontological dualism, the latter thinker's with non-dualism. The former pair sees some kind of end to this universe (the *eschaton*), while the latter thinker sees the universe cycling *ad*

⁵⁹ Aurobindo, *Divine Life: Book One*, p. 204.

⁶⁰ Pandit, *Glossary of Sanskrit Terms*, p. 54.

⁶¹ Aurobindo, *The Divine Life: Book Two*, p. 1023.

⁶² Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry and Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1973), p. 56.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

“The fact that the Divine plays the game of the universe invites humanity itself to create and play along with the Divine in the universe.”

infinitum. But aside from such obvious differences between Hart, Moltmann and Aurobindo, what about the potential similarities at work here? There are arguably profound resonances between *līlā* and play in that Hart, Moltmann and Aurobindo seek to deconstruct any notion of the universe being “for itself” or “for the Divine.” Instead, each thinker demonstrates that the creation (God) or manifestation (Brahman) of the universe is *both* an intrinsic “unnecessary” good for the perfect Divine (who enjoys creating or manifesting out of “love” or “delight”) and also good for creation itself. Thus in Christian terms, one can say that Love (*agape*) plays because it freely desires (*eros*) the “glory” of creation; and in Hindu terms, that Delight (*ānanda*) plays (*līlā*) because it freely desires (*kāma*) the *rasa* of manifestation as well. Here, love / play / desire / glory and *ānanda* / *līlā* / *kāma* / *rasa* intriguingly mirror each other across religious borders, for both in its Christian and Hindu renderings the universe is *an intrinsically good, beautiful, and erotic game of play between the difference of transcendence and immanence*.

This play of difference is significant, for it would seem that Hart, Moltmann and Aurobindo escape the dichotomy of ontotheology (founding the world on something) and meontology (founding the world on no-thing) by linking transcendence and immanence in irreducible relation to each other.

Of course, for both Christian and Hindu thinkers alike, transcendence has an phenomenological priority over immanence, but in these cosmogonies of “play,” transcendence and immanence cannot be thought apart from each other—God / Delight is always already related to the difference of creation, or said differently, the creation of difference.

The fact that the Divine plays the game of the universe invites humanity itself to create and play along with the Divine in the universe. Thus Hart speaks of the universe’s “infinity of perspectives,” Moltmann of “the endless beauties and liberties of the finite concomitants of infinite joy of the creator,”⁶⁴ and Aurobindo, of the importance of creating infinitely new ways for *Saccidānanda* to self-express itself aesthetically. Might one, then, postulate here something like a Hindu-Christian *imperative towards novelty*? Theologically, this would mean that perhaps the perfection of the Divine (God / Brahman) lies precisely in its openness to—not transcendent removal from—the indefiniton of immanence. Anthropologically, perhaps such an imperative might motivate both Christian and Hindu believers to become hermeneutically open, and so play across religious borders, to risk their religious particularities in a “universal,” comparative play of interreligious truths. In doing so, might both Hindus and Christians be said to be mirroring the Divine acts of manifestation and creation?

~

⁶⁴ Moltmann, “The First Liberated Men,” p. 23.

MYSTICISM, TRUTH, AND THE “MORE”

Play itself contains its own, even sacred, seriousness.
Gadamer⁶⁵

*I just want you to know I'm perfectly / serious much
of the time: when I kid around / I'm trying to get in a
position to be serious.*

A.R. Ammons⁶⁶

It is time for this author to come clean about his own “serious” motivations for this Hindu-Christian comparison of play. For on the one hand, I believe comparative theology is a powerful tool for engaging in interreligious comparison and dialogue. But on the other hand, my specific motivation in writing this essay on “play” stems from a life-altering mystical experience that occurred three years ago (2012). It cannot go unmentioned if I am to maintain intellectual honesty.

The scene: I am alone praying one night when suddenly I feel a surge of energy in my groin and the base of my spine. At first, I am unsure what to do with this sensation—should I push it down? Should I encourage it? Panicking, I have the overwhelming thought that if I do not release this energy inside of me I will be ripped to pieces. So, I focus on it and allow it to slowly rise from the base of my spine, through my chest, up my neck, into my skull, and *out through the top of my head*. And in that moment of release, not only do I ecstatically lose my physical sense of self; my consciousness is filled with a frightening—almost unbearable—surplus of orgasmic energy and bliss. I then believe and feel as though I am energy without body or limit, and terrifyingly infinite. I sense that I have the entire universe inside of me, or

that I am outside and wholly dispersed into the universe (or that there is indeed no difference between “in” and “out” at all). And I am—in the non-moment—endless, as though I have always been and always will be. In other words, I feel as though I have somehow transcended space and time and that I am part of the universe at play with itself. That is, I feel as though I am somehow achieving the impossible and have become a paradox: I know that I am both finite and infinite, historical and eternal, bodily and energetic, myself and something “more” than I have ever believed myself to be: I am God looking at Godself from a particular perspective, *and I am loving it*.

After coming “down” from this altered state of consciousness, I realized that I had seemingly experienced something not unlike what is termed a “*kuṇḍalinī* awakening” (which is what initially drew me to investigate the Tantra-influenced work of Aurobindo when I discovered it). But what does this experience mean for me as a Presbyterian Christian who comes from a tradition that offers little in the way of guidance for understanding such an event? Admittedly, I am still in the process of interpreting the significance of this “awakening” as a Christian, and I imagine I always will be. Even so, while admitting, à la J.Z. Smith, that I have obviously engaged CT in order that I might re-vision religious phenomena as *my* data in order to solve *my* theoretical problems, I nonetheless assert that comparing Hindu and Christian cosmogonies is not only valuable aesthetically. To be sure, now having come to the end of my essay, it is not my intention to resurrect the specter of comparative

⁶⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 102.

⁶⁶ A.R. Ammons, *Garbage*, p. 54.

essentialism⁶⁷ and the problematic power dynamics inherent in the very idea of “experience,”⁶⁸ but it would be insincere to imply that I mean such a comparison as I have undertaken to be for the sake of play and proverbial “precession of simulacra.” As Moltmann writes, “a critical theory of play must begin with the question: *Cui bono?* Whom does it serve?”⁶⁹ Noting that the Roman authorities promoted games to anesthetize the populous so that it would not become aware of its political oppression, Moltmann argues that, if used wrongly, play *itself* can become oppressive. So in much the same way, comparative theologians should not let analogical “play” become its own form of methodological oppression, becoming inescapably doomed to an endless creation of maps and signifiers that map and signify only a meaningless, meontological territory. For while one *must* acknowledge the political and constructed nature of all comparison, I do not think theologians can afford to relegate the idea of truth to the dustbin of comparison, and this is because I am strongly inclined to believe that there precisely is something “more” than our scholarly and theological maps.

It is my comparative intuition that what makes such comparisons as the one I have undertaken worthwhile *is* the possibility that Hindus and Christians are somehow, in some way, speaking meaningfully about a divine reality of some kind; and furthermore, that this reality is the “More” that is more than finitude, linguisticity, and imagination even if it only can be experienced and understood in limited,

“language”, and imagined ways.⁷⁰ For while Smith rightly teaches that map is not territory, might this be because territory (the “More”) *exceeds* map? If such a suggestion offends postmodern and/or materialist sensibilities, my reply is that genuine a posteriori, hermeneutical openness requires that one not a priori delimit the possibility of thought’s potential transcendence. To be sure, the transcendence I am pointing to here is not equivalent to the ontotheological rendering of transcendence as presence that is the great shame of modernity (Nietzsche’s God is *quite* dead as is modernity’s self-transparent subject), but of a transcendence that is deeply implicated with the becoming and multiplicity of immanence. In other words, what I am pointing to is the possibility that the metaphysics of analogical comparison is *itself* risked in the act of dialogue with explicitly metaphysical methodologies that dwell *between* transcendence and immanence, *between* universality and particularity (as exemplified especially by Hart and Aurobindo). For if comparative theology may be defined as “particularity seeking universal context,” then this search is never over but ever drawn on by the allure of the More. And it is this allure that compels me to practice “Christian *kundalini*” since undergoing my mystical experience. It is this allure that sustains my own fascination with Hindu-Christian comparative theology, compels me to risk my methodological presuppositions, and liberates me both playfully and seriously to consider truths across religious borders.

~

⁶⁷ See Arvind-Pal S. Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) for a masterful Sikh perspective on the ideological violence inherent in the Western construction of *religio*.

⁶⁸ See Stephen S. Bush, *Visions of Religion: Experience, Meaning, and Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) for a prolegomena to future research on the intersection of “experience” and “power” in the study of religion.

⁶⁹ Moltmann, “The First Liberated Men,” p. 31.

⁷⁰ For what has been called the “the tradition of the more,” see Robert A. Orsi, “The Problem of the Holy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert A. Orsi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 84–105; p. 99.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Matthew Allison received his B.A. in World Religions/Philosophy from Westminster College, and is currently enrolled in the M.Div. program at Princeton Theological Seminary, anticipating future Ph.D. work in the study of mysticism. His research interests include the metaphysics and methodologies of comparison, speculative realism, radical orthodoxy, power and the construction of the "mystical" body, and the intersection between the paranormal and post-materialist ontology. He thanks Richard Fox Young for his guidance in writing this essay.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ammons, A.R. (1993) *Garbage: a Poem* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company).
- Aurobindo, Sri. (1973) *The Future Poetry and Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram).
- . (1973) *The Life Divine: Book One and Book Two* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram).
- . (1972) *Sri Aurobindo on the Tantra* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram).
- Bolle, Kees. (September 1962) "Tantric Elements in Sri Aurobindo," *Numen* 9/2: 123-42.
- Bush, Stephen S. (2014) *Visions of Religion: Experience, Meaning, and Power* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Clooney, Francis X. (1995) "Comparative Theology: A Review of Recent Books," *Theological Studies* 56: 521-50.
- . (2011) *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.).
- . (2013) *His Hiding Place is Darkness: A Hindu-Catholic Theopoetics of Divine Absence* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).
- Crawford, Nathan. (2013) *Theology as Improvisation A Study in the Musical Nature of Theological Thinking* (Leiden: Brill Publishing).
- Einstein, Albert. (1954) *Ideas and Opinions* (New York: Dell Publishing).
- Fredericks, James L. (2004) *Buddhists and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books).
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. (1960/2004) *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum).
- Gill, Sam. (1998) "No Place to Stand: Joanthan Z. Smith as *Homo Ludens*, The Academic Study of Religion *Sub Specie Ludi*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66/2: 283-312.
- Hart, David B. (2004) *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- . (2013) *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- Kallungal, Martin Sebastin. (2012) "Introducing Sri Aurobindo," in *Mystical Anthropology: Cross Religious Perspectives: Interdisciplinary Reflections on the Arnhem Mystical Sermons and Sri Aurobindo*, ed. Ineke Cornet, Rob Faesen, and Martin Sebastin Kallungal (Walpole, MA: Peeters).
- Kripal, Jeffrey J. (2007) *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press).
- Long, Jeffery. (2001) "Solidarity through Polyphony," *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation*, ed. Francis X. Clooney (New York: T&T Clark): 171-90.
- Mandair, Arvind-Pal S. (2009) *Religion and the Specter of the West* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Moltmann, Jürgen. (1972) "The First Liberated Men in Creation," *Theology of Play* (New York: Harper and Row): 1-75.
- Moyaert, Marianne. (2011) *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality* (Rodopi: Amsterdam).
- Nicholson, Hugh. (2011) *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Ogden, Schubert. (1972) "What Is Theology?" *Journal of Religion* 52/1: 22-40.
- Orsi, Robert A. (2012) "The Problem of the Holy," *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Orsi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 84-105.
- Paden, William E. (1996) "Elements of a New Comparison," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8/1: 15-20.
- Pandit, M.P. (1973) *Glossary of Sanskrit Terms in Sri Aurobindo's Works* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram).

- Smith, Jonathan Z. (1982) *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- . (1990) *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Taylor, James. (2011) "Hospitality as Translation," in *Hosting the Stranger: Between Religions*, ed. Richard Kearney and James Taylor (New York: Continuum): 11-22.
- Thatamanil, John. (2006) *The Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and the Human Predicament: An East-West Conversation* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press).
- Tracy, David (Autumn 2000). "Form and Fragment: The Recovery of the Hidden and Incomprehensible God," in *Reflections Center of Theological Inquiry* 3: 62-88.
- Wolfson, Elliot R. (2014) *Giving Beyond the Gift: Apophasis and Overcoming Theomania* (New York: Fordham University Press).

Subjectivity of Christ and the Coherence of the Incarnation: A Critical Reading of the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria from a Madhyamaka Perspective

by Wanjoong Kim



INTRODUCTION

Logical coherence? Logic at least in the West from Aristotle to Frege and Russell has experienced various developments. In each stage of development, logical coherence, as a result, has acquired different significance. In order to make this article more adequate, I focus on the Aristotelian system of logic. Cyril based his sketch of hypostatic union upon philosophical concepts and languages provided by this system. For many centuries, Cyril's vision mediated through Chalcedon has served as the primary guidepost for most Christianity. In what way did Cyril use the Aristotelian system of logic? According to Aristotle, logical coherence entails the conformity of a statement

or proposition with the fundamental laws of reason such as the law of non-contradiction and of identity. It implies that if a proposition is false, then its contradiction is true. But Cyril's doctrine is strange with regard to its logical application because it rejects both coherent and incoherent doctrines, which makes the classical logicians puzzled. Thus, it becomes natural to ask whether his doctrine is logically sound. The challenging nature of the question can be seen by the fact that even Thomas Aquinas, in *Contra Gentiles*, felt it necessary to address the question of logical incoherence.

For the most part, contemporary readers of Cyril remain wedded to the same Aristotelian system of logic. Immanuel Kant's claim that

logic had changed little since Aristotle indicates that the fundamentals of the Aristotelian system, such as the principal laws of reason, survived through many historical challenges. Such laws - often through the lens of the medieval scholasticism – continue to be a benchmark for us in determining whether a given doctrine is coherent or not.

When reading Cyril, one notices that in the original context, two natures (divinity and humanity) as predicates are said of one and the same hypostatic subject. In classical logic, there is no problem with one subject having plural predicates. What puzzles the classically-minded logicians is the fact that the given predicates are mutually contradictory; ascribing both to one and the same subject seems to violate the laws of reason. How to solve this problem? Most contemporary interpreters seem to think that if they come to appreciate the actual metaphysical structure of the predicates, they might also understand in what way the predicates can share the one common subject without violating the rational laws. Even Thomas Aquinas focused on the nature of the predicates in his analysis of the problem of incoherence.

Some scholars, such as John Hick and more recently Sarah Coakley, approach this problem in a different way. They claim that focusing on the metaphysical analyses of logical elements leads to overlooking the actual soteriological import contained in the kerygmatic confession of the Incarnation. Coakley and Hick focus on the mystical dimension of the doctrine, suggesting that logic may not be a proper tool to understand the genuine meaning of this Mystery. This alternative approach is certainly tempting. Nonetheless, the intention of Cyril was not to bypass logic entirely, but rather to transcend it and highlight its limitation when

describing the Mystery; he did not reject philosophical terminology entirely but actually used terms such as hypostasis (person) and *physis* (nature) that are soaked with metaphysical implications. Thus, simple abandonment of logical analysis may not be a wise solution. Rather than leaving logical analysis behind, we may need to approach Cyril's vision from a different angle.

Instead of analyzing the predicates, my suggestion is to focus on analyzing 'subject.' How did Cyril understand this notion? While in his earlier (trinitarian) period, there is some textual evidence that he was influenced by the notion of *hypokeimenon* (subject), in his later (christological) period, he used 'hypostasis' to indicate the subject of two predicates. In order to grasp the real logical nature of Cyril's vision, it is necessary to focus on his understanding of the subjectivity of Christ.

Throughout his earlier and later writings, we can see that Cyril's notion of subject, while remarkably consistent, distances itself from the conventional application of the Aristotelian subject. Cyril's approach is also distinct from that of his neo-platonic contemporaries. This research will focus on his understanding of the notion of subject, which enabled him to transcend all binary logical frameworks and to propose a new understanding of coherence. In this perspective, an attitude of apophatic modesty and wonder appears to be the best approach to explore the unfathomable depths of the Mystery.

This apophatic manner of reasoning is not uncommon if we turn to the religious traditions from the East. The Madhyamaka school in the Mahāyāna tradition exemplifies a comparatively systematic and sophisticated

engagement of logic in the context of mystical reality. While Madhyamaka is not a theistic school of thought, its emphasis on unknowability and ineffability of subjectivity will resonate with many Christian readers. If we read the writings of Nāgārjuna, the founder of the school, we will also see that his method of reasoning was significantly different from that of classical logicians. At the same time, he would remind his opponents that the ungraspable nature of subjectivity effectively undercuts all attempts of exhaustive logical analysis. The truth is reachable only through the rejection of all these attempts, which indicates a method of radical negation.

Familiarity with Nāgārjuna's critique of logic helps us understand and better appreciate Cyril's qualified appropriation of the resources of the Aristotelian tradition. Like Nāgārjuna, Cyril also appears to reject all doctrines conceivable by logic. Nāgārjuna's way of relating to mystical subjectivity echoes Cyril's conceptual and philosophical choices. A critical reading of Cyril's Christology in the light of Nāgārjuna will help us appreciate the real import of his conceptual vision.

This article begins with a comparative analysis of Aristotle and Nāgārjuna with regard to the concept of subject. The second part will supply a constructive theological interpretation of Cyril's Christology as a metaphysical discourse with an apophatic vision of subjectivity, which demands a non-dualistic method of reasoning. Finally, contemporary Christological debates on the logical problem will be examined critically in the light of Cyril's vision of apophatic subjectivity.



Golden statue of Nāgārjuna (c. 150 – c. 250 CE)
at Kagyu Samye Ling Monastery, Scotland

BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY: LOGIC OF ESSENCE VS. LOGIC OF EMPTINESS

The term 'essence' has proved a useful term in Buddhist scholarship when delineating the ontological programs of Nāgārjuna. Jay L. Garfield, a prominent commentator on Nāgārjuna, agrees in his commentary on Nāgārjuna's main treatise, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, that the word 'essence' is an adequate translation of '*svabhāva*.'¹ *Svabhāva* is normally understood as the essential nature inherent in a given entity that makes it existing in its own right, i.e., independently from other entities. The literal translation of *svabhāva* is 'self-nature,' which shares some ontological concepts with the western term 'essence,' with respect to existing inherently and self-sufficiently.

~

¹ Jay Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Translation and Commentary of Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1995), p. 89

Moreover, it has a logical implication, of which Nāgārjuna was aware. In *Emptiness: The Seventy Stanzas*, his auto-commentary on *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Nāgārjuna recognizes his philosophical opponents' distinctive scheme of essence as substratum and its characteristics.² For his opponents, both aspects of a thing exist inherently and independently as essential nature (*svabhāva*) and essential characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa*), constituting together its reality. In contrast, Nāgārjuna attempts to refute this essentialist ontological approach and establish a theory of interdependent origination of both ontological aspects. He says explicitly in a critical verse in this commentary: "The characteristic is established by the substratum of the characteristic. The substratum of the characteristic is established by the characteristic, but they are not established independently, nor are they established by one another."³ The intention of this verse will be clearer later when we review his theory of emptiness. What we need to focus on right now is that Nāgārjuna recognizes the subject-predicate (substratum-attribute) division. But we need to be aware – when comparing the Buddhist division with that of Aristotle – that for Aristotle it is only substratum, i.e., *subjectum*, that exists in its own right. Both philosophical traditions developed the similar logical concept of predication, and the property of self-sufficiency is a key ingredient in establishing the system of logic. But Nāgārjuna's doctrine of emptiness puts the notion of 'essential' (i.e., self-sufficient) in question and approaches critically the relation of predication between subject and predicate, ultimately rethinking the logic itself. Because essential nature is in question, we do not have a proper subject. If there is no adequate subject,

the conventional relations of predication are not appropriate when stating the given reality, because predicates have no proper foundation to be attributed onto. If the relations of predication are useless, logic itself fails. Thus, any attempt to describe a thing logically will result in a failure to describe it as it really is, primarily because that thing needs to exist in its own right in order to be a subject and yet, as Nāgārjuna contends, does not exist so. In a sense, Nāgārjuna's philosophical system is diametrically opposite to that of Aristotle's. Both philosophers recognize the relation of predication; but their difference in approaching the subject leads each into radically divergent paths, the former deconstructing logic and the latter constructing it.

In the 2nd chapter of *Categories*, Aristotle divides all entities into four supposedly exhaustive categories.⁴ There are (1) things said of but not in a subject, (2) things not said of but in a subject, (3) things said of and in a subject, and (4) things not said of nor in a subject. According to Simplicius, an Aristotelian commentator from late antiquity, the logical marks of 'said of' and 'not said of' are to distinguish what is universal from what is particular. He also interprets the metaphysical marks of 'to be in a subject' and 'not to be in a subject' as the division between what exists extrinsically and what exists intrinsically, i.e., accidents and substances. In the fourfold division, there are two intrinsic entities, i.e., substance-universal (1) and substance-particular (4). The mark of 'not to be in a subject' implies that a thing is a subject and yet does not require any other subject to be in. Of the two, substance-particulars (the primary substances) are to underlie (substrate)

² Peter Della Santina, *Casuality and Emptiness: The Wisdom of Nāgārjuna* (Singapore: Buddhist Research Society, 2002), pp. 135-6

³ Ibid, p.146

⁴ Aristotle, *Categories*, tr. L. Minio-Paluello, Oxford: OCT, 1956, 1a20 – 1b5

ultimately all other beings as predicates.⁵ Substance-universals (the secondary substances), however, are to underlie other beings and to be underlain by the primary substances as subjects.⁶ A substance-universal can be taken either as a subject or as a predicate.

In *Categories*, Aristotle defines ten categories. He begins with the category of substances, both particulars and universals, and includes entities that belong to the category of accidents:

“quantity or qualification or a relative or where or when or being-in-a-position or having or doing or being affected”.⁷ The division of substances and accidents is confirmed here, and he considers ‘*per se* existence’ as an ontological mark of substances as subjects. Entities that do not exist *per se* cannot be placed in subject-terms, primarily because they do not exist on their own but depend upon something substantial to exist. According to Aristotle, the secondary substances do exist *per se*, which implies that they do not require something else in order to exist, while they are said of a subject as the primary substance. In any case, for either the primary or secondary substance, ‘self-sufficient’ existence is the minimum requirement for a thing to underlie (substrate) predicates.

What is interesting is that in *Metaphysics*, Aristotle considers the property of self-sufficiency as an index of ‘either/or’ type of judgment. He says, “for if there is to be any such thing as being essentially man this will not be being not-man or not being man (yet these

are negations of it); for there was some one thing which it meant, and this was the substance of something.”⁸ Here, what exists substantially also exists essentially. In other words, a substance is what it is in itself and does not require something else to be itself. In this quotation, Aristotle acknowledges the property of self-sufficiency (‘essentially’) as a logical mark, according to which one can identify a substance as what it is and differentiate it from what it is not. Here, Aristotle establishes the principle of identity, on the basis of which other principles such as the laws of non-contradiction and the excluded middle; these verify, respectively, that “contradictories cannot be predicated at the same time”⁹ or “there cannot be an intermediate between contradictories”.¹⁰

What logical options does a logician have if there is no proper subject with intrinsic property? According to Aristotle, judgment becomes relative and there is no constant logical valence. Nothing is what it is in itself permanently. Its essential identity alters according to when and where it is said.

Again, if all contradictories are true of the same subject at the same time, evidently all things will be one. For the same thing will be a trireme, a wall, and a man, if it is equally possible to affirm and to deny anything of anything... They seem, then, to be speaking of the indeterminate, and, while fancying themselves to be speaking of being, they are speaking about non-being; for that which exists potentially and not actually is the indeterminate. But they must predicate of every subject every attribute and the negation of it

⁵ Ibid., 2b1-10

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 1b25

⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, tr. W. D. Ross, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924, 1007a25

⁹ Ibid., 1007b15

¹⁰ Ibid., 1011b25

indifferently.¹¹

Here, Aristotle points out a logical condition in which the given subject has a relative (indeterminate) essence, whose identity is determined not intrinsically. The same thing can be identified as different entities, even including 'non-being', depending upon the context in which it is said. And the principles of non-contradiction and excluded middle do not apply properly in this context. Then, what determines it to be as it is, if there is no intrinsic cause?

Nāgārjuna has been well recognized for his critique of *svabhāva*. His doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) eliminates all ontological views that presuppose it as the fundamental property of beings. His critique of categories, as described well in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, includes exhaustively all categories of beings, which are more extensive than Aristotle's ten categories.¹² His ultimate goal is not to negate their existence but to deny their intrinsic mode of existence. The concept of *svabhāva* is the intrinsic condition for each thing to be and furthermore, if Aristotle is right, constitutes the logical condition of judgment, in which the principles of logic apply non-relatively. His examination of time, as presented below, exemplifies the case of ontology where there is no essential nature presupposed whatsoever. It applies to all other categories including space, motion, etc.

- v. 1 If the present and the future
Depend on the past,

Then the present and the future
Would have existed in the past.

- v. 2 If the present and the future
Did not exist there,
How could the present and the future
Be dependent upon it?
- v. 3 If they are not dependent upon the past,
Neither of the two would be established.
Therefore neither the present
Nor the future would exist.¹³

These verses appear in the 19th chapter of his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and examine the problem of time. Nāgārjuna recognizes all three modes of time and examines each mode in the light of the law of causation. What is at stake here is whether each mode has essential nature (*svabhāva*). In the law of causation conventionally understood, the effect event depends for its existence on the cause event¹⁴ and cause and effect are temporally arrayed, i.e., cause precedes effect.¹⁵ However, if a particular temporal mode exists essentially, i.e., inherently and self-sufficiently, this whole situation brings in a logical problem. It may not be possible to conceive of an inherently existing event causing another inherently existing event without violating the principles of logic. From the very first verse, he examines time in terms of the problems of identity and non-contradiction. Nāgārjuna identifies his opponents' view as one that reflects the conventional law of causation. His analysis exposes in his opponents' view a point that the present cannot be caused without having its essence in the past, because his opponents also

¹¹ Ibid., 1007b20

¹² In Aristotle's categorical system, the category of substance is the only one that exists *per se*. All the others are *per accidens*. In contrast, in the Abhidharmika system of categories, all beings, either substantial or accidental, are considered to have the property of self-sufficiency. Nāgārjuna's critique targets at this ontological property.

¹³ Jay Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Translation and Commentary of Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, pp. 50-1

¹⁴ Jan Westerhoff, *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka: A Philosophical Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 122

¹⁵ Jay Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, p. 263

maintain that nothing can exist out of nothing. But he finds that the very notion of essence would destroy the whole point of the laws of logic. He argues that if one maintains the conventional concept of essence, one would end up with a self-contradictory result that the source of the present, i.e., essence, coexists with the past, which is an apparent case of the principle of non-contradiction violated and of the principle of identity confused. This is what he argues in the first verse.

In the second verse, he continues his criticism that if one asserts that the source of the present is not in the past, then one would have to say that the present cannot be caused at all or that a new thing exists from nothing. Therefore, he attempts to show how untenable it is to maintain an ontological view of *svabhāva*. If time does not have essential nature, nothing existing in time exists essentially. With this deconstruction of the notion of *svabhāva*, the notion of substratum is also deconstructed, and this deconstructive feature is summated in his doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). His examination of time is only an example of deconstructing the notion of essence; he also examines other ontological issues, such as space.

How is it possible to propose a logical statement without having the notion of essential substratum? It is a question puzzling to those who are familiar with the concept of subject-predicate division and seek for an essential foundation for knowledge. Without being intrinsically established, logic would not stand properly. Against this conventional sentiment,

Nāgārjuna opens a possibility for rational knowledge to be attained without being constructed upon its foundation. The tetralemmic method of negation is his genius.

Neither from itself
nor from another
nor from both
nor without a cause¹⁶

This is a typical case of his method that appears frequently in his masterpiece, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. This exemplary case deals with the problem of causation. Each option represents not A; not non-A; not both A and non-A; not neither A and non-A. Richard H. Robinson shows that these four statements list all logical alternatives possible in the disjunctive system of logic.¹⁷ What Nāgārjuna intends to achieve by means of this cryptic method is to attain to the correct knowledge of a given entity by rejecting all logically possible views on it, because logic is limited in unraveling it as it is without essence. The fourth option proposes the opposite case of the third one, just as the second is the opposite of the first. Its resemblance to the Chalcedonian formula is significant in serving the aim of this article. It exemplifies a rational method in a particular ontological situation where no essential substratum is presupposed.

Many have attempted to interpret this apparently absurd formation of four propositions. Most interpreters try to extract some logical implications from it. For example, Gunaratne finds that the first three alternatives seem to comply well with the laws of thought and that the last alternative does not break the

¹⁶ This is the first verse in the first chapter of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Jay Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, p. 3

¹⁷ For brevity, I will pass over his analysis. See for detailed analysis, Robinson, Richard H., "Some Logical Aspects of Nāgārjuna's System", *Philosophy East and West*, 6:4 (1957), p. 303

law.¹⁸ Thus, he suggests that the system engaged in this formation is disjunctive. But his analysis makes sense only when each alternative is taken individually. When taken together as a set, no logical sense can be made out of this formation. Robinson also joins his interpretation, arguing that while these four alternatives present all possible options in logic, this tetralemmic formation involves some disjunctive program of logic.¹⁹ But after finding out that there is no alternative affirmed – the disjunctive logic affirms at least one alternative – he makes a rather obscure conclusion that this disjunction serves to negate all propositions.

More recent interpreters urge paying more attention to Nāgārjuna's doctrine of emptiness when interpreting this absurd formation. Such an approach results in different interpretations that leave behind any attempt to understand this four-fold formation as a binary logical program. This new approach highlights the nullifying character of the doctrine of emptiness. Brian Galloway, for instance, recognizes that "the whole statement, subject included, is vacated or voided or zeroed."²⁰ With this voided subjectivity, the conventional methods of logical construction do not operate properly. In recognition of such an impasse, Nāgārjuna attempts to reject all logically conceivable alternatives together, in a systemic formation of tetralemmic negation. This negative method demarcates itself from the typical disjunctive logical method of negation. In a sense, this method surpasses the capacity of

logic.

For this reason, Stcherbatsky, a researcher of the Buddhist logical school, understands it as a translogical system of thinking.²¹ Stcherbatsky notes this uncanny method of knowledge is "a cognition through mystic intuition."²² It implies that the Madhyamakan system of knowledge construction envisages a status of being that our mind cannot comprehend for it surpasses reason. Consequently, mystic intuition rather than rational analysis is an adequate method to see what it really is. Frits Staal, in his book, *Exploring Mysticism*, traces a stream of a critical view on the Madhyamakan (Prasaṅgikan school in particular) method of negation that interprets it as a mystical system.²³ His main point develops out of a verse from Nāgārjuna's masterpiece, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, "What words can express comes to a stop when the domain of the mind comes to a stop."²⁴ It is a radically unutterable truth that all things are empty of self-nature because if an entity lacks its substratum, it cannot be logically reconstructed by attributing some qualities – i.e., temporal or spatial for example – onto that substratum. Thus, the mind becomes helpless because it loses its foundation of cognition. Then, it comes to a stop. Along with this cessation, our linguistic attempts fail to comprehend a given reality as it is without essential nature. In consideration of the lack of the substratum of logic, it is not surprising to see logic reach its limit. Nāgārjuna must have felt this limitation of logic and so took a detour

¹⁸ R. D. Gunaratne, "Understanding Nāgārjuna's Catuskoṭi," *Philosophy East and West* 36:3 (1986), p.213

¹⁹ For brevity, I will pass over his analysis. See for detailed analysis, Robinson, Richard H., "Some Logical Aspects of Nāgārjuna's System", *Philosophy East and West*, 6:4 (1957), p.303

²⁰ Brian Galloway, "Some Logical Issues in Madhyamika Thought, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 17 (1989), p.7

²¹ Stcherbatsky, Theodore, *Buddhist Logic Vol. I*, New York: Dover Publications, 1962, p.113

²² Ibid.

²³ Staal, Frits, *Exploring Mysticism: A Methodological Essay*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975, particularly, chapter 2.

²⁴ Ibid., pp.45

by reconsidering the conventional usage of logic. His invention is radically negative. In this system, even subjectivity can be deconstructed. The accusation of logical incoherence is effective only when one remains in an ontological system, from which dualistic methods of argumentation derived. But such accusation loses its validity when one enters into an ontological system radically deconstructive. If one disproves the foundation, all architecture constructed on it comes to be meaningless. In the Madhyamakan world, the foundation itself is disproved.

In consideration of all these characteristics, some call this negative method a conjunctive logic.²⁵ Whatever name it is called, its purpose is to offer a possibility of attaining valid knowledge of a given entity in a situation where logic fails due to its loss of the constructive foundation. Jonardon Ganeri remarks about this illogical feature, "if reason is by its very nature limited, then perhaps the subversion of reason itself becomes a rational end."²⁶ All logical principles as conceived in the binary scheme are subverted. And this subverted reason is radically non-dualistic; it does not cognize a thing in a disjunctive division of A and non-A. All disjunctive logical alternatives are simply rejected, which puzzles those who are familiar with the disjunctive logic and feel that at least something should be affirmed. But to the foundationless thing, we cannot apply conventional logical tools. This is what Nāgārjuna intuitively. Does the Mystery of the Incarnation operate as the foundation for our

logical construction?

LOGICAL PROBLEM IN THE CYRILLO-CHALCEDONIAN CHRISTOLOGY

Cyril's texts have been often analyzed as being conscious of the logical scheme of subject and predicate.²⁷ Hans van Loon produced the most recent study in *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*. According to his analysis, Cyril was well aware of the categorical distinction of 'said of something as a subject' and 'not said of something as a subject.'²⁸ As mentioned above, it indicates the division of universal and particular, i.e. the secondary and primary substances. Cyril maintained a scheme of one hypostasis and two natures (*physis*). Both are substantial, while the former indicates a particular historical entity and the latter universal natures. Thus, Christ is the ultimate subject and two natures as predicates are said of it. Let us explore this logical scheme, while tracing out his terminological transition from 'physis' to 'hypostasis' to accommodate the concept of subject.

These are the controversial terms that appeared in the early history of Christology:

<i>Ousia</i>	Essence, substance, being, genus, or nature.
<i>Physis</i>	Nature, make-up of a thing (In earlier Christian thought the concrete reality or existent).
<i>Hypostasis</i>	The actual concrete reality of a thing, the

²⁵ Musashi Tachikawa, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1997, pp. 132-133

²⁶ Jonardon Ganeri, *Philosophy in Classical India: The Proper Work of Reason*, New York, London: Routledge, 2001, p. 1

²⁷ Ruth Siddals, "Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 38 (1987), pp. 341-367; John A. McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: the Christological Controversy: Its History, Theology and Texts*, Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004; Hans Van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2009

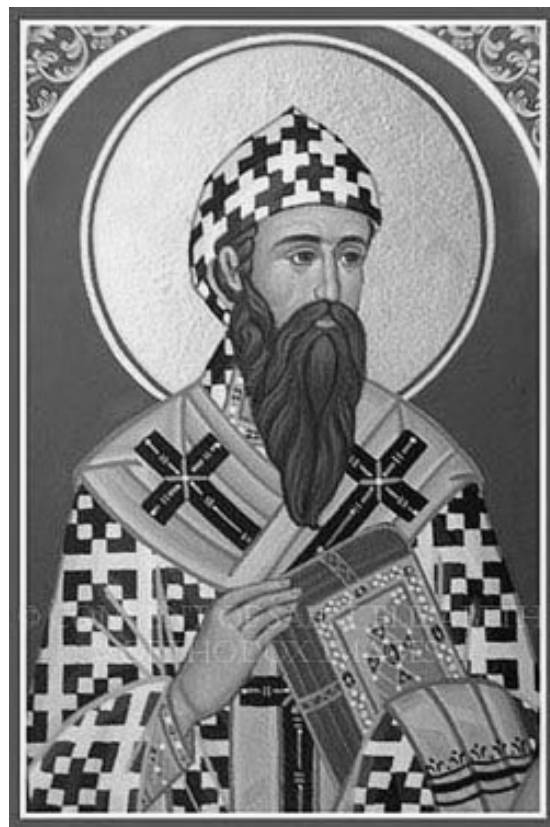
²⁸ Hans Van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2009, p. 92

underlying essence, (in earlier Christian thought the synonym of *physis*).

Prosopon The observable character, defining properties, manifestation of a reality.²⁹

Ousia came to the surface when the Trinitarian issue was debated at the Council of Nicaea. It denotes “essence” or “nature” at Nicaea but carries a meaning of “genus” at the council of Chalcedon.³⁰ The next two terms are more significant, since Cyril’s switching of these terms created an interpretative difficulty on Nestorius’ side and a new opportunity to adapt to a new situation on Cyril’s side. Originally, the term *physis* was used to denote a meaning of the individual existent in the Alexandrian school since Athanasius.³¹ Before the council of Ephesus, Cyril followed this signification, but on the turn of the council changed it to denote a meaning of essential nature. The next one, hypostasis, originally was used as a synonym of *physis* by Athanasius.³² But Cyril modified it to carry a meaning of individual existent.

Although accustomed to the old usage of the term, Nestorius mistook his new formula ‘hypostatic union’ as an Apollinarian type of error, i.e., union of divine and human natures into a third one. Meanwhile, Nestorius tried to maintain consistence in his usage of terms. Particular attention needs to be paid to *prosopon*. Nestorius used it to denote a meaning of the individual reality of Christ as used by Tertullian.³³ However, Cyril tried to avoid it, since it would nuance a docetic error with its literal meaning as ‘actor’s mask’.³⁴ Most theological debates revolved around these terms.



Cyril of Alexandria
(c. 376 - 444 CE)

~
As mentioned above, Cyril must have found the scheme of subject and predicate to be effective in explaining the event of the Incarnation by assuming two ontologically distinctive dimensions in one historical reality. But terminological inconsistency seemed to contribute to the interpretative friction between Cyril and Nestorius. After the exchange of fierce debates, each recognized the other’s problem. For Cyril, Nestorius had a problem with presupposing two subjects as a result of his emphasis on the distinctiveness of divine and human natures as the secondary substances, i.e., predicable universals, which is incompatible

²⁹ John A. McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: the Christological Controversy: Its History, Theology and Texts*, p. 138

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p. 139

³² Ibid., p. 141

³³ Ibid., p. 144

³⁴ Ibid., p. 143

with the Christian tradition of faith as he inherited it.³⁵ Cyril's main concern was with a theological issue, the 'Mother of God' (*theotokos*).³⁶ It involves the problem of divine passibility. How is it possible for an impassible reality to suffer? This involves a logical problem. Nestorius maintained a position that the birth and the sufferings are not applied to the Godhead but to the manhood alone.³⁷ Thus, the Son in Christ did not suffer, while only the human flesh was subject to birth and death. He regarded 'Christ' as the subject, to which two distinctive properties, one passible and the other impassible, were attributed.³⁸ Although Nestorius maintains the position of single subjectivity, each property, from Cyril's perspective, needs to have a separate subject term to be attached to. Otherwise, it violates the principle of non-contradiction. For Nestorius, meanwhile, '*theotokos*,' in connection with Cyril's emphasis on single subjectivity, is a problematic concept that confuses the impassible God with the human nature, which is a clear indication of the violation of the principles of non-contradiction and excluded middle, i.e., attributing two predicates in contradiction onto one and the same subject and resulting in a God-man as the third nature.³⁹ For this reason, one would estimate Cyril's Christology as a logically less coherent form than Nestorius'. This is McGuckin's opinion.⁴⁰ But as mentioned above, Nestorius' position also does not evade the logical problem, unless he presupposed two subjects as Cyril's

suspicion indicates.

For Nestorius, Cyril's distinction of two natures is not sufficient to eradicate a trace of an Apollinarian type of error. If Nestorius had posited two subjects, his position would have been logically more stable. Although he denied that he assumed two subjects, his concept of two prosopa – which correspond to each nature⁴⁰ – exacerbated Cyril's impression that the theory of two subjects is implied in the Christology of Nestorius, since without two subjects his Christology would be irrational. It does not mean, however, that Cyril wanted his Christology to be rational but merely that Nestorius' position is self-contradictory if one subject is presupposed in his Christology. His primary interest lies in defending what had been inherited from the traditional and scriptural authorities rather than in rationalizing it.⁴¹ Clearly, Cyril repudiated a logical format of two subjects or any conceptual position that develops the distinction of two natures to the extent of presupposing two subjects, of which two distinctive natural properties, i.e., passibility and impassibility, are predicated respectively, mainly because such is inconsistent with the Christian faith. As a counteraction, he insisted upon one hypostasis, which results in logical incoherence if that unity implies an Apollinarian type of conjunction of two natures.

While insisting upon single subjectivity, Cyril in

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 144-5

³⁶ Ibid., p. 366

³⁷ Ibid., p. 365

³⁸ Ibid., p. 135

³⁹ Nestorius, *Nestorius: The Bazaar of Heracleides*, G. R. Driver & Leonard Hodgson (tr), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), p.xxxv. This logical estimation of Cyril appears in the Introduction by translators.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 21-23

⁴¹ John A. McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: the Christological Controversy: Its History, Theology and Texts*, pp. 143

some of his letters attempted to evade the charge of Apollinarism by arguing against “a mixture or confusion”⁴² of two natures, which is problematic in the conventional logical sense. Thus, it cannot be said that Cyril’s position is logically incoherent. Meanwhile, Cyril could maintain a logically coherent view by repudiating this problematic view and upholding its logical reverse, which is exemplified in the separation of two subjects attributed to Nestorius, one predicated by passible nature and the other by impassible nature. Cyril repudiated it too. Considering that neither of two positions, i.e., Apollinarian and Nestorian, is affirmed as valid, his position can be seen as pointless and the hypostatic union – as he frequently remarked as a correct view throughout his writings – is a mysterious reality, incomprehensible to our intelligence.⁴³ In the conventional logical system, if the proposition of confusion of two natures is false, then its reverse, division, is true. It is apparent in the logical sense that the Apollinarian proposition is invalid since it confuses two contradictory predicates into one subject. Then, the Nestorian proposition of division must be true.

It is most interesting in Cyril’s Christology that he repudiated even the latter position, which results in an absurd situation that none of them is affirmed as right. This absurd method resembles a type of reasoning exemplified in Nāgārjuna, who wanted to reason about something without essence. When he realized that reason reaches its limit in some ontological matters, he intuited a subverted method of reasoning. The same seems to be true with Cyril, who realized that reason reaches its limit

when it comes to the matter of the divine reality. What drove him to uphold such an absurd – but not entirely irrational – position, then? Now we are turning to the main question. I expect that we can derive an affordable answer from his own ontological presumptions, which he inherited from his predecessors, including Athanasius, and believed to attain from the scriptures. Furthermore, all these presumptions are associated with the problem of the subject. Before we move on to the answer, let us consider another example of the same logical problem of absurdity, the Chalcedonian formula.

It is no wonder that the Chalcedonian formula has the same logical problem, since it came out as a result of the accommodation of the Cyrillian Christology. The same method of absurdity is embedded in the Chalcedonian formula, which includes elements in an absurd format; *perfectly divine, perfectly human, without confusion, without division*. The first one is the logical opposite of the second; the third one asserts that the first and the second cannot both be affirmed at the same time. Considering that ‘confusion’ is the logical opposite of ‘division,’ it becomes apparent that the last one, the most controversial, denies what is affirmed in the previous one. Of course, the Chalcedonian formula does not supply the clear-cut formation we can see in Nāgārjuna’s tetralemma. But the given formula includes all the alternatives possible in the disjunctive logical program, as exemplified in Nāgārjuna’s tetralemma, whose intention, however, is to reject them altogether, i.e., conjunctively. These four are the ones that can be arrayed disjunctively. Unlike in the disjunctive logic where at least one alternative

⁴² Ibid., pp. 349-50. Some of his letters to his colleagues such as Eulogius and Succensus contain his position against Apollinarism.

⁴³ Mc Kinion, Steven, *Words, Imagery, and the Mystery of Christ: A reconstruction of Cyril of Alexandria’s Christology*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2000. Particularly, see ch. 6

is proven true, the formula rejects all conjunctively, as will be shown below.

The last option apparently targeted the Nestorian error of two separate subjects. The third option, as a direct opposite of the fourth, was aimed at the Eutychean controversy of monophysitism. The first two options establish the firm identities of each predicable property, which corresponds to a historical fact that if we overemphasize one nature at the cost of the other, we fall into a Christological error of Arianism in the case of sacrificing divine nature and of docetism or Sabellianism in the case of sacrificing human nature.⁴⁴ In consideration of such historical fact, the first option can be replaced by 'without human nature alone' in accordance with the principle of identity to denote a logical relation where 'perfectly divine' excludes a logical possibility of human nature. In the same way, the second option can also be replaced by 'without divine nature alone' to denote a logical relation where 'perfectly human' excludes a possibility of divine nature. Therefore, all four options can be rearranged as 'without human nature alone', 'without divine nature alone', 'without confusion', and 'without division'. Rearranging these options in this format, taking them together as a set, creates a crisis in the logical integrity of the formula.

As mentioned frequently, when reason is by its very nature limited, then the subversion of reason itself becomes a rational end.⁴⁵ Apparently, this seems to be the case with Nāgārjuna, who recognized the limitation of reason in accounting for a trans-logical reality and attempted to give an intelligible description

of that reality by means of a subverted rational method. Without a proper subject, nothing can be constructed upon it for the sake of its characterization as such and such reality. It is absolutely unidentifiable due to its emptiness of essence. In other words, the principle of identity along with all other principles does not apply to this case. The same seems to be true with Cyril, particularly with regard to his ontological presumptions about the divine reality, which he confessed frequently as belonging to the realm of ineffable mystery. The reality of the union of two natures is also a pure mystery, i.e., absolutely incomprehensible, for "the Word of God made man still remained God."⁴⁶ Who can understand this absurd mystery! This mystery cannot be adequately explained in terms of the logical category of essence, because it transcends all categories including substance. The essence of God simply has no conventional sense and exists beyond categories.

Although confining her exegetical analysis to Cyril's earlier writings directed against Arianism, Ruth M. Siddals extracts some textual evidence that verifies this mystical nature of essence in Cyril's Christology. Siddals's summary is helpful:

Ultimately, the transcendent being of God is beyond the limited capacity of human understanding. No sensible person enquires τὸν ὄντα Θεόν τί μὲν ὄντως ἐστί κατὰ Φύσιν ("[into] the essence of God or what God is essentially by nature", in d. Joannis evang. 580c). Strictly speaking, the category of substance cannot be applied to God at all, for God falls under no genus or species, and sustains no accidents, but is rather ὑπερῶς ὄν ("beyond being", Thes. 36B) and is beyond definition.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 20

⁴⁵ Jonardon Ganeri, *Philosophy in Classical India: The Proper Work of Reason*, p.1

⁴⁶ Cyril of Alexandria, *Scholia on the Incarnation*, in *Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy*, John McGuckin (tr), ch.14

⁴⁷ Ruth Siddals, "Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria," p. 348

Siddals's exegetical analysis of the given texts highlights Cyril's concept of '*hyper-ousios* (beyond-essence/substance).' If Siddals' analysis is accurate, then we can note its resemblance to Nāgārjuna's ontology of emptiness of *svabhāva* in the significant point that it is an all nullifying class. For Cyril, God is an absolutely ineffable reality, which holds no predicates to be sustained. It is undeniable that God exists really and essentially. However, what Cyril questions here is the notion of substratum of that existence. If God is a substratum or exists in an essential nature as the foundation for rational construction, then logic can do its duty. If not, logic loses its utility.

The whole point emerges with the event of the Incarnation of Logos. In the Incarnation, the Son of God, the second person in the Godhead, constitutes the substratum for two predicable universals, the divine and human natures. But the Son is consubstantial with the Father with regard to being transcendent. The logical implication is that the substratum itself is trans-logical. At the Council of Nicaea, the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father was consolidated. Cyril inherited this tradition, which is apparent in most of his writings. His commentary on the gospel of John is exemplary, where the same concept of *hyperousios* is remarked in the very first sentences. In this commentary, Cyril reaffirms the doctrine of consubstantiality that the Son "is of the Essence of the Father, having all His Father's properties in Himself of Nature."⁴⁸ Just as the Father is beyond beings, so is the Son. This concept of beyond-being of the Son is illustrated in the first

chapter of the commentary. The Gospel begins with a verse, "In the beginning was the Word." Recognizing a misguided interpretation that 'beginning' denotes a temporal mode, Cyril suggests an alternative one, which accords with the tradition he inherited. For Cyril, it refers to a mode of beginning that transcends all modes of time. He comments on this verse that "It is not possible to take beginning, understood in any way of time, of the Only-Begotten, seeing that he is before all time and hath His Being before the ages, and, yet more, the Divine Nature, shuns the limit of a terminus."⁴⁹ Therefore, the essence of the Father is ineffable, and so is the Son. Cyril remarks that "the glory of God hideth speech, and greater than our idea and utterance is the God-befitting dignity, and hard to utter and most difficult of unfolding are the properties of the Divine nature."⁵⁰ It is beyond "the scant measures of human nature,"⁵¹ neither understandable nor explainable, because the Divine essence is the pure mystery that is above us.⁵²

How does this ineffable subject sustain predicates? To this question, Cyril gave a clear negative answer. The divine reality has essence, for sure. However, the divine essence is absolutely ineffable. While it is ineffable, which means that reason fails to comprehend the Divine nature, he still employs reason to defeat misguided reasoning about it. His strategy⁵³ employed in the commentary is not to reveal the divine mystery to human comprehension, but to defend his faith against false doctrines about it, i.e., to demonstrate that his opponents have their weakness in their own rational

⁴⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*, P. E. Pusey (tr), Preface, 1885, p.28

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 12

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 8

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., p. 39

⁵³ Ibid., ch. III

viewpoints about God. In short, the subject-term, Christ, understood as being *hyperousios* by Cyril, can hardly operate as a conventional logical substratum, because predicates cannot be properly sustained by this substratum. God belongs to the category that reason cannot reach.

In order to serve as a logical subject, a thing has to subsist essentially. The concept of *hyperousios*, for Cyril, does not belong to this category of essentiality. The divine substance (*ousios*) belongs to the category that transcends conventional categories of being so that it cannot properly be called 'an entity.' Moreover, because it transcends all ontological categories, it cannot be logically reconstructed. In other words, God is trans-logical. In the logical tradition, in contrast, the essential nature of an entity operates as a logical substratum, on the basis of which dualistic principles of logic are established. These principles of reason, however, do not apply to the transcendent category. A new type of rational method needs to be intuited. Nāgārjuna's doctrine of emptiness presents a trans-logical case for a different reason, i.e., dealing with non-theistic concerns. As mentioned earlier, he recognized that a given subject is inconceivable both logically and linguistically, due to the lack of a self-established foundation. He adopted a conjunctive type of tetralemmic negation as a viable option for describing the indescribable. Likewise, the Cyrillo-Chalcedonian doctrine must have been intuiting a destabilizing method that can nullify all logical options constructed upon logic itself. In both cases, reason is subverted. This subversion of reason, however, needs to be shielded from a stigma of

logical incoherence, for it coheres well with the order of being beyond being. It should rather be called 'trans-logical' for this reason.

REAPPRAISAL OF CONTEMPORARY DEBATES ON THE LOGICAL PROBLEM

My analysis so far, if plausible, can prove that contemporary debates on the problem of logical coherence are misguided in examining it from a conventional logical perspective, in which the notion of essential substratum is presumed as a necessary condition of knowledge. Do contemporary debaters consider the logical feature of 'beyond being' properly? This section deals with this question briefly by quoting some exemplary scholars. For convenience, I will divide them roughly into three groups: those arguing for logical incoherence, those for logical coherence, and those who are making metaphorical or hermeneutical turns.

The rationale for the first group is simple and clear: the Cyrillo-Chalcedonian doctrine does not comply with the principles of logic.⁵⁴ These principles constitute the disjunctive and dualistic method of logical inference, in which it is untenable to propose a statement that an entity is and is not at the same time; furthermore, the proposition of 'to be' of that entity negates the proposition of 'not to be,' on the basis of an absolute principle that they are together exhaustive and mutually exclusive. In this logical program, it is not tenable to propose that Christ is bilateral with two distinctive natures in mutual contradiction. Any proper analysis of these predicable universals will reveal a logical fact that they cannot be in the

⁵⁴ These are the primary principles of being in a sense that it provides us with an a priori condition of operating our intellectual faculties including reason. They constitute themselves, not basing their constitution upon external principles. For more information, see William Wallace, *The Elements of Philosophy: A Compendium for Philosophers and Theologians*, pp. 33-5

same place at the same time, as predicated of one and the same subject.

Christopher J. F. Williams represents an exemplary case of this critique.⁵⁵ Following the rules of predication constituted in accordance with the aforementioned principles of being, Williams identifies key terms in the Cyrillo-Chalcedonian doctrine, including hypostasis and *physis*, which operate as subject and predicate respectively. He holds against a claim of logical coherence for the doctrine, and remarks finally,

Jesus Christ however is, we say, both a man and God. Herein lies a *prima facie* obstacle to regarding the Christian faith as logically coherent. How does the person-nature distinction, rightly interpreted, resolve this paradox? By itself I do not think it resolves anything. But it does serve to prevent the theologian from acquiescing in too easy a solution such as that of the Nestorian.⁵⁶

His point is clear that the Cyrillo-Chalcedonian doctrine is logically incoherent and its sole purpose lies in suppressing Christological views pronounced as wrong. Here, he does not address the category of transcendent subject. His remark gives us a negative impression that the Christian doctrine is meant to be authoritarian and oppressive. Many historical accounts depict Cyril as a strenuous politician, one who even used unethical methods such as bribery in order to suppress his opponents. McGuckin, however, justifies his political strategies as a way of defending his own faith inherited from traditional and scriptural

authorities; an ontological concern regarding the being of Christ was his primary concern.

More scholars seem to be involved in defending its logical coherence than those who are involved in doubting it.⁵⁷ They try to understand the doctrine of the Incarnation as nonsensical, following the tenet of 'faith seeking understanding'. They focus also on analyzing predicable universals, i.e., two distinctive natures. They attempt to rearrange predicable universals in a hierarchical order, although their manners of ordering them differ. Ruth Siddals analyzes Cyril's earlier texts and discovers that Cyril divides two natures as the secondary substances into two categories, i.e., inseparable and separable accidents – the divine nature as the former category and the human nature as the latter.⁵⁸ Richard Swinburne, in his book *The Christian God*, reinterprets the two predicable properties in terms of essential and non-essential natures.⁵⁹ By 'essential' he refers to that which does not cease to be itself and by 'non-essential' that which ceases to be itself.

Although these scholars claim logical coherence, a Christological error can arise from their claim. When the non-essential human nature is separated from the subject so that the divine nature alone remains attached to the subject, it falls into a docetic type of error. If, on the other hand, both natures are attributed to the subject, it violates the principle of the excluded middle, exemplifying an Apollinarian type of error as imputed to Cyril. Although the divine nature inheres permanently, the human

⁵⁵ C. J. F. Williams, "A Programme for Christology," *Religious Studies*, Vol. 3, 1968, pp.513-524

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 522-3

⁵⁷ For example, Ruth Siddals, "Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria," *Journal of Theological Studies*; Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1986); Christopher B. Kaiser, "Christology and Complementarity," *Religious Studies*, 12:1 (1976), pp. 37-38

⁵⁸ Ruth Siddals, "Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria," *Journal of Theological Studies*, pp. 345-6

⁵⁹ Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God*, p. 192-3

nature can jeopardize the logical or Christological integrity of the hypostatic union whether it is attached to or detached from the subject. Their weakness lies in their analytic methods that are designed to operate properly in the conventional logical program of essence.

Still other scholars have suggested more tenable approaches.⁶⁰ This last group treats the doctrine from a grammatico-narrative point of view. Richard Norris interprets the formation of subject-predicates in the doctrine merely as a linguistic rule of predication. John Hick and Sarah Coakley, beginning with apophatic insights, suggest metaphorical and hermeneutical approaches respectively. Their approaches have an advantage in avoiding troubles caused by the metaphysical charge of incoherence while being able to remain faithful to the tradition of the Incarnation. However, they do not address the metaphysical intention of the early fathers, Cyril in particular. Such a lapse can make a false impression that our faith in the Incarnation is merely an abstract story without concrete content, as in the case of the fairytale. Although fairytales are full of meanings for our *sitz im leben*, no one trusts their reality. But for these early fathers as well as most of us, the story of the Incarnation must direct us to the real and concrete content, the being of Christ. The search for the real content, however, should not necessarily be directed to a conventional reality of essence, which does not cohere with the traditional and scriptural views of Christ.

CONCLUSION: LOGIC IN FACE OF MYSTERY

Logic applies only to the realm of beings that reason can reach. To the realm of being beyond these beings, i.e., the absolutely transcendent being that cannot even be called a being, logic does not apply. The mystery of the Incarnation is confessed to be this transcendent reality by Cyril of Alexandria. As to this absolutely incomprehensible subject, reason reaches its limit. If, however, we still need to approach it cognitively – otherwise, we become totally blank about God – the conventional method of logic must be subverted. Lacking ‘substratum’ as conventionally understood, logic loses its whole point. Cyril’s Christology is considerably apophatic in this sense. When reading his writings, we become impressed by his language, which expresses his proposition of hypostatic union as an ineffable mystery that surpasses all human understanding. Can it then still be logical to talk about this mystery? If God subsists non-essentially and therefore it is not even proper to say that God subsists, we cannot utter a single word about God.

From Nāgārjuna’s critical approach to essential subjectivity, we learned firstly that reason reaches its limit when the given subject is ineffable and secondly that a negative formation of eliminating all views is a viable option for a logician to apply to this ineffable subject. Although Nāgārjuna and Cyril have different religious causes for conceiving the limitation of reason, they both have a trans-logical vision in mind. It nullifies all the binary programs of cognition. Consequently, it is pointless to distinguish truth from falsity because an

⁶⁰ Coakley, Sarah, “What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does it Not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian ‘Definition,’” *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, Stephen T. Davis (ed), (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp.143-163; John Hick, “The Logic of God Incarnate”, *Religious Studies*, 25 (1989), pp.409-423; Richard Norris, “Chalcedon Revisited: A Historical and Theological Reflection,” Bradley Nassif (ed), *New Perspectives on Historical Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp.140-158

ineffable subject transcends such division. Therefore, the principles of reason do not apply properly. Nāgārjuna's alternative option is to reject all logical options that – whether logically coherent or incoherent – can be said of a given subject. His negative method suggests that nothing can be properly said of a trans-logical subject. In other words, no word can describe it properly. It is his philosophical insight that, where logic fails, word also fails and vice versa. The way of his negation resembles significantly that of Cyril of Alexandria's, whose doctrinal insights were adopted later by the Church as her official confession about the subject of Christ. For him, no word can be properly said of the divine mystery. Then, as we learn from

Nāgārjuna, the rejection of all descriptions is a viable option for us to choose. Words are of no avail in the face of the Mystery.

~

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Holding a M.Div degree received from San Francisco Theological Seminary, Wanjoong Kim is a Ph.D. candidate at the Graduate Theological Union, with a focus on the area of philosophy and systematic theology. He is also affiliated with the Presbyterian Church of the USA. Wanjoong has a broad spectrum of research interests including Greco-Roman philosophical traditions, early Christological developments, and East Asian Buddhist philosophical traditions. His dissertation is on a comparative theological topic that reinterprets Cyril's doctrine of the Incarnation through a philosophical lens attained from a comparative study of Aristotle and Nāgārjuna. It is tentatively entitled 'The Contingency of God in the Incarnation'.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Theological and Philosophical References

- Anatolios, Khaled, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011
- Aristotle, *Categories*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Barnes, Jonathan, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984
- Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Barnes, Jonathan, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984
- Bethune-Baker, J. F., *Nestorius and his Teaching: A Fresh Examination of the Evidence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908.
- Brother Azarias, *Aristotle and the Christian Church*, London: Kegan Paul Trench Co., 1888
- Coakley, Sarah, "What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does it Not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian 'Definition,'" *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, ed., Stephen T. Davis, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.143-163
- Coward, Harold, & Foshay, Toby, ed., *Derrida and Negative Theology*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1992
- Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*, tr. P. E. Pusey, Preface, 1885
- Erickson, Millard J., *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991
- Goulder, Michael, *Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1979
- Grillmeier, Aloys, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, London: Mowbrays, 1975, pp.443-557
- Herbert, Robert T., *Paradox and Identity in Theology*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979
- Hick, John, "The Logic of God Incarnate", *Religious Studies*, Vol.25, 1989, pp.409-423
- _____. ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate*, London: SCM Press, 1977
- Kaiser, Christopher B., "Christology and Complementarity," *Religious Studies*, 12 (1): 37-38 (1976)
- Kaufman, Gordon. *In Face of Mystery*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993
- Kelly, J. N. D., *Early Christian Doctrines*, San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1978
- Marmodoro, Anna & Hill, Jonathan, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011
- McGuckin, John A., *St. Cyril of Alexandria: the Christological Controversy: Its History, Theology and Texts*, Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004.

BIBLIOGRAPHY, CONT.

- McKinion, Steven, *Words, Imagery, and the Mystery of Christ: A reconstruction of Cyril of Alexandria's Christology*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2000. Particularly, see ch. 6
- Morris, Thomas V., *The Logic of God Incarnate*, Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1986
- Moulder, James, "Is a Chalcedonian Christology Coherent?", *Modern Theology* 2:4 July 1986, pp.285-307
- Nestorius, *The Bazaar of Heraclides*, tr. G.R. Driver & Leonard Hodgson, reprint: Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1925
- Norris, Richard, "Chalcedon Revisited: A Historical and Theological Reflection," ed., Nassif, Bradley, *New Perspectives on Historical Theology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996, pp.140-158
- Roberts, Michelle Voss, *Dualities: A Theology of Difference*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010
- Siddals, Ruth, "Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria," *Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, Vol.38, Part 2, Oct. 1987, pp.341-367
- Simplicius, *On Aristotle Categories 1-4*, tr. Michael Chase, Bloomsbury: London, 2003
- Soskice, J. M., *Metaphor and Religious Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985
- Swinburne, Richard, *The Christian God*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994
- Torrance, Thomas F., *God and Rationality*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1971
- Williams, C. J. F., "A Programme for Christology," *Religious Studies*, Vol. 3, 1968, pp.513-524
- Wallace, William A., *The Elements of Philosophy: A Compendium for Philosophers and Theologians*, (Eugene: WIPF & Stock, 1977)

Buddhist References: Primary Sources

- Bhattacharya, Kamaleswar, Johnston, E. H., and Kunst, Arnold, *The Dialectical Method of Nāgārjuna: Vīgrahavyāvartani*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985
- Hopkins, Jeffrey, *The Buddhism of Tibet*, London: Wisdom Publications, 1975
- Inada, Kenneth K., *Nāgārjuna: A Translation of his Mūlamadhyamakakārikā With an Introductory Essay*, Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1970
- Kalupahana, David J., *Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1986
- Komito, David Ross, *Nāgārjuna's Seventy Stanzas: A Buddhist Psychology of Emptiness*, Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1987
- Lindtner, Christine, *Master of Wisdom: Writings of the Buddhist Master Nāgārjuna*, Oakland: Dharma Press, 1986
- Santina, Peter Della, *Causality and Emptiness: The Wisdom of Nāgārjuna*, Singapore: Buddhist Research Society, 2002
- Streng, Frederick, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967

Buddhist References: Secondary Sources

- Arnold, Dan, "Candrakīrti on Dignaga on Svalakṣaṇas," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 26(1): 139-174, 2003
- Bharadwaja, V. K., "Rationality, Argumentation and Embarrassment: A Study of the Four Logical Alternatives (Catuṣkoṭi) in Buddhist Logic," *Philosophy East and West*, 34(3): 303-319, 1984
- Bhattacharya, Kamaleswar, Johnston, E.H., and Kunst, Arnold, *The Dialectical Method of Nāgārjuna*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977
- Burton, David, *Emptiness Appraised: A Critical Study of Nāgārjuna's Philosophy*, Richmond: Curzow, 1999
- Chakravarti, Sitansu, "The Madhyamika Catuṣkoṭi or Tetralemma," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 8:303-306, 1980
- Cheng, Hsueh-li, *Empty Logic: Madhyamika Buddhism from Chinese Sources*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1983
- Chu, Junjie, "On Dignaga's Theory of the Object of Cognition as Presented in PS(V)," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 29(2):211-253, p.211
- Cox, Collett, "From Category to Ontology: The Changing Role of Dharma in Sarvastivada Abhidharma," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32, 5-6, 2004
- Galloway, Brian, "Some Logical Issues in Madhyamika Thought," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 17:1-35, 1989
- Ganeri, Jonardon, *Philosophy in Classical India: The Proper Work of Reason*, New York, London: Routledge, 2001
- Garfield, Jay, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Translation and Commentary of Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Oxford: Oxford University, 1995

BIBLIOGRAPHY, CONT.

- Garfield, Jay, "Emptiness and Positionlessness: Do the Madhyamika Relinquish All Views?", *Journal of Indian Philosophy and Religion*, Vol.1:1-34, 1996
- Ghose, Ramendra Nath, "The Modality of Nāgārjuna's Dialectics," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 15(3):285-310, 1987
- Gunarantne, R. D., "The Logical Form of the Catuskoṭi: A New Solution," *Philosophy East and West* 30(2): 211-238, 1980
- Gunarantne, R. D., "Understanding Nāgārjuna's Catuskoṭi," *Philosophy East and West* 36(3): 213-235, 1986
- Hayes, Richard P., *Dignaga on the Interpretation of Signs*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988
- Jayatileke, K.N., *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1998)
- Jayatileke, K. N., "The Logic of Four Alternatives," *Philosophy East and West* 17(1-4):69-83, 1967
- McEvelley, Thomas, "Pyrrhonism and Madhyamika," *Philosophy East and West*, 32(1): 3-35, 1982
- Raju, P. T., "The Principle of Four-Cornered Negation in Indian Philosophy," *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol.VII, No.4 (28), 1954
- Robinson, Richard H., "Did Nāgārjuna Really Refute All Philosophical Views?", *Philosophy East and West*, 22(3): 325-332, 1972
- Robinson, Richard H., "Some Logical Aspects of Nāgārjuna's System", *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 6, No. 4, Jan., 1957, pp.291-308
- Routley, R., "The Need for Nonsense," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 47(3):367-384, 1969
- Ruegg, David Seyfort, "The Use of the Four Positions of the Catuskoṭi and the Problem of the Description of Reality in Mahāyāna Buddhism," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, (5):1-171, 1977
- Ruegg, David Seyfort, "Does the Madhyamika have a Thesis and Philosophical Position?", ed., Matilal, Bimal Krishna, *Buddhist Logic and Epistemology*, Reidel: 1986
- Siderits, Mark, "Thinking on Empty: Madhyamaka Anti-Realism and Canons of Rationality," ed., Biderman, Shlomo and Scharfstein, Ben-Ami, *Rationality in Question: On Eastern and Western Views of Rationality*, New York: E.J. Brill, 1989
- Siderits, Mark, "The Madhyamaka Critique of Epistemology .I.," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 8:307-335, 1980
- Staal, Frits, *Exploring Mysticism: A Methodological Essay*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975
- Stcherbatsky, Theodore, *Buddhist Logic Vol. I*, New York: Dover Publications, 1962
- Tachikawa, Musashi, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*, tr., Giebel, Rolf W., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997
- Tola, Fernando, *Nāgārjuna's Refutation of Logic*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995
- Tsong Kha Pa, *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nāgārjuna's Mulmadhyamakakarika*, trans., Jay L. Garfield and Geshe Ngawang Samten, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006
- Wayman, Alex, "Who Understands the Four Alternatives of the Buddhist Texts?", *Philosophy East and West*, 27(1):3-21, 1977
- Weiss, Paul, "The Four Dimensions of Reality," *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol.VII, No.4, pp.558-562
- Westerhoff, Jan, *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka: A Philosophical Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009

Reading Across Traditions: Comparing the Theological Anthropologies of Ramanuja and Augustine of Hippo

by Jacob Prahlow



INTRODUCTION

This study stands as a theological experiment comparing two theological anthropologies from the Hindu¹ and Christian traditions, those of Ramanuja and Augustine of Hippo, respectively. These theologians have only sometimes been compared, and rarely are their specific theological conceptions regarding how humanity relates to the Ultimate considered in relation to one another.² The purpose of this study is twofold. First, I examine the value of

the comparative theological process espoused by Francis X. Clooney and second, I compare the theological anthropologies of Ramanuja and Augustine. To these ends, this project considers Clooney's method before engaging the texts of these two writers within their historical and theological contexts. Through a "reading together" of the theological anthropologies of Ramanuja and Augustine, numerous similarities and differences are noted. These not only provide useful connections for Hindu-Christian dialogue, but also reveal important

¹ I am fully aware of the historical problems associated with the use of the term "Hindu" (See Francis X. Clooney, "Learning Our Way: Some Catholic Reflections on the Catholic-Hindu Encounter," in *Catholicism and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. James J. Heft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 90-2.). However, as a generalist and summarizing designation of those persons (such as Ramanuja) participating in the rituals and beliefs of Indian religious culture and practice, this term is used in this study without caution marks.

² One example of a comparison of Augustine and Ramanuja is Ankur Barua's *The Divine Body in History: A Comparative Study of the Symbolism of Time and Embodiment in St. Augustine and Ramanuja*, trans. Peter Land, (New York: OUP, 2008).

aspects of these theologians' conceptions of the Ultimate. In the end, this paper argues that 1) Clooney's comparative process serves as a useful tool for future comparative work between Hindu and Christian sources and 2) there are striking parallels between Ramanuja's and Augustine's theological anthropologies, especially conceptions of dependent agency, which provide a ready foundation for future Hindu-Christian dialogue.

Before proceeding, we must first clarify the genesis, scope, and limitations of this study. First, there have been several combined factors that have led me to this study. Most important of these factors have been my engagement with Francis X. Clooney's comparative method in Robert Neville's *Ultimate Realities* and my reading of Clooney's own *Theology after Advaita*. These sources not only provided formative forays into the comparative methodology employed here, but they also stimulated my own interest in Hindu-Christian comparison. Additionally important was J. Calvin Keene's article "Ramanuja: The Hindu Augustine," which first brought to mind the comparison of these two figures. Of further influence was the "World-Self-God" model noted by Mark C. Taylor in his *After God*.³ Employing this model, the comparative reading here seeks to

understand the way in which conceptions of the self, as conceived by Ramanuja and Augustine, relate to conceptions of the Ultimate.⁴ Finally, reflections in this paper concerning the Ultimate stem from a graduate seminar I attended at Wake Forest University entitled "Conceptions of the Ultimate" taught by Jay Ford.

We must also consider the scope of this project, namely, what the term "theological anthropology" entails. Broadly defined by theologians such as Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar, theological anthropology involves the "study of the human person in conversation with the doctrinal framework of particular religious traditions."⁵ In this study, J. Patout Burns' definition is used, where "theological anthropology investigates the resources, the limitations, and the destiny of the human person."⁶ In short, the focus on this project involves the manner in which Ramanuja and Augustine conceive of humanity's ability to relate to the Ultimate.

Third, we note several limitations of this paper. This project does not claim to offer a full presentation of the Hindu tradition, the Christian tradition, the comparison of the Hindu and Christian traditions, Ramanuja, Augustine, theological anthropology, the

³ While Taylor is certainly not the first to propose the world-self-God model, my reading of *After God* provided the basis for this project's with that paradigm.

⁴ Throughout this study the terms Ultimate, God, and Divine are used to signify the Ultimate Reality for the tradition(s) being discussed.

⁵ Richard Treloar, "Theological Anthropology: Introduction," in *National Council of Churches in Australia* (2005): 2-3.) and E.A. Livingstone, "Theological Anthropology," in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (2nd E), ed. E. A. Livingstone, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Also note that "theological anthropology" more broadly designates the relationship between the human and the divine. The topic of theological anthropology in some (primarily Christian) circles revolves around a discussion of human free will and/or divine predestination. These conversations are not the explicit topic of this paper, though similar concerns are sometimes touched upon.

⁶ J. Patout Burns, introduction to *Theological Anthropology*, trans. and ed. J. Patout Burns. In *Sources of Early Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 1.

process of reading together, or the reading together of Ramanuja or Augustine.⁷ That is to say, this project is specifically interested in the comparison of the theological anthropologies of Ramanuja and Augustine as a means for investigating Clooney's comparative method and drawing tentative conclusions about theological similarities and differences between the Hindu and Christian traditions. This project proceeds recognizing the internal diversity of the traditions being examined here, as well as the historical centrality of these theological anthropologies for adherents to forms of Christianity or Hinduism.⁸ The focus of this study is neither to destabilize these theologies, nor to cast them as universally stable, but rather to offer a comparative reading of these perspectives. Sabapathy Kulandran notes an additional limitation, viz., we must maintain the importance of understanding that much of the terminology used in the study of theological anthropology (and indeed that term itself) neither originates with the authors being considered here nor is universally accepted by their respective traditions.⁹ This is to note once again the limited scope of this work while seeking to remain aware of the numerous linguistic and categorical boundaries that necessarily restrain the findings of this project. With these recognitions in mind, we now proceed to consideration of the comparative methodology used in our reading together of Ramanuja and Augustine of Hippo.

METHOD

Francis X. Clooney has been remarkably successful in forming (and propagating) a method of interreligious comparison. His numerous books and articles comparing the Hindu and Christian traditions not only serve as useful sources for methodological thinking, but have also encouraged other scholars to engage in his comparative reading process as well.¹⁰ This section seeks to examine Clooney's methodological process of "Comparative Theology" and "Reading Together" before employing this method in a reading of Ramanuja and Augustine.

The location of Clooney's studies within the realm of comparative theology warrant several considerations. First, given the necessarily interreligious scope of contemporary theology, theological thought cannot be excessively dogmatic. Rather, it must serve as the process through which believers of any tradition begin to think through what they believe without rejecting firm conclusions, while, nevertheless, recognizing the necessity of thoughtful and informed reflection upon theological concerns.¹¹ Second, this type of comparative theology highlights both similarities and differences.¹² In highlighting similarities, comparisons may draw out lessons from both the non-home (or comparative) tradition as well as the home tradition serving as the basis for comparison. By highlighting differences we may recall that all

⁷ Of additional importance is a brief historical point, that despite Ramanuja's post-dating Augustine by nearly 600 years, almost nothing has been said concerning his possible interaction with Augustinian materials on theological anthropology. That is, there are no clear genealogical or textual connections between these two thinkers.

⁸ John Brockington, *Hinduism and Christianity* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), ix-xi. Michelle Voss Roberts, *Dualities: A Theology of Difference* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 12.

⁹ Sabapathy Kulandran, *Grace: A Comparative Study of the Doctrine in Christianity and Hinduism* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964), 29.

¹⁰ Voss Roberts, *Dualities*, 4.

¹¹ Francis X. Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries Between Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 8.

¹² *Ibid.*, 9.

religions are not the same. Third, comparative theology practiced with an awareness of context becomes dialogical in nature and points toward actual encounters between the traditions being compared.¹³ In a word, comparative theology should ultimately be a practically applicable process. Fourth, Clooney argues that comparative theology must remain confessional.¹⁴ This means the theologies being compared must be vital enough that they may become arguments highlighting the very real differences of the traditions being compared and even during dialogue, that theologians “should be able to affirm the content of their faith as true, render it intelligible to those who believe it already, and venture to put persuasive arguments before outsiders in order to demonstrate the truth of the faith, which might even lead some outsiders to believe and convert.”¹⁵ To summarize, Clooney’s comparative theology involves a contextualized comparative process undertaken by confessional theologians, who highlight the similarities and differences of the traditions being compared. Working from this perspective, this paper seeks to exemplify an interreligious, dialogical, and confessional theology.

If comparative theology is the foundation for this method, what does the applied method of comparison entail? Some scholars have favored praxis-centered approaches to dialogue as the best means of comparison. For example Robert

Baird suggests that the process of Hindu-Christian dialogue serves as a useful end for understanding the “essential encounter of God and man,” functioning as an appropriate treatment of two (or more) traditions.¹⁶ Similarly, Raimundo Panikkar argues that informed dialogue offers an appropriate means of contributing to the “new self-understanding” of traditions which undergo the process of serious comparative dialogue with other traditions.¹⁷ Not entirely at odds with a dialogue-centered encounter, but certainly distinct from it, is the comparative method outlined by J. Z. Smith. Smith advocates a four-step comparative process which entails the description of each phenomenon within its social, historical and cultural contexts and reception history, a focused comparison of examples in light of each other, a re-description of the examples in light of the comparative process, and finally an attempt to rectify the categories of comparison.¹⁸ Clooney effectively combines the dialogical aspects suggested by Baird and Panikkar, the critical academic realism of Smith, and his own foundation of comparative theology through his practice of “reading together,” which we now consider in some detail.¹⁹

The process of reading together is “primarily a rather simple but extended exercise in reading together brilliant and compelling texts, in order that we might notice how attentive readers,

¹³ Ibid., 9-10.

¹⁴ Ibid., 10-11.

¹⁵ Ibid. 10-11

¹⁶ Robert D. Baird, “The Academic Study of Religion,” in *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*, ed. Harold Coward, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 225-8

¹⁷ Raimundo Panikkar, forward to *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*, ed. Harold Coward (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), ix-xvii.

¹⁸ Voss Roberts, *Dualities*, 3.

¹⁹ Ibid., 4.

possibly including ourselves, are educated and made vulnerable to the power of the ideals our authors propose.”²⁰ This type of reading is the immersion “in a double reading that makes us vulnerable to the realities of God and self as imagined by the authors.”²¹ Whereas a traditional comparative reading will yield insights, this type of reading offers an uncharted vantage point into the ideals, images, and conceptions beneath the texts of both the home and comparative traditions.²² In the words of Michelle Voss Roberts, “for Clooney the truth of comparative theology comes through the prolonged practice of reading the texts of different traditions together.”²³

In order to accomplish this process of reading together, Clooney proposes five methodological points: First, he again notes the importance of context in thoughtfully comparing texts.²⁴ Second, he advocates an “intratextual approach” to comparison.²⁵ This means situating comparison within as many textual quotes as possible, which also involves reconsidering the typical approach to commentaries which should not be seen as signs of corruption or decay, but rather the “original genius of the tradition” being

explicated.²⁶ A fully contextual and intratextual comparative reading may thus extend beyond the source texts of a tradition to the explication of those source texts within the commentaries of the traditions being compared. Third, Clooney advocates the privileging of convergence in the texts being compared.²⁷ This means noting parallels wherever they might be found, not just in the portions of a text that have been deemed the most important, original, or brilliant.²⁸ Fourth, we should concede that any one example of the comparative process cannot represent the totality of comparative knowledge.²⁹ This recognizes that however enlightening the comparative process may be, Ultimate Reality for each of the traditions being examined lies beyond that process,³⁰ and also that such a study cannot possibly explicate all of the potential comparisons and meanings available from the texts being compared.³¹ Clooney's final methodological point indicates that each comparative reading should seek to further interreligious understanding.³² That is, while this methodology might seem highly bookish in nature, it should always seek to have practical implications. This of course stems at least partially from the desire for comparative theology to have practical implications.

²⁰ Francis X. Clooney, *Beyond Compare: St. Francis de Sales and Sri Vedanta Desika on Loving Surrender to God* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 22.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Francis X. Clooney, *Theology after Vedanta: An Experience in Comparative Theology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 165.

²³ Voss Roberts, *Dualities*, 4.

²⁴ Clooney, *Beyond Compare*, 22.

²⁵ Ibid., 25.

²⁶ Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 21.

²⁷ Clooney, *Beyond Compare*, 26.

²⁸ Clooney, *Theology After Vedanta*, 158-9.

²⁹ Clooney, *Beyond Compare*, 27.

³⁰ Francis X. Clooney and Hugh Nicholson, “Vedanta Desika's *Isvarapariccheda* ('Definition of the Lord') and the Hindu Argument about Ultimate Reality,” in *Ultimate Realities: A Volume in the Comparative Religious Ideas Project*, ed. Robert Cummings Neville (Albany: SUNY, 2001), 96.

³¹ Clooney, *Beyond Compare*, 27.

³² Ibid., 28.

~

The application of these considerations to a comparative reading of a home tradition text *with* a non-home tradition text is what Clooney calls “reading together.”³³ This process requires a careful reading of the textual tradition under consideration, including a reading of commentaries and later interpretive frameworks where possible. After immersion in the non-home tradition, one returns to the home tradition, engaging in a re-reading and reconceptualization of those materials in light of the other tradition. This process is not choosing sides between the home tradition and the non-home, but rather the process by which the home tradition beings to “think again the entire range of problems and possibilities in [that] theological tradition” following a serious engagement with another tradition.³⁴ The conclusions drawn from this type of reading together consist of several features. First, like many theological conclusions, they are often tentative and open to revision and correction.³⁵ Such conclusions are not intended to be hard, fast, and final dogma gleaned from the comparative process, but the beginnings of serious comparisons. Second, conclusions should be drawn from areas of mutual concern.³⁶ This is to ensure conclusions do not serve the purposes of one tradition or scholar, but rather are broadly applicable to numerous contexts. Third, conclusions must be cautiously applied to ‘hot topics.’³⁷ Truly valuable comparative conclusions are reached after

serious engagement with the ideas of the other and then a significant amount of reflexivity on the part of the home tradition; to rush this process in order to find applicable materials for one's tradition or a specific issue is to hijack the potential value of lasting findings. Fourth, conclusions must be crafted with the least amount of conceptual violence done to the “ideas, figures, practices, or traditions under comparison,”³⁸ another reminder of the importance of context. As a result of following these cautions in crafting comparative conclusions, readers may not only gain insights into the theological conceptions of the comparative tradition, but also learn a great deal about their home tradition as well.

In the sections that follow, this study employs Clooney's methodological paradigm and seeks to understand the process of reading together from the perspective of comparative theology. This is done by introducing the contexts of Ramanuja and Augustine, a detailed reading of Ramanuja's theological anthropology, a reading together of Augustine and Ramanuja, and the notation of comparative conclusions drawn from reading together. We now turn to consider the contexts of Ramanuja and Augustine.

³³ Clooney, “Learning Our Way,” 103.

³⁴ Clooney, *Theology After Vedanta*, 153.

³⁵ Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 12.

³⁶ Panikkar, forward to *Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, xvii.

³⁷ Clooney, “Learning Our Way,” 92.

³⁸ John J. Thatamanil, forward to *Dualities: A Theology of Difference*, by Michalle Voss Roberts (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), ix.



The body of Ramanujar (1017–1137 CE)
in the Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple

CONTEXT

Ramanuja, also called Ramanujacharya (c. 1017 - 1137 CE), has been called the “single most influential thinking of devotional Hinduism.”³⁹ After following the Advaita Vedanta school of Shankara for some time, he became a devotee of Vishnu and Shri Lakshmi and founded the Vishishtadvaita School.⁴⁰ This system he called “qualified non-dualism,” and in it he provided an intellectual basis for *bhakti* devotional practices through three major commentaries: the *Vedartha Samgraha*, the *Sri Bhashya*, and the *Bhagavad Gita Bhashya*.⁴¹ These works continue to influence significant portions of Hindu

thought and practice to this day. This study seeks to examine Ramanuja's theological anthropology through the lens of the *Sri Bhashya*. In this commentary on the *Brama Sutras*, Ramanuja presents the central principles of his Vishishtadvaita interpretation of the Upanishads, *Bhagavad Gita*, and other *smṛti* texts.⁴² He also develops the principles of *bhakti* as an appropriate means to *moksha*, and describes in some detail the three categories of reality: God (*Brahman*), soul, and matter.⁴³ Throughout this commentary Ramanuja demonstrates the importance of a proper reading of scripture, the impact that proper interpretation plays in proper practice (especially *bhakti*), and engages with issues of self-dependence found in the teachings of Shankara and Advaita Vedanta.⁴⁴

Much like Ramanuja, Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) has long been called one of the most influential of the Christian Church. Converted from Manicheism by Ambrose of Milan in 384 CE, Augustine quickly became one of the most prolific and well-respected theologians of the Western Roman Empire.⁴⁵ One of his most famous works, *The Confessions*, agitated a British monk named Pelagius to advocate a radical form of human free will which nearly divided the western Church. Augustine responded to Pelagius through his treatise *On the Grace of Christ* in 418 CE and later

³⁹ “Ramanuja,” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online Academic Edition*. (2014), accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/490485/Ramanuja>.

⁴⁰ Brockington, *Hinduism and Christianity*, 9.

⁴¹ J. Calvin Keene, “Ramanuja, The Hindu Augustine,” in *The Journal of Bible and Religion* 21, no. 1 (1953): 3-8. Britannica. These commentaries are on the *Vedas*, the *Brama Sutras*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*, respectively.

⁴² V. S. Ghatge, *The Vedanta: A Study of the Brahma Sutras with the Bhasyas of S'ankara, Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhva and Vallabha*, Second Edition, ed C.R. Devadhar (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1960), 26.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Harold Coward, “The Experience of Scripture in Hinduism and Christianity,” in *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*, ed. Harold Coward, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 230. Kulandran, *Grace*, 30.

⁴⁵ Burns, *Sources of Early Christian Thought*, 12.

through *On Rebuke and Grace* in 426 CE. In these treatises Augustine affirms a dependent form of human freedom through the grace of Christ.⁴⁶ In addition to engaging with the theological anthropology of Pelagius, Augustine also implicitly distinguishes his thought from the two great theological movements which preceded and jointly influenced him, those of asceticism and Christian Platonism.⁴⁷ Affirming theological conceptions such as grounding freedom of choice in the desire for good and critiquing ideas of the development of innate human desire, Augustine argued that God exclusively should be given credit for beginning and completing the process of salvation, thereby redefining the Christian doctrine of the efficacy and gratuity of divine grace.⁴⁸ Augustine's thought was especially influential on Reformation thinkers, and continues to serve as the basis for a considerable amount of Christian theology today.

READING RAMANUJA

An integral part of a comparative reading involves familiarization with the traditions being compared through source texts and commentaries on those texts. This section seeks to offer a summary of important points

regarding Ramanuja's theological anthropology in order to familiarize readers with his thought. The central problem of all theological anthropology is the relation of the human to the Ultimate; to again visit Burns' definition, "theological anthropology investigates the resources, the limitations, and the destiny of the human person."⁴⁹ Thus it is not surprising that the Upanishad's presentation of the Ultimate as the unity of the universe and the divine presented problems for those wanting to affirm individual souls or selves, including Ramanuja.⁵⁰ In addressing this concern, Ramanuja speaks to four basic issues: the nature of the soul/self, the relationship of the soul/self with the Ultimate, the agency of the soul/self, and salvation for the soul/self.

In order to talk about the nature of the soul/self, Ramanuja first clarified the two different types of selfhood: the Supreme Self (Brahman) and finite selves.⁵¹ The number of finite souls is nearly infinite and may be further subdivided into three categories: pristine and eternal finite souls that have never been bound to *samsara*, finite souls that have been freed from *samsara* through *moksha*, and bound finite souls still entrapped in *samsara*.⁵² It is this final category of bound finite souls that Ramanuja is most

⁴⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁷ Burns, *Sources of Early Christian Thought*, 4. Coward notes that "Hindu thought seems to have influenced the Neo-Platonists and is specifically commented upon by Clement of Alexandria (200 CE)" though whatever influence may have been exhibited pre-dates the specific theologies of both Ramanuja and Augustine (Harold Coward, Introduction to *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.), 1.).

⁴⁸ Ibid., 15-6.

⁴⁹ Burns, *Sources of Early Christian Thought*, 1.

⁵⁰ Ramanuja, *Sri Bhashya*, in *The Vedanta Sutras, Volume III*, ed. George Thibaut (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1962), 1.4.16. Keene, 4. The terms 'soul' and 'self' are used interchangeably in this section and are often combined as 'soul/self' due to Ramanuja's definition of the soul as the self.

⁵¹ Ramanuja, *Sri Bhashya* 1.1.1. ? Martin Ganeri, "Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Ramanuja," in *Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Matthew R. Dasti and Edwin E. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 233. Both of the Supreme and finite souls/selves are distinct from indeterminate matter. Clooney notes that Ramanuja believed that the Supreme God occasionally "assumed more specific material forms, divine bodies, during those divine descents renowned in poetry and myth..." (Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 112).

⁵² Arvind Sharma, *Classical Hindu Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 49.

concerned with here. Finite souls, in their pristine state, possess all the qualities of the Supreme Self with two notable exceptions: they may not control the world and they are atomic in size.⁵³ Conversely, Brahman controls the movements of the world and is all pervading. Humanity is essentially a finite soul/self, a conscious subject, real and unique, endowed with intelligence, granted freedom of action in the world, and distinct from the Supreme Self.⁵⁴ However, due to ignorance finite souls are “conjoined to matter” despite their resemblance to Brahman and subsequently suffer.⁵⁵ Yet for Ramanuja, ignorance of the true nature of the soul, not materiality, remains the problem which must be cured.⁵⁶

What then of the soul/self's relationship with the Ultimate? First and foremost, all finite selves must be understood as dependent upon the creative action of the Ultimate, that individual souls (as well as the inanimate world) are incapable of an existence independent of the Supreme Self.⁵⁷ The technical term for this relationship is *samavaya*, that the universe infers the Supreme and is its attribute.⁵⁸ Ganeri aptly summarizes this relationship by noting that for Ramanuja the “world is the body of the Supreme Self.”⁵⁹ The explanatory analogy for this relationship is the body and soul of

humanity. As the body depends upon the soul for its continued existence, so also the cosmos depends upon the Ultimate for its continued being.⁶⁰ In the same way that both the body and soul are real and yet dependent, so also finite souls are real and remain wholly dependent upon the Ultimate.⁶¹ Teleologically speaking, the whole cosmos finds fulfillment in service of the Ultimate.⁶² Soteriologically speaking, humanity's total dependence upon the Ultimate, who continually and lovingly offers saving grace despite human ignorance, means *moksha* remains a possibility.⁶³

If the entire cosmos is dependent upon the Ultimate for its very existence, what may be said concerning the agency of the soul/self? For Ramanuja, the dependency of the soul/self in no way mitigates its freedom of will.⁶⁴ In opposition to Advaita Vedanta and Samkhya, he argues the *Brahma Sutras* indicate that the experiencer acts as a real free agent, whose actions are 'consented' but not determined by the Supreme Self.⁶⁵ Such statements raise questions concerning the scope of finite selves' freedom in relation to that of the Ultimate. Ramanuja addresses this most clearly in *Sri Bhashya* 2.3.40, where the Supreme Self stands as the 'inner controller' and the finite self the 'permitter' of action. The finite soul/self must

⁵³ Ramanuja, *Sri Bhashya* 2.3.18, 20. Ghate, *The Vedanta*, 25.

⁵⁴ Ramanuja, *Sri Bhashya* 2.1.9. Ganeri, “Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Ramanuja,” 235. Keene, “Ramanuja, The Hindu Augustine,” 5. Kulandran, *Grace*, 164.

⁵⁵ Ghate, *The Vedanta*, 25.

⁵⁶ Keene, “Ramanuja, The Hindu Augustine,” 5.

⁵⁷ Ramanuja, *Sri Bhashya* 1.4.16, 2.1.9. Ghate, *The Vedanta*, 24. Keene, 4. Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Divine Self, Human Self: The Philosophy of Being in Two Gita Commentaries* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 56.

⁵⁸ Kulandran, *Grace*, 166-7.

⁵⁹ Ganeri, “Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Ramanuja,” 236.

⁶⁰ Keene, “Ramanuja, The Hindu Augustine,” 4.

⁶¹ Ramanuja, *Sri Bhashya* 1.4.16. Brockington, 9-10.

⁶² Ganeri, “Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Ramanuja,” 237.

⁶³ Ram-Prasad, 64. ??

⁶⁴ Ganeri, “Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Ramanuja,” 233. Ramanuja, *Sri Bhashya* 2.3.33-39.

⁶⁵ Ganeri, “Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Ramanuja,” 233, 240-3. Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 114.

realize that all its actions are dependent upon the Supreme Self, but such a realization should then lead to an “active desire to co-operate with [the Supreme Self’s] will.”⁶⁶ Finite selves are thus not free in the sense that they are completely independent of the Ultimate, but rather they have agency because of the power and action of the Ultimate.⁶⁷ In Ganeri’s terms, “the finite self is free to act and its actions are free, not despite the agency of the Supreme Self, but because of it.”⁶⁸ Thus Ramanuja seeks to preserve the moral agency of the finite selves while continuing to affirm the universal causality of the Supreme Self.

Given the finite selves’ total dependence on the Supreme Self and Ramanuja’s desire to maintain some form of free agency for those finite selves, the soteriological implications of his theological anthropology sound surprisingly similar to certain aspects of the Christian tradition. The first step is the curing of ignorance, the recognition of the finite self’s utter dependence upon the Ultimate.⁶⁹ This involves renouncing claims of one’s own agency and ascribing all good actions to the will of the Supreme Self and replacing ignorance with the true knowledge of the Ultimate concerning reality.⁷⁰ This does not mean giving up agency as such, but rather suggests a “mental attitude of detachment that is an effective means of getting free of self-centered desire for the fruits of its actions.”⁷¹

Pragmatically this suggests that devotees will fulfill their *dharma* and live virtuous lives without the expressed desire to accrue merit.⁷² For Ramanuja, the best way to do this is through *bhakti* practices, including intense devotion and submission to Narayana (Vishnu) which will eventually lead to mystical experience of the Ultimate and liberation from *samsara*.⁷³

To summarize, central to Ramanuja’s concerns is the desire to account for the relationship and agency of the Supreme and finite selves in a manner consistent with the Hindu scriptures and proper operation of both selves. This necessitates the recognition that finite selves, while real, conscious, and able to express agency, have fallen into ignorance about their total dependence upon the Ultimate. This total dependence does not undermine the moral agency of the finite selves, but rather offers an opportunity for finite selves to recognize the truth about reality and co-operate with the Supreme Self.⁷⁴ In order to achieve liberation, this freedom must be aligned with the agency of the Supreme Self and combined with the recognition that the Supreme Self provides the agency being employed by the finite self. For Ramanuja, *samsara* is effectively ignorance of dependent agency, and *moksha* derives from the mental realignment of recognizing the need to renounce one’s own agency. In terms more

⁶⁶ Brockington, 74.

⁶⁷ Ganeri, “Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Ramanuja,” 246.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Keene, “Ramanuja, The Hindu Augustine,” 6.

⁷⁰ Ganeri, “Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Ramanuja,” 248. Keene, 6.

⁷¹ Ganeri, “Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Ramanuja,” 249.

⁷² Brockington, *Hinduism and Christianity*, 119.

⁷³ Keene, “Ramanuja, The Hindu Augustine,” 7.

⁷⁴ It is worth noting that while Ramanuja conceives of the Supreme Self as having willful intention, this conception is not prevalent among his contemporaries (Ganeri, “Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Ramanuja,” 233). Additionally, while functionally Ramanuja seems to have identified Narayana (Vishnu) with the Ultimate (Brahman), this topic remains outside the immediate purview of this essay, and would be a fruitful area of future research.

easily conveyable to the forthcoming comparison with Augustine, Ramanuja's theological anthropology is that humanity is utterly dependent upon the Ultimate for agency. Such agency having been granted, humanity has the capacity to freely choose the good and to realize that any agency that humans express is dependent upon the Ultimate.

READING TOGETHER: AUGUSTINE WITH RAMANUJA

After immersing ourselves in Ramanuja, seeking to understand his theological anthropology, and (though not recreated here) reading significant portions of the *Sri Bhashya*, the next step involves a (re)reading of Augustine. When reading Augustine's *On the Grace of Christ* and *On Rebuke and Grace*, passages that reflect or recall readings from the *Sri Bhashya* can be drawn out and then compared with those parallel passages in Ramanuja. There are numerous passages in Augustine and Ramanuja that parallel one other,⁷⁵ though here we offer four of the clearest examples of reading together before drawing some comparative conclusions from this process.⁷⁶

Example #1

On the Grace of Christ: "We must realize that [Pelagius] believes neither our will nor our action is helped by divine aid."⁷⁷

Sri Bhashya 2.1.9: "In this sense, then, all sentient and non-sentient beings together... are completely controlled and supported by him for his own ends, and are absolutely subordinate to him."⁷⁸

Comparative Insights: Here we see the importance of dependency upon the Ultimate for both Augustine and Ramanuja. Human will and action for Augustine are at the very least assisted by the Divine, and Ramanuja goes so far as to say that all beings, sentient and otherwise, are *controlled* and supported by the Ultimate. This suggests that Augustine attributes some measure of freedom to humanity that Ramanuja is more comfortable ascribing to the Divine. Reconsidering Augustine's thought in light of this passage, we note that Augustine does not write of a wholly encompassing reliance upon the divine, but rather speaks in terms of assistance, a helpful reminder when (re)reading his encounter with the freedom of Pelagius.

Example #2

On Rebuke and Grace: "Free choice is adequate for evil, but it can manage good only if it is helped by Sovereign God."⁷⁹

Sri Bhashya 2.3.39: "The Self, although always provided with the instruments of action, such as the organ of speech, and so on, acts when it wishes to do so, and does not act when it does not wish to do so. Just as a carpenter, although having his axe and other implements ready at

⁷⁵ See especially Ramanuja, *Sri Bhashya* 1.4.16, 2.1.9, 2.2.3, 2.3.33-41, 4.4.14.

⁷⁶ The following references from Ramanuja's *Sri Bhashya* are to Thibaut's edition. References from Augustine are to Burns' edition. Get rid of this and just cite references properly?

⁷⁷ Augustine of Hippo, "On Grace," in *Theological Anthropology*, trans and ed. J. Patout Burns (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 64.

⁷⁸ Ramanuja, *Sri Bhashya*, 425

⁷⁹ Augustine of Hippo, "On Rebuke and Grace," in *Theological Anthropology*, trans. and ed. J. Patout Burns (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 101.

hand, works or does not work just as he pleases.”⁸⁰

Comparative Insights: Ramanuja here speaks of humans as free to act through their capacities as they see fit. Conversely, Augustine allows that humanity may act of its own accord, but argues that this action results in wholly unsuitable ways without divine assistance. The current natural state of humanity (which we must note is distinctly post-lapsarian for Augustine) has access to different capacities for Augustine and Ramanuja, though both see the typical human being as aided by the overarching and efficacious natural grace of God. In reconsidering Augustine, this raises questions regarding the scope of human action when it is unassisted by the grace of God.

Example #3

On Rebuke and Grace: “Thus God created humanity with free choice.”⁸¹

Sri Bhashya 4.4.14: “As the quality, inhering in all things, of being ruled by the highest Self, is eternal and definitely fixed by being connected with his essential nature, it is an unavoidable conclusion that the rule of the soul and of the divinities over the organs depends on the will of the highest Self.”⁸²

Comparative Insights: These two passages offer an example of a ‘divergent reading together,’ where the differences are more acute than possible similarities. Augustine affirms that, as a first principle, humanity was created with free choice (though, as noted above, this freedom has been corrupted). Ramanuja, on the other hand, affirms that any capacity of the finite self



The earliest known portrait of Saint Augustine in a 6th-century fresco, Lateran, Rome.

is ultimately dependent upon the Supreme Self. While these statements at first glance may seem incompatible, reflecting upon the contexts of these passages within the totality of these author's arguments leads us to conclude that these views are more compatible than may have first been thought. Augustine emphasizes the dependent nature of human choice and notes the limited purview of human freedom (both in the garden and now), while Ramanuja does not deny free choice, but rather limits its scope, and here notes the dependent origin of human freedom. Thus this reading presents an opportunity to seriously read and reflect upon what is contextually being said by both

⁸⁰ Ramanuja, *Sri Bhashya*, 557??

⁸¹ Augustine, “On Rebuke and Grace,” 98.

⁸² Ramanuja, *Sri Bhashya*, 577.

Augustine and Ramanuja, thereby furthering the mutual understanding of these traditions being compared.

Example #4

On the Grace of Christ: "God not only helps the capacity even if a person neither wills nor acts well, but also helps willing and action itself, so that a person wills and works well.... [further] without this help we neither choose nor accomplish anything good. Let him admit that this is the grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ, through which he makes us righteous by his justice rather than our own, that our justice is that which comes from him."⁸³

Sri Bhashya 2.3.33: "(The soul is) an agent, on account of Scripture (thus) having a purport. It has been shown that the individual Self is a knowing subject and atomic. Now the question arises whether that Self is an agent or, being itself non-active, erroneously ascribes to itself [activity].... The soul, therefore, is an enjoyer only, while all agency belongs to Prakriti [nature]--To this the Sûtra replies, 'an agent, on account of Scripture thus having a meaning.' The Self only is an agent..."⁸⁴

Comparative Insights: Here we see the clearest indication from Ramanuja that the finite self is indeed an agent, a position effectively affirmed by Augustine as well, though both stress the dependent agency of selves upon the Ultimate. For Augustine, the active grace of God impacts the willing and action of a human agent; for Ramanuja, human nature expresses agency imparted through grace by the Ultimate. It is notable that whereas Augustine draws a distinction between willing and acting, Ramanuja parses the differences between the

soul and nature. Both this division and the role that the divine plays in enacting whatever agency may be possessed by a portion of the human subject demonstrate that both Ramanuja and Augustine are concerned with attributing supreme agency to the Ultimate while reserving some role for human agency.

COMPARATIVE CONCLUSIONS

Having completed a reading together of Augustine and Ramanuja, we can now offer some comparative conclusions based on this reading. The first set of differences between Ramanuja and Augustine's theological anthropologies are those arising from the different contexts and concerns of their formulation. These differences extend beyond the mere particulars of when these men lived, where they lived, who they were responding to, or the religious milieus out of which they worked. Indeed the styles in which Augustine and Ramanuja wrote are different and suited toward their different purposes. Ramanuja offered an extensive philosophically-informed systematic commentary on a text in conversation with numerous partners; Augustine produced brief occasional letters primarily dealing with the views of a particular individual. These factors and purposes certainly impacted and shaped the theologies of Ramanuja and Augustine. In the comparative reading above, we noted several other key differences between Augustine and Ramanuja, the most important being the qualitative difference in the scope of human agency. For Augustine, the agency of the self is unable to accomplish good except through the grace that only comes from God. For Ramanuja, the agency of the self may act (and accomplish

⁸³ Augustine, "On Grace," 94.

⁸⁴ Ramanuja, *Sri Bhashya*, 554.

good) through the agency granted naturally by the Ultimate. Thus we may say here that Augustine writes of the active grace of the Ultimate, whereas Ramanuja writes of the inactive (or natural) gift of agency granted by the Ultimate. While both are ultimately conceiving of human agency as enabled by the grace of the ultimate, the parameters of human agency are defined differently.

There are also a number of striking similarities between the theological anthropologies of Ramanuja and Augustine. First we most note two important contextual similarities, that these theologies engage with the importance of the scriptures of their traditions and that both theologians reflect the tension between the transcendent/immanent concerns of their traditions. That is to say both Ramanuja and Augustine appeal to external written sources as the ostensible basis for their thought while offering useful (re)conceptions of the Ultimate through their writings. The central similarity between the theological anthropologies of our two candidates is their affirmation of dependent agency. This was seen most clearly in our examples of reading together above. Augustine argues that the grace of God imparts the willing and action of human beings to the point that even when he affirms humanity's free choice he simultaneously limits its scope.⁸⁵ Though starting from different assumptions, Ramanuja likewise ends up at a similar place. Affirming the dependency of the finite self upon the Supreme Self, Ramanuja nonetheless argues that the finite self remains an agent. Both Augustine and Ramanuja are concerned with attributing supreme agency to the Ultimate

while reserving some moral agency for humanity. To summarize, the key similarity which emerges from our comparative reading of Augustine and Ramanuja stems from their proposals of a theological anthropology involving "dependent agency," where human agency and freedom which is only possible through the grace of the Ultimate.

As this study follows Clooney's process of reading together from a confessional perspective, I must also offer some thoughts on the implications of this reading together of Ramanuja and Augustine from my perspective as a Christian theologian. The first thing which must be said is that the theological anthropologies of Augustine and Ramanuja, despite their differences, remain highly similar, perhaps shockingly similar to some Christian theologians who conceive of the Christian tradition as having a monopoly upon truth. For if Augustine is correct in his conception of humanity's relation to God, then Ramanuja also conceived of an accurate theological anthropology. Such a realization suggests the need to take a charitable attitude toward adherents of other religions, as we not only might learn from them, but also may find aspects of their worldview which parallel and inform our own.

Second, these similarities should lead theologians to (re)consider the usefulness of consulting the resources of other traditions whilst studying and conceiving of their own. My reading of Ramanuja and my comparison with Augustine has forced me to re-read and reconsider precisely what Augustine says in his

⁸⁵ The major caveat that Augustine adds is his distinction between pre- and post-lapsarian theological anthropologies. Here he envisions pre-fall humanity having been graced with the charity of God in such a way as they would have been able to accomplish the good works commanded to them; conversely, through the fall humanity lost this capacity for total obedience, and subsequently found their capacity for willing limited (See Burns, *Theological Anthropology*, 14).

writings, forcing me to understand better my own tradition as I sought to understand another tradition. Further, the way in which Ramanuja (or at least Thibaut, his translator) phrased and made his arguments sometimes made more immediate sense than Augustine's writing, making his (Ramanuja's) commentary a useful sourcebook for thinking about and constructing one's own theological anthropology.

Third, this study has underlined that there are indeed differences between Augustine and Ramanuja. We have looked at but a small sliver of the work and theology of each and found that they did neither advocates a monolithic "religious" principle. Following the implications of these differences and reading these theologians more fully may confirm that Augustine and Ramanuja ultimately believed very different things about God, the world, and humanity. By privileging the points of convergence between these writers, we have found useful and provocative materials. This, however, should not be taken to mean that there are not significant differences between the theologies of Ramanuja and Augustine, let alone their contemporary disciples.

Fourth, reading Ramanuja offers something of a logical and/or philosophical affirmation of "dependent agency" which may be useful for both Christian theological responses to arguments in the marketplace of philosophical ideas. Fifth, there are potential lessons from Ramanuja for thinking about human personhood and agency apart from a post-lapsarian anthropology. That is, while Augustine highlights the differences between pre- and post-fall humanity, Ramanuja is concerned with human beings as they are,

ignorant and misguided, but impossibly sinful. At the very least, perhaps certain Christian theologians could take something away from Ramanuja's rhetorical strategy in *Sri Bhashya*.⁸⁶ Sixth, this reading together again emphasizes the importance of careful and contextual interpretation of scripture and tradition (broadly defined as sources which are appealed to as useful and authoritative) within theological traditions.

Ultimately, this practice of reading together and the aforementioned realizations should lead Christian theologians to pursue greater familiarity with sources external to their home tradition, as well as a greater willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue with members of different theological traditions. This, I would add, may be applied both inter- and intra-religiously. Additionally, such realizations and actions will force Christian theologians to form more robust theologies, formed in the context of multiple voices and concerns and not narrowly focused on the concerns of a particular time, place, or people.

We must now ask what implications for thinking about the Ultimate may be gleaned from this study. As has been noted throughout this study, considering the Ramanuja's and Augustine's theological anthropologies, the "resources, limitations, and destiny of the human person," has necessarily interacted with conceptions of the Ultimate. For these two writers, the Judeo-Christian God and Narayana (Vishnu) have functioned as the basis for the consideration of the finite and human. For Ramanuja, it is because the Supreme Self is supreme and has created the cosmos that the theological anthropology of finite selves is

⁸⁶ Especially for those contemporary theologians for whom the "Fall" is understood in highly mythological terms or is even problematic.

understood as having limited and dependent agency. For Augustine, God revealed in Christ speaks to the love of a deity who remains powerful enough to have created and granted agency to all, but remains loving enough not to have deterministically removed the possibility of human freedom in all circumstances. In many respects, the Ultimate as related to theological anthropology is highly similar for Augustine and Ramanuja, paralleling their similar conceptions of dependent agency. After all, if human agency is going to be dependent upon someone or something, it is not surprising in a theological context to find the genesis for that agency with the Ultimate. To be sure, there are differences in Augustine and Ramanuja's conceptions of the Ultimate: different names, separate revelations and traditions, and distinct ways in which the Ultimate functionally limits itself in granting agency in certain situations to humanity. But there are also significant similarities: the function of the Ultimate as creator, the transcendence of the Ultimate which becomes immanent through the grace of freedom, the possibility of salvation through devotion, and the call to think about the Ultimate as totally powerful and sovereign over the entire cosmos. Thus we see that, paralleling their similar conceptions of theological anthropology, the conception of the Ultimate articulated in Ramanuja's *Sri Bhashya* and Augustine's *On the Grace of Christ* and *On Rebuke and Grace* contain notable similarities.

CONCLUSION

This study has undertaken a comparative reading of Ramanuja and Augustine using Francis Clooney's methodology of reading texts together. In an attempt to make this project a manageable size, it has focused on a specific aspect of these theologians' thought, their

theological anthropologies, and the manner in which these authors conceive of humanity's resources, limitations, and destiny in relation to the Ultimate. As one emphasis of this study involved considering the applicability of Clooney's methodological approach, this project began with a lengthy consideration of comparative theology and the process of reading together. Part of my engagement with Clooney's method involved taking seriously his thinking about the confessional disposition of those engaging in comparing the texts of different traditions and asking whether or not the process of "reading together" is a viable method for confessional Christians (my tradition) to employ when doing comparative work. I have found working from a confessional standpoint in this project useful, though also a cause for caution at times as I wanted to exercise the appropriate cautions in reading and interpreting Augustine. In other words, I wanted to be sure that I was properly allowing Augustine to "speak for himself" and not using his texts as proof texts for my own conception of theological anthropology. While not an explicit part of Clooney's methodology, it may be beneficial to offer a critically engaged reading of one's own tradition to ensure a fair reading of the materials being deployed.

Clooney's process of reading together was especially informative. I appreciated the need for engagement with primary source texts, as well as the opportunity to delve deeply into the non-home tradition. The practice of reading together forces a careful and contextualized reading of the sources being considered, yet does not demand a specialist's knowledge of both traditions prior to the comparative process. Clooney rightly notes the benefits for confessional theologians in using this method when he writes that, "a Christian theologian is a

better theologian if he or she is well informed about Jayanta, Kumarila, Ramanuja, and Arul Nandi (and their contemporary heirs) or equivalent figures from some other tradition.”⁸⁷ Clooney’s methodological approach enables, and indeed encourages, confessional theologians to broaden their horizons, engage sources from other religious traditions, and learn creatively from and incorporate the insights of other perspectives into their own theological projects. The process of reading together allows theologians to mature their learning about a non-home tradition in a way that encourages understanding and meaningful conversations. I thus find that Clooney’s call for comparative theology and practice of reading together are appropriate methods for comparing traditions and gleaning useful information for understanding and dialogue.

Moving from methodological conclusions to comparative conclusions, this study has offered numerous comparative insights into the theological anthropologies of Ramanuja and Augustine. Most significant is the emphasis on dependent agency found in the writings of both theologians, where the Ultimate functions as the source of all human agency and freedom. This parallel suggests, for example, that Christian theologians may find valuable resources for their own thought through consultation of Ramanuja’s reflections on theological anthropology. The same may be true for other conceptions as well, where the respective similarities and differences between Hindu and Christian theology may fruitfully tease out otherwise less obvious meanings and implications or offer alternative approaches to seemingly stale questions. For example, my understanding of “dependent agency” was

enhanced by Ramanuja’s emphasis on the empowering action of the Ultimate. This conception was at odds with my received tradition of Augustinian theological anthropology, leading me to re-read Augustine with fresh eyes and a new paradigm for interpreting his statements concerning human will and agency.⁸⁸ As noted above, this process of “reading together” can lead Christian theologians to pursue greater familiarity with sources external to their home tradition, as well as incite a greater willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue with members of different theological traditions.

At the end of this theological experiment, I conclude 1) that Clooney’s comparative process serves as a useful tool for future comparative work between Hindu and Christian sources and 2) that there are striking parallels between Ramanuja’s and Augustine’s theological anthropologies, especially conceptions of dependent agency, which provide a ready foundation for future Hindu-Christian dialogue and a valuable resource for certain Christian theological projects.

~

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jacob Prahlow is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in Historical Theology at Saint Louis University, where he focuses on the Apostolic Fathers and early Christianity. He holds a Master of Arts in religion from Wake Forest University, a Bachelor of Arts in theology from Valparaiso University, and an Associate of Arts from Southwestern Michigan College. Additionally, he studied theology at Trinity College - Oxford University, the Summit Oxford Study Centre, and Summit Ministries Semester program. Jacob also serves as Managing Editor for Conciliar Post, a website dedicated to informative and edifying dialogue across Christian traditions.

⁸⁷ Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 173.

⁸⁸ See especially Example Four above.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Augustine of Hippo. "On Grace," in *Theological Anthropology*, Translated and Edited by J. Patout Burns, 61-96,. *Sources of Early Christian Thought Series*, edited by William G. Rusch Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.
- . "On Rebuke and Grace." In *Theological Anthropology*, 96-108, Translated and Edited by J. Patout Burns. In *Sources of Early Christian Thought*, Series Editor William G. Rusch. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.
- Baird, Robert D. "The Academic Study of Religion," in *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*, Edited by Harold Coward. *Faith Meets Faith Series*. General Editor Paul F. Knitter. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.
- Brockington, John. *Hinduism and Christianity*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.
- Burns, J. Patout. Introduction to *Theological Anthropology*, Translated and Edited by J. Patout Burns. *Sources of Early Christian Thought*, Series Editor William G. Rusch. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.
- Clooney, Francis X. *Beyond Compare: St. Francis de Sales and Sri Vedanta Desika on Loving Surrender to God*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008.
- . *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries Between Religions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- . "Learning Our Way: Some Catholic Reflections on the Catholic-Hindu Encounter." In *Catholicism and Interreligious Dialogue*, edited by James J. Heft, 89-108. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- . *Theology after Vedanta: An Experience in Comparative Theology*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1993.
- Clooney, Francis X. and Hugh Nicholson. "Vedanta Desika's *Isvarapariccheda* ('Definition of the Lord') and the Hindu Argument about Ultimate Reality." In *Ultimate Realities: A Volume in the Comparative Religious Ideas Project*, Edited by Robert Cummings Neville, 95-123. Albany: SUNY, 2001.
- Coward, Harold. Introduction to *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*. Edited by Harold Coward. In *Faith Meets Faith Series*, General Editor Paul F. Knitter. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.
- . "The Experience of Scripture in Hinduism and Christianity." In *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*, 230-50. Edited by Harold Coward. In *Faith Meets Faith Series*, General Editor Paul F. Knitter. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.
- Ganeri, Martin. "Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Ramanuja." In *Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, 232-54, Edited by Matthew R. Dasti and Edwin E. Bryant. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Ghate, V.S. *The Vedanta: A Study of the Brahma Sutras with the Bhasyas of S'amkara, Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhva and Vallabha*, Second Edition. Edited by C.R. Devadhar. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1960.
- Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*. Edited by Harold Coward. *Faith Meets Faith Series*. General Editor Paul F. Knitter. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.
- Keene, J. Calvin. "Ramanuja, The Hindu Augustine." In *The Journal of Bible and Religion* 21, no. 1 (1953): 3-8.
- Kulandran, Sabapathy. *Grace: A Comparative Study of the Doctrine in Christianity and Hinduism*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1964.
- Livingstone, E. A. "Theological Anthropology." In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (2nd E), edited by E.A. Livingstone. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Online.
- Panikkar, Raimundo. Forward to *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*, Edited by Harold Coward. In *Faith Meets Faith Series*, General Editor Paul F. Knitter. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.
- Ram-Prasad, Chakravarthi. *Divine Self, Human Self: The Philosophy of Being in Two Gita Commentaries*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013.
- Ramanuja. *Sri Bhashya*. In *The Vedanta Sutras, Volume III*. Edited by George Thibaut. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1962.
- "Ramanuja." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online Academic Edition* (2014). Accessed May 1, 2014. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/490485/Ramanuja>.
- Sharma, Arvind. *Classical Hindu Thought: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Sheth, Noel. "Hindu Avatara and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison." In *Philosophy East and West* 51, no 1 (2002): 98-125.
- Taylor, Mark C. *After God*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Thatamanil, John J. Forward to *Dualities: A Theology of Difference*, Michelle Voss Roberts. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.
- Treloar, Richard. "Theological Anthropology: Introduction." *National Council of Churches in Australia* (2005).
- Voss Roberts, Michelle. *Dualities: A Theology of Difference*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

Occasionally, the Journal of Comparative Theology would like to include reflection pieces from scholars in the field of comparative theology, or related fields. The following is the first to be included.

Building Bridges: A Friendship Forged Through Interreligious Dialogue

by Howard Shapiro and Echol Nix, Jr.



TWO STRANGERS AND HOW WE MET

It is interesting to think about how and why things happen. Is Albert Einstein right that “coincidence is God’s way of remaining anonymous?” Is there a meaning behind encounters? Is there a logic to history and how do events give shape to experiences? What immediately follows are brief reflections, respectively, of what happened 15 years ago in Massachusetts and what has developed as a result of it.

I was on my way back from morning prayers at the Young Israel synagogue and had an unusual experience. About 50 feet from my house in Brookline, I felt a tap on my shoulder while

walking up the hill from the Summit Avenue train stop. A complete stranger was walking beside me and had observed my daily ritual of going back and forth from the synagogue. He asked if we could meet the following Sunday at Starbucks Coffee shop in Coolidge Corner. I initially wondered, “What does an African American, Christian minister from the south who is a Democrat have in common with a white, orthodox Jew from the West coast who is a conservative Republican?” The answer came soon. Although the details of that conversation have faded from my memory, we talked for over two hours on that day and we have been talking regularly ever since.

Howard, whom I call “Howie” is right about my reaching out to him. He routinely walked passed my residence window at Boston University’s Theology House and was rather conspicuous by wearing a full-length overcoat and winter accessories in late *Fall*. I am from Montgomery, Alabama, and he is from Los Angeles, California. Neither of us is fond of cold weather and we were both dressed up like Eskimos. C.S. Lewis wrote, “Friendship is born at that moment when one says to another: What! You too?” Like Howie, I cannot remember everything we talked about at Starbucks but our friendship has deepened since then and I appreciate his willingness to engage questions regarding religion and to share his thoughts and personal story of faith.

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

Beyond outward appearances and political parties we share an appreciation for Scripture. We both really enjoy what Peter Ochs of the University of Virginia calls “scriptural reasoning.”¹ For Ochs and others, “scriptural reasoning” is an interactive practice where people of different faith traditions discuss the history and meaning of their sacred texts. “Scriptural reasoning” does not have to rely on commentaries or other literature; rather, “communal reading” opens texts to others for conversation and “makes a fellowship that sees difference as rich and illuminating.”² This “fellowship” by participants is an innovative practice. Francis Clooney encourages such a practice and insists in his foundational text, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across*

Borders: “Texts are only a part of a religion but in my view they remain the single best resource, among many good resources, for knowing religious traditions deeply and subtly. They are legitimately the main object of comparative theological study.”³

When we began our conversations neither of us approached the topic of religion in a scientific way. We have always discussed the history and background of our respective faiths, but we did not begin, for instance, with Kant’s definition of religion as “the recognition of our duties as divine commands” or Schleiermacher’s “feeling (*das Gefühl*) of absolute dependence” or any other theoretician’s definition. We began by discussing religion in a personal way and by sharing our experience of faith. The common bond that continues to unite us is a love of God, commanded in Deuteronomy 6:5: “And you shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart and all your soul and all that you have.”

A Mishna (*Berachot* 9:5) states:

A person is obligated to bless upon the bad just as he blesses upon the good. ‘With all your heart’—with your two inclinations, with the inclination of good and the inclination of evil. ‘And in all your soul’—even if He takes your soul. ‘And with all that you have’—with all your money. Alternatively, ‘with all you have’—with every measure that is measured for you thank Him very much.⁴

Our love of God results from an intense interest and fervent desire to know God, no less than modern philosophers like Spinoza who thought “the intellectual love of God” (*amor dei*

¹ Peter Ochs, “Philosophic Warrants for Scriptural Reasoning,” *Modern Theology* 22:3 July 2006

² Peter Ochs and Homayra Ziad, “Grassroots Scriptural Reasoning on Campus,” *Journal of Interreligious Studies*, Issue 4, July 2010.

³ Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Borders* (Wiley Blackwell, 2010), p. 67.

⁴ For more commentary on the *Shema*, see Moshe Chaim Lussatto, *The Way of God and Ma’amar halkkarim: An Essay on Fundamentals* (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1997), Chapter 4.

intellectualis) is the highest virtue for humans. Our love of God gives way to a desire to better know God which influences our theologies and ethical practices. Further, a better knowledge of God has led to a better knowledge of each other, as we are created in the *imago Dei* (the image of God) and begs the question, "What is a human being?" Such existential questions can be correlated with theological answers, as was Paul Tillich's method, "as long as cultures raise such questions."⁵

Furthermore, our dialogue is not guided by a set of rules other than civil discourse and a genuine interest in learning. We respect each other's perspectives and explore differences of opinion in order to deepen our knowledge, clarify our questions, dispel misconceptions and, ultimately, pursue truth. For Clooney, "comparative learning should pertain to issues of truth and not detach itself from matters central to faith."⁶ Interreligious dialogue, then, should grow out of a dynamism that incites reflection, inquiry, and the pursuit of truth. John Cobb maintains that the process of "mutual transformation through dialogue" should "not be to convince others to change

their point of view but to modify one's own outlook based on learning from one's dialogue partner."⁷ When we dialogue, neither of us is trying to convert the other. Our purpose is not to be "right" but it's rather to share our unique religious perspective. Through these discussions, we learn more about our own religious traditions, the other's tradition, and ourselves. We both agree with John Dunne: "When one is no longer concerned about reaching agreement... but simply about attaining insight and understanding, then one can enter freely into other cultures, lives, and religions and come back to understand one's own in a new light."⁸ The bonds formed between friends of different faiths can illumine one's own journey and serve as a source for learning. There are many ways to break barriers, cross borders, and build bridges. For us, becoming friends was our way.

~

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Howard Shapiro is a school psychologist in Denver Colorado and Echol Nix, Jr., is an Assistant Professor of Religion at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Clooney, Francis X. *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Borders* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010).
- Dunne, John. *The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978).
- Gross, Rita. "The International Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter: Twenty Years of Dialogue," in *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, (2005), Volume 25.
- Lussatto, Moshe Chaim, *The Way of God and Ma'amar haIkkarim: An Essay on Fundamentals* (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1997).
- Neville, Robert C. *A Theology Primer* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991).
- Ochs, Peter, "Philosophical Warrants for Scriptural Reasoning," in *Modern Theology* (July 2006), Issue 22.
- Ochs, Peter and Homayra Ziad, "Grassroots Scriptural Reasoning on Campus," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* (July 2010), Issue 4.

⁵ Robert Neville, *A Theology Primer* (New York: SUNY Press, 1991), p. 20.

⁶ Francis Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), p. 15.

⁷ Rita Gross, "The International Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter: Twenty Years of Dialogue," in *Buddhist-Christian Studies* (Volume 25) 2005: pp. 3-7.

⁸ John Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), p. 53.