

## CURRENT THEOLOGY

### CATHOLIC THEOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION IN SOUTH ASIA: WIDENING THE CONTEXT FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The post-Vatican II Church has witnessed an increasing recognition of the fact that the religions of the world form an integral part of the context in which theology is to be done. Sensitivity to religions ranging from Indian Hinduism to Zen Buddhism to Native American tribal systems to indigenous African faiths is no longer something expected only of the more politic among missionaries, nor is knowledge of such religions the task only of the energetic apologist. We have become increasingly aware of the multiple ways in which the fundamental doctrines of our faith—pertaining to God, revelation and redemption, Christ, the Church, etc.—are challenged and enriched through comparison and contrast with what has happened, been said, and thought outside Christianity. Of course, our practical concern with ethical issues and liturgical reform is even more noticeably influenced by corresponding practices in other religions. Most of us are now well beyond the point of needing to be convinced that Christian theologians can profitably and usefully study other religions.

Yet, this is easier said than done. Even the most adventurous theologian quickly runs into the problem of the plethora of information available on other religions, the enormous body of primary and secondary literature flooding the market. The more proficient a theologian has become in the historical-critical study of some aspect of the Christian tradition, the more hesitant he or she is to retreat, in effect, to the "naive immediacy" of simply picking up some well-known Hindu text in translation or book of Muslim Sufi tales, in order to base systematic reflection upon it. Supposing one does want to "take other religions seriously," where does one turn and what exactly is one to do?

This collaborative essay seeks to facilitate the theological appropriation of the ideas and methods both of other religions and the modern study of them by discussing in context four recent important contributions to the study of South Asia (i.e., India and the surrounding countries) and by offering some suggestions on how they might be of interest and use to theologians. Aware that the modern study of religion is divided into disciplines and fields that rarely overlap, our goal has been to bring into the arena of Christian theological discourse, in a way that must

remain exemplary and not comprehensive, some of the most prominent research being done about Indian religion today, in a form accessible to those who are not specialists in South Asian studies and who are unlikely to have current familiarity with the journals, books, and seminars dealing with religion in that area.

Francis Clooney traces the development of Hindu devotional religion as it occurs in the confluence of a pan-Indian tradition with a local, vernacular tradition, as this is described in Friedhelm Hardy's *Viraha Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India*; Clooney suggests that attention to this historical phenomenon will deepen our understanding of how religions and their theologies (including our own) grow. Paul Griffiths comments on the tradition of Indian rational theology and proofs for the existence of God as set forth in John Vattanky's *Gaṅgēsa's Philosophy of God*, and thus highlights the existence and advantages of one alternate rational discourse in which God might be thought about. Charles Hallisey introduces us to Steven Collins' *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism*, in order to examine the way in which Theravāda Buddhism developed its religious and theological structure through a considered rejection of the "anthropocentric turn"; he thereby challenges us to consider the possibility that even an appeal to the notion of the "human" may not be a sufficiently universal basis for a theology which wants to reach beyond certain cultural confines. Finally, James Laine calls to our attention a volume of essays entitled *Purity and Auspiciousness in Indian Society*, in which eight scholars, from various perspectives and using different subject matters, retrieve the notion of the "auspicious" in Indian religious theory and practice and thereby re-emphasize the importance of the concrete particularity of living Indian religiosity; Laine asks whether attention to this material might not clarify our task in reuniting theology and popular piety in our "postmodern" age.

We have limited ourselves to recent developments in the study of South Asia, in part because we could thus identify one manageable section of the much larger corpus of materials available regarding religions, and in part because South Asia (India and the surrounding countries) is the area of specialization of the four of us who collaborate on this essay. Even those who study world religions are necessarily specialized. Needless to say, comparable bibliographical essays could be done regarding other religions and areas of the world.

It is our hope that our comments will stimulate our readers to find and read these four important books, to explore their bibliographies, and follow up on particular points relevant to particular areas of current research. If we succeed in making the study of other religions more easily

accessible—and more inviting, more interesting—to the theological community, our main objective will have been met.

FRIEDHELM HARDY'S *VIRAHA BHAKTI: THE EARLY HISTORY OF KRṢṢNA DEVOTION IN SOUTH INDIA*

When Christian theologians have thought about other religions, they have given their work many different names, depending on their presuppositions in undertaking it: it has been the "the treatise against the pagans" or the "dialogue with all people of good faith," "the theology of religions" or "comparative theology," the treatise "on natural religion" or "Christ and the nations," etc. Whatever the name of the work, however, its form has been approximately the same: reflection on the inner logic of the Christian faith, usually with the juxtaposition of selected pieces of information about some other religion or religions. Theologians have proceeded for the most part as if the complexity of this area of theology lies in achieving a correct understanding of the Christian data involved, while the "other side" of the comparison is more or less a simple and unproblematic affair. Even today, only modest use is made of the vast amounts of research available on those other religions or the disciplines (ranging from the "history of religions" to "folklore studies" to "cultural anthropology") fashioned wholly or in part for the purpose of handling that material. On the whole, the result has been a stimulating dialogue among Christian theologians about the other religions, with the latter remaining somewhat inert, represented by a few bare facts or impressions taken as unproblematically true. Unfortunately, this dialogue pertains only minimally to what religions like Hinduism and Buddhism are in themselves, and so we are deprived of the real resources they offer us for understanding God and ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

For the theologian who is not a specialist in another tradition but who wants to go about the task of comparison differently, there are available today many fine and accessible works on other religions. This essay focuses on one such work, Friedhelm Hardy's *Viraha Bhakti*,<sup>2</sup> which by its content and its methods prompts important insights and questions relevant to Christian theology.

<sup>1</sup> The characterization I thus make needs, of course, to be balanced by recognition of works which try to go beyond generalities. One thinks immediately of the dialogue of Christians and Buddhists in Japan and the U.S., and the recent *Christianity and the World Religions* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1986) in which Hans Küng reflects on presentations about Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam made by three Christian specialists in those religions. What I have in mind in the following pages, however, asks that the theologian himself or herself "get involved" in the material of another religion more directly than Küng seems to.

<sup>2</sup> New York: Oxford University, 1983.

The book is an enormous volume (over 700 pages) in which the author compiles and organizes the information about devotional religion found in several main traditions of Hindu thought. In particular, he traces the development of one form of devotion, "emotional attachment to an absented God" (*viraha-bhakti*) in the Tamil and Sanskrit language traditions, especially in South India and in the first millennium C.E. What is new here is not the attention to devotional religion but the breadth of the corpus of sources Hardy draws on. A brief consideration of the background against which the book is set is necessary to appreciate what he has done.

The dominant, most widely influential texts of ancient India were written in the Sanskrit language and took shape in a culture defined most prominently by values of order, the functional hierarchization of society, the notion of the divine as transcendent and ultimately transpersonal—values such as are normally traced to the Indo-European groups who came down into India from the northwest in the second millennium B.C.E. Thus, the four *Vedas*, the *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the epic works *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* are all Sanskrit and "northern" texts (notwithstanding the presence of indigenous elements). These texts remained prominent in Hinduism's later self-consciousness, functioning as canonical standards to which diverse local and vernacular groups could appeal as the basis for their orthodoxy.

They are also the texts which, for various reasons, came first to the attention of Europeans and which in the past several centuries have served to define what "Hinduism" means in the West. Even today most popular introductions to Hinduism focus entirely on these texts; it is these Sanskrit sources which one finds in the religion sections of the bookstore. Many theologians offering interpretations of Hinduism do not look any further for materials on which to base their judgments about Hinduism. Unfortunately, the basis for judgment is thus inadequate; it is something like trying to evaluate Roman Catholicism as a whole without reading anything written after St. Augustine.

There is an enormous array of local, vernacular traditions in India, traditions with contents and ways of thinking different from those of the Sanskrit, often very ancient, and which have interacted in various ways with the "high" Sanskrit culture and religion. There were always, and are today, local religious movements only partially understood and accounted for in the pan-Indian and Sanskrit texts; one misses some of the most interesting aspects of Hinduism by overlooking these other sources.

Chief among these vernacular literatures, by virtue of the age, quantity, and quality of the literature in that language (and by virtue of the advances in the modern scholarly study of it), is the Tamil tradition of

South India. Tamil is a non-Indo-European language, the oldest of the Dravidian family of languages which flourish today in South India (Tamil itself is spoken by perhaps 50 million people). Its first extant works are secular love and war poetry dating back 2000 years, and a corpus of religious literature which took shape in the first centuries C.E. Probably from the earliest times, and certainly by the fourth or fifth century, this Tamil literature, characterized by immediacy, emotion, and sophisticated explorations of natural and psychological phenomena, was engaged in significant encounter with the more speculative and distanced Brahmanical and Sanskritic traditions "moving in" from the north. In those centuries and thereafter religious movements and the theological systems emerged in South India which cannot be understood without attention to both Sanskrit and the Tamil sources and religious values.

Hardy's work is a well-documented examination of the confluence of these two traditions, a history of a certain religious idea that cannot be described solely in terms of either. Hardy explores the notion of devotion and asks how the emotional and even ecstatic devotion characteristic of medieval India came to be. His starting point, assumed by most scholars, is that the Sanskrit tradition does not provide the source for this kind of devotion. To be sure, commitment to a single God can be found in early texts like the *Bhagavad Gītā*, but Hardy shows how the transition from this "intellectual commitment" to later texts which stress deep-felt emotions, tears, sighs, longings of the heart for the absent lover, etc. can be best explained through attention to another source, i.e. the Tamil tradition. He carefully traces the course of emotional devotion from basically Tamil roots—set forth in basic motifs of Tamil secular and religious poetry—to its increasingly dominant position in later Sanskrit religious literature and piety, climaxing by around 1000 C.E. Hardy is not the first to attend to the Tamil sources,<sup>3</sup> but his thorough examination of the main materials is a tremendous contribution to our overview of the interconnections of the Tamil and Sanskrit; among Indologists, it should convince even the most skeptical reader of the need to attend to non-Sanskrit data.

<sup>3</sup> See A. K. Ramanujan's *The Interior Landscape* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1967) and *Poems of Love and War* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1985) for translations from the oldest Tamil poetry, and his *Hymns for the Drowning* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1981) for selections from the major work of Nammālvār, the greatest of the Tamil saints according to the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. Kamil Zvelebil's *The Smile of Murugan* (Leiden: Brill, 1973) remains the standard reference for Tamil literature, while Fred Clothey's *The Many Faces of Murukan* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973) was one of the first full-length studies of a divinity of the Tamil tradition. For fuller listings of recent scholarship, see Hardy's bibliography and that given by Vasudha Narayanan in the article referred to in n. 5 below.

Hardy's analysis is also highly interesting for nonspecialists, those from other fields wishing to understand the themes and genres involved in an evolving, God-oriented religion. Many sections of the book should be provocative even for a reader who does not go through the whole or who is not interested in Hardy's overall thesis. We learn a great deal about what it meant for an ancient Hindu (in South India in the first millennium, but it rings true today too) to love unrestrictedly a single God, how this love was experienced by the devotee, how such Hindus went about using every kind of literary form to express this love, especially materials which talk about the love of male and female. Hardy's work likewise tells us much about how devotion and theology interact in the long and vital tradition of worship, praise, and reflection which constitutes South India's Vaiṣṇava community. The book aids the theologian interested in what actually goes on in another religion and in its religious evolution in particular; one learns so much more here than if only the *Gītā*, for instance, had been read.

The book is also an interesting and provocative way to look anew at Christianity. Its focus is not specifically theological (it is something of a descriptive textual study woven together with a "history of religions" theme), but its treatment of a decidedly religious and communitarian element of Hinduism gives one an excellent feel for a "total religion," the development of a faith community with roots in ritual and philosophy, local mythology and universalizing conceptualization, village and urban societies. When it tells us something about how people who are not Christian have gone about devoting themselves to their God, how they have used the assorted imageries of nature and the body and the senses to express this devotion, and how philosophical and theological systems too are revised and rethought for devotional purposes, one is reminded frequently of a community like Roman Catholicism in its shape, richness, and complexity, even if not in its specific doctrines.<sup>4</sup>

It is, of course, also a reminder that Christianity itself has always been more than what found its way into the selected "great" texts of the Latin and Greek traditions. Christianity too is a constant merging of traditions, "great" and "little," first within the Near East and Palestine, and then in conjunction with the many wider and more local traditions of the Roman Empire, Europe and Asia, and later the Americas. Needless to say, the Christian appreciation of non-European "vernaculars" has increased greatly in the past few decades.

Enough has been said, I hope, to give an idea of the scope of the book. I wish now to turn to a more methodological concern which also has

<sup>4</sup> There are, in fact, conceptual, even dogmatic, parallels, although, as we shall see, these do not much interest Hardy in this work.

theological implications: the way Hardy establishes the frame of discussion and the questions this raises. Given the enormous body of Tamil and Sanskrit material related to the issue of emotional devotionism, Hardy necessarily has had to make choices, and even the nonspecialist should be aware of their effect.

Hardy decides to trace devotion in his texts by looking for the phenomenon of emotional devotion to the god Kṛṣṇa. He follows it from the earliest Tamil considerations, contrasting it with the more austere intellectual devotionism of Sanskrit texts such as the *Bhagavad Gītā*, until finally he can show how it reached normative expression in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (1000 C.E.), where the emotional aspect of Kṛṣṇa devotion comes to pre-eminence for the pan-Indian tradition.

In tracing this path, Hardy makes ancillary decisions which affect his treatment of the material. In a recent review article<sup>5</sup> the Hindu scholar Vasudha Narayanan notes three of the most important choices Hardy has made. First, as noted already, he distinguishes "intellectual devotion" from "emotional devotion," in a way that at least gives the impression that these are separate phenomena which only at a fairly late date come together in Indian religion. Second, his correct identification of the distressful experience of separation from God as characteristic of emotional devotion apparently also implies for him the further belief that there must be separation from God, both in this life or the next, due to the nature of God and humans. Third, he studies Kṛṣṇa in isolation from the figures with whom this deity is usually connected (even in much of the material Hardy considers), such as Rāma and the supreme, transcendent god Viṣṇu.

It is not easy to communicate the effect of the choices thus made, but it is akin to tracing the history of bridal mysticism, as a central kind of Christian piety, from some local and vernacular origin to a normative expression in Latin poetry of the High Middle Ages, and then extrapolating on that basis to what Christians as a group believed in that period. The specific investigation itself is not problematic, and as such would provide us with a real sense of how medieval Christian piety developed. But it is also true that if one were to overgeneralize on the basis of this data, one might indeed end up with a distorted view of its context. There is certainly a leap to be made from this kind of mystical material to the general medieval Christian view of redemption by Christ or the general image of Christ in the Middle Ages.

Vasudha Narayanan criticizes Hardy's work on the three points she noted. Hardy's intellectual-emotional distinction, says Narayanan, is a

<sup>5</sup> "Hindu Devotional Literature: The Tamil Connection," *Religious Studies Review* 11 (1985) 12-20.

distortion even in theory (religion does not easily separate these), and in practice it does an injustice to the religious poets/thinkers considered, devotees whose works are not so conveniently marked off as intellectual or emotional. Thus, she points out, only 20% of the great *Tiruvāymoli* of Nammālvār, a Tamil saint of the eighth century, can serve as relevant data for Hardy's study; most of this long poem and its careful arrangement of all kinds of materials—including emotional devotion—have to be left aside in order to focus on the emotional aspect. What, then, are we learning about emotional devotion in Nammālvār's works, if we put aside the fact that he does not "experience" it as a separable reality? Or, if one of the points of Nammālvār's whole project is to integrate the emotional with the other aspects of religion, to what extent does it make sense to extract this single theme from its context?

Regarding Hardy's notion that emotional devotion relies on a final and permanent separation or distance from God, Narayanan notes that this ignores the claims made within the tradition itself that God is faithful, does return, does give salvation, does grant final union; separation is not a permanent state for the devout Vaiṣṇava. The tradition in its theological expression chooses in effect to subordinate the tensions of emotional longing to a stronger faith affirmation that salvation does take place, that longing ends. Even in the angst of separation, the devotee realizes, notionally at least, that the separation will not last.

Finally, when Hardy divides Kṛṣṇa devotion off from the complex phenomenon of South Indian Vaiṣṇava devotion, this separation, even if temporary, sidesteps the belief within the worshipping Vaiṣṇava community that Kṛṣṇa is no one but Viṣṇu, who is manifest in many other forms as well. For that community, the Kṛṣṇa stories make sense only in the context of Viṣṇu's other acts and larger mystery.

To Narayanan's comments I might add that Hardy (and he is not alone in this) gives the impression that emotional devotion developed nicely and as "real religion," only to be smothered later in a Sanskritizing and intellectualizing framework—which latter can also be put to one side when we seek the "real" meaning of Tamil devotion in the relevant texts.<sup>6</sup> It seems that in Hardy's view the commentatorial tradition reworked the Tamil texts according to the Sanskrit intellectual framework to remove (in Hardy's words) "what its anti-emotional premises could not tolerate" (480), progressively moving away "from the actual poetic content [and losing] themselves in esoteric speculations and scholastic subtleties" (558). Narayanan's own book on early Vaiṣṇavism and her book with

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., my forthcoming article in *Numen*, "Divine Self-Consciousness and Its Commentatorial Interpretation in Medieval South India."



John Carman (both forthcoming)<sup>7</sup> correctly stress the valid and healthy continuity of the Tamil and the Sanskrit traditions in the Śrīvaiṣṇava community, showing how the suggestion that later thinkers are trying to correct and purify the early religion really distorts the picture—at least as these Hindus see it.

To point out this kind of distortion—which is inevitable, to some extent—is not to denigrate the work; it is rather to emphasize that when we as theologians pick up this or any book about another religion, we must be consciously, reflectively, theologically engaged in sorting out the values implicit in the author's presentation itself. Moreover, we ourselves will be questioned as to our attitudes on religion, the nature of devotion, the role of the intellect in religion, etc. I wish now to conclude by spelling out a few examples of issues which arise from Hardy's book.

First, this new attention to the vernacular traditions of India and their interaction with the Sanskrit requires of theologians a more sophisticated treatment of the complexes of religious tradition grouped conveniently but inaccurately under names such as "Hinduism," and more cautious judgments about them. Narayanan and Carman, at the beginning of their forthcoming *The Tamil Veda*, suggest that

the complexities of the Hellenistic and the Hebraic heritages seen in western thought are paralleled in the twofold inheritance of the Śrīvaiṣṇava culture. Like Athens and Jerusalem, the Sanskrit and Tamil literatures perpetuate two distinct ways of perceiving the universe and a human being's place in it. The Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition is the product of these two ways of thinking.<sup>8</sup>

To understand Hinduism, we have to apply to it the developed theological sensitivities we bring to our understanding of Christianity. To articulate the theological relationship of India's religions and Christianity by presuming a simplistic, ahistorical Hinduism is to construct a Hindu-Christian relationship that is really an abstraction, dependent on a "Hinduism" that does not in fact exist. No religion is reducible to a single idea or single classical expression or single modern interpretation of it. The decision of a theologian to say something about world religions on a more than a priori basis will necessarily involve interpretations of, and judgments about, sources similar to those made when some text or doctrine or period of Christian thought is being studied. What is the incentive for bothering with this added complexity? Simply a better,

<sup>7</sup> Her book is entitled *Bhakti and Prapatti in the Śrīvaiṣṇava Tradition* and will appear soon in the *Studies in World Religions Series* of the Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions. Her book coauthored with John Carman is tentatively titled *The Tamil Veda: Piḷḷān's Interpretation of the Tiruvaymōḷi*.

<sup>8</sup> Manuscript, chap. 1, p. 1.

more fruitful theology of religions, a more solid grounding of Christian self-identity in its real context.

Some of the distinctions used by Hardy merit consideration and criticism when we are thinking about Christianity itself. The sophisticated and nuanced meeting of the "great" and "little" traditions (the universal and the local), the interaction of emotional and intellectual elements of faith (which are justly distinguished even if one refuses to separate them), and appreciation of the role of male and female psychologies in the articulation of religious experience—all these are topics pertinent for our understanding of the Church today, and attention to how they have been dealt with in another culture can only be helpful.

If we take up where Hardy leaves off and study how the South Indian commentators rethink Tamil ideas with Sanskrit concepts and thereby change *both* Sanskrit and Tamil ideas, we see an even more remarkable reflection of ourselves; for then the theologian is confronted with his or her Hindu counterpart, the Hindu theologian who has struggled with matters of mind and heart, the local and universal poles of revelation and religious experience and community, the meanings of the absences and presences of God in the world, etc. We learn, surprisingly at first, that some of our "modern" crises in the Church parallel quite nicely South Indian crises in the 12th or 13th centuries. The step from a Christian theological treatment of Hindu religiosity to a Christian theological encounter with Hindu theology is surely a very significant step awaiting us.

Finally, the discussion between Hardy and Narayanan highlights the problem of insider and outsider studies of various religions and their basic ideas; this is so even if these two scholars agree on many issues and do not by any means represent mere "types." Whatever the merits of Hardy's analysis, it is at odds on significant points with what Narayanan identifies as the self-understanding of her Hindu community in South India. While Narayanan herself, of course, does not claim to represent that community in any authorized fashion, her work nevertheless does indicate a new awareness among Hindus of their right and duty to explain their religion on their own terms. The best-informed non-Indian and non-Hindu must take into account the self-understanding of living Hindu believers; the timeworn paradigm of the "dead" religions of the Ancient Near East, Greece, and Egypt (whose believers cannot be asked to check over our manuscripts!) is not adequate to the modern study of religions. As W. C. Smith has pointed out many times, descriptions of other people's religions must try at least to make sense to those people themselves.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See his *Toward a World Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) and his address to the Catholic Theological Society of America, *Proceedings* 39 (1984) 52-68. We need not

Hardy's work, of course, is only one of the better of the many books which lead into these larger and smaller issues. The books treated in the other sections of this essay exemplify many of the same points, as do other resources available today. The main point I wish to make, however, is that a book like Hardy's makes it quite possible and attractive and, I hope, almost irresistible for Christian theologians to gain a new, deeper understanding of an important aspect of Indian religion and so to start changing the way we theologize about non-Christians and ourselves—and thereby to start learning something about what theology itself means in today's richly religious world.

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JOHN VATTANKY'S GAṄGEŚA'S PHILOSOPHY OF GOD

Augustine described theology as "speaking of God" (*sermo de Deo*). Christians have done a good deal of this in the last two millennia. They have done it using words of praise, of devotion, of confession, and of agonized doubt; they have used theological language to justify oppressive political systems and to call those same political systems into question, to demand peace and to justify war. They have also developed a systematic rational discourse with which to explain what God is like and to demonstrate to Christianity's despisers, cultured and otherwise, that he exists and what his attributes are. It is speaking of God in this last sense which will be my concern here, that speaking of God which is concerned to describe a maximally great being, a being with the largest possible set of great-making properties,<sup>10</sup> each maximally developed within the limits of logical possibility, and to provide probative arguments for that being's existence.

Christian theologians have, for the most part, carried on this difficult and complex intellectual enterprise with conceptual tools drawn from the Hellenistic philosophical traditions. Even when they have self-consciously rejected these tools (as they often have in the last half century), the conceptual rules of the game have still usually been set by the heritage of the Hellenistic world, modified, of course, by the Semitic origins of the tradition. The ideas of substance and accident, necessity and possibility, Incarnation and Trinity—these are inescapable parts of the Christian theological tradition: one cannot effectively speak of God within that tradition without taking account of them. And this is good:

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draw the extreme conclusion that only insiders can understand their religion, or that in cases of conflicting interpretations the insiders' view must be the right one.

<sup>10</sup> I learned this language from Tom Morris at the University of Notre Dame and find it exceedingly useful for thinking about what the Naiyāyikas were engaged in, as well as for discussing the intellectual enterprise of Christian theology.

the historical weight of a 2000-year sustained attempt by a large intellectual community to speak of God in and through these categories should not be taken lightly. But perhaps this is not the only way to carry forward the theological enterprise; perhaps other categories and other methods can be used to construct a discourse which is significantly analogous to that described in the preceding paragraph. Certainly, Christian theologians have not been slow to innovate and to try new conceptual categories, but they have usually done this by trying to create a discourse *de novo* or by tinkering with the one they already have. There are other sources from which new possibilities for speaking of God can be learned, and it is the purpose of this short piece to suggest one, and to open some avenues for Christian theologians interested in following it.

My suggestion is that Christian theologians will benefit from looking in a close and critical way (but with intellectual humility and a genuine willingness to learn) at discourses every bit as long-lived, sophisticated, and productive of texts as their Christian counterparts, discourses which appear to be aimed toward at least some of the same goals and which developed historically almost completely outside the Christian sphere of influence. Such discourses provide fascinating control cases for the Christian theologian; they might provide him or her with a concrete example of an enterprise similar to his or her own—delineating, describing, and arguing for the existence of a maximally great being—carried on through categories quite different from the familiar ones. And this in turn offers data useful both for a fresh consideration of ancient and somewhat hoary theological questions from within the Christian tradition, and for some new thoughts about the necessity of holding on to apparently secure and unquestionable elements of Christian metaphysics. There are complex and sophisticated intellectual traditions devoted to theologizing (in the sense suggested) in a cultural setting quite uninfluenced by Christianity, traditions whose list of great-making properties—properties which a maximally great being must have in order to be maximally great—includes rather few of those held dear by the Christian tradition and many which are not valued by that tradition. This suggests that there are genuine and pressing questions for the Christian theologian about the supposed universality of his or her categories. There are also theological traditions whose list of such properties, although equally uninfluenced by Christianity (or, it should be added, Judaism or Islam), is strikingly similar to that developed by Christian intellectuals. This provides ammunition for those who would wish to argue for the necessity of some set of great-making properties closely analogous to that developed by the Christian tradition being predicated of any maximally great being. The Christian theologian should therefore find the study of theology as

done in non-Christian cultures of compelling interest.

There is, inevitably, a caveat: if the discourse from which the Christian theologian is trying to learn is really as complex and many-faceted as that of his or her own tradition, the amount of intellectual energy required for even a preliminary understanding of it is likely to be enormous. But difficulty is no excuse for not making a beginning; and what is impossible for an individual may turn out to be possible for a community.

The non-Christian theological discourse of which I wish to say something here is an Indian phenomenon, a discourse whose lifeblood is Sanskrit rather than Greek or Latin, one concerned not with *theos* but with *īśvara*; but it is one which meets most if not all of the requirements suggested above. The Sanskrit term *īśvara* is derived from a verbal root whose semantic range includes meanings such as "to own," "to possess," "to be powerful." *īśvara* is therefore the owner, the lord, the powerful one, that being to which all great-making properties naturally belong. Indian (Sanskritic) discourse devoted to discussion of the nature and attributes of *īśvara* is immense and has a 3000-year history. It was carried on by many schools, schools which often held mutually exclusive positions and which, although they shared much in the way of vocabulary and concepts, often had very different intellectual goals and interests. To attempt to provide pointers to an understanding of all this literature is neither desirable nor possible; to try it would be like offering a survey to a contemporary Hindu of all that Christian theologians have said and are saying about God. Instead, I shall say something about one small subset of this vast discourse: that which those involved in it usually called *īśvaravāda*, the conceptual analysis through debate (*vāda*) of the idea of God (*īśvara*).<sup>11</sup> Even here I shall limit my remarks to the long series of debates on the topic of *īśvara* that went on between Buddhists (who vehemently opposed both the logical possibility of such a being's existence and its soteriological desirability) and adherents of the Nyāya school<sup>12</sup> (who equally vehemently affirmed both), a series of debates that flourished in India (and in Sanskrit) from the early part of the Christian era to the beginning of the New Nyāya school with the work of Gaṅgeśa in the 14th century C.E.<sup>13</sup> These limitations are precisely those observed

<sup>11</sup> *īśvaravāda* would in fact be a perfectly reasonable translation of Augustine's *sermo de Deo* or even of "theology": *logia* about *theos*.

<sup>12</sup> For whom the Sanskrit name is Naiyāyikas, a term that I shall, for the sake of convenience, use in what follows.

<sup>13</sup> All dates, both here and in what follows, are little more than guesses. It is not possible to date Indian texts with accuracy any time before the second millennium C.E., and often not then. A recent survey of the early Nyāya literature may be found in Karl Potter, *Indian Metaphysics and Epistemology: The Tradition of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika up to Gaṅgeśa* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1977). Some suggestions about dates are on pages 3-12.

by John Vattanky, S.J., in his recent study of Gaṅgeśa's contribution to this debate.<sup>14</sup> Since my main purpose here is to make Vattanky's work and some of its implications known to Christian (and especially Catholic) theologians, it is appropriate to follow them here also.<sup>15</sup>

Vattanky's work is the most significant English-language resource available to date for the study of the Nyāya position on God's nature and attributes, and, more especially, for the analysis of the standard Naiyāyika arguments for God's existence. It is not, of course, without predecessors, but much of the earlier work is not in English and is available only in scholarly journals which are not likely to form part of the Christian theologian's regular intellectual diet.<sup>16</sup> In what follows I shall

<sup>14</sup> John Vattanky, S.J., *Gaṅgeśa's Philosophy of God: Analysis, Text, Translation and Interpretation of Īśvaravāda Section of Gaṅgeśa's Tattvacintāmani with a Study on the Development of Nyāya Theism* (Adyar Library Series 115; Madras: Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted, though, just how severe these limitations are. Nothing will be said here about the devotional theistic literature of Indian origin, or about the enormously complex and subtle systematic theologizing done by adherents of schools other than the Nyāya in India. It may, perhaps, be worth mentioning the contributions of John Carman (*The Theology of Rāmānuja: An Essay in Interreligious Understanding* [New Haven: Yale University, 1974]) and Julius Lipner (*The Face of Truth: A Study of Meaning and Metaphysics in the Vedāntic Theology of Rāmānuja* [Albany: State University of New York, 1986]) to the study of Viśiṣṭādvaita theologizing, since both of these works are aimed at Christian theologians (though in different ways) and both have excellent bibliographies of their own. The reader who turns from Vattanky's work to theirs will immediately note the difference in intellectual and aesthetic tone, and will thus get a sense of the enormous variety of the theological work produced in India. But my focus here, following Vattanky, is exclusively upon the Naiyāyika *īśvaravāda*.

<sup>16</sup> Among the more important works in this field preceding Vattanky's are the following: Hermann Jacobi's *Die Entwicklung der Gottesidee bei den Indern und deren Beweise für das Dasein Gottes* (Bonn: Kurt Schroeder, 1923) was pioneering and is still worth reading, though now superseded in many of its historical conclusions. Gopikamohan Bhattacharya's *Studies in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Theism* (Calcutta Sanskrit College Research Series 14; Calcutta: Sanskrit College, 1961) is a standard monograph by an Indian scholar showing wide and deep acquaintance with the original source-material. So also (though with a different slant) is Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya's *Indian Atheism* (Calcutta: Manisha, 1969). Of great importance (though sadly little used by scholars whose first language is English) is Gerhard Oberhammer's "Zum Problem des Gottesbeweises in der indischen Philosophie" (*Numen* 12 [1965] 1-34). This surveys the Nyāya-Buddhist debate from Gotama to Udayana and contains an especially interesting discussion of Dharmakīrti's arguments in the Pramāṇavārttika. Oberhammer was Vattanky's Ph.D. advisor at Vienna, and one of the great strengths of Vattanky's work is his thorough knowledge and creative use of German scholarship in this field. George Chemparathy, another Indian scholar with deep roots in the German scholarly tradition, has also produced a useful series of studies of *īśvaravāda*, including the following: "The Testimony of the Yuktidīpikā concerning the Īśvara Doctrine of the Pāsupātas and Vaiśeṣikas," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens* 9 (1965) 119-46; "The Doctrine of *īśvara* Exposed in the Nyāyakandali," *Journal of the*

give a taste of the rich theological fare to be found in Vattanky's book, and in so doing hope to provide some vindication of the suggestion that Christians speaking of God may have something to learn from Naiyāyikas speaking of God.

Vattanky's book is divided into three main parts: in the first (3–150) he gives an accurate and detailed historical outline of the progression of Nyāya thought on the question of *īśvara* up to the time of Gaṅgeśa, with much reference to the antitheistic arguments offered by their Buddhist opponents. In the second (169–246) he gives both the Sanskrit text and an English translation of Gaṅgeśa's own major contribution to the issue.<sup>17</sup>

*Ganganatha Jha Research Institute* 24 (1968) 25–38; "Two Early Buddhist Refutations of the Existence of *īśvara* as the Creator of the Universe," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens* 12–13 (1968–69) 85–100; "The Little-Known Fragments from Early Vaiśeṣika Literature on the Omniscience of *īśvara*," *Adyar Library Bulletin*, 33 (1969) 117–34; "The *īśvara* Doctrine of the Vaiśeṣika Commentator Candrānanda," *Akhila Bhāratiya Sanskrit Parishad* 1/2 (1970) 47–52; "The Number of Qualities in *īśvara*," *Journal of the Ganganatha Jha Research Institute* 27 (1971) 11–16; *An Indian Rational Theology: An Introduction to Udayana's Nyāyakusumāñjali* (Publications of the De Nobili Research Library 1; Vienna: De Nobili Research Library, 1972). Vattanky has himself published a series of articles leading up to the publication of *Gaṅgeśa's Doctrine of God*. In chronological order they are: "Aspects of Early Nyāya Theism," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 6 (1978) 393–404; "Śaśadhara's *īśvaravāda*: An Important Source of Gaṅgeśa's *īśvaravāda*," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 4 (1979) 257–66; "The Inference of Gaṅgeśa to Establish the Existence of God," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 10 (1982) 37–50. More specifically on the Buddhist side of the debate we have Helmuth von Glasenapp's works, the more important of which are "Buddhismus und Gottesidee," *Scientia* 67 (1941) 77–83, and *Buddhismus und Gottesidee: Die buddhistischen Lehren von den überweltlichen Wesen und Mächten und ihre religionsgeschichtlichen Parallelen* (Abhandlungen der geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz 8, 1954). This latter was translated into English by Irmgard Schloegl as *Buddhism: A Non-Theistic Religion* (New York: Braziller, 1966). For contemporary Theravāda Buddhist perspectives on the issue we have Nyanaponika Thera's compilation *Buddhism and the God-Idea* (Wheel Publication 47; 2nd ed.; Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1970), and Gunapala Dharmasiri's *A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Concept of God* (Colombo: Lake House, 1974). Roger Jackson has recently published a thorough and perceptive study of Dharmakīrti's antitheistic arguments: "Dharmakīrti's Refutation of Theism," *Philosophy East and West* 36 (1986) 315–48.

<sup>17</sup> Gaṅgeśa's contribution is found in a short section entitled *īśvarānumāna* ("Inferential Reasoning about God") of a much longer work, his magnum opus, called *Tattvacintāmaṇi* ("The Jewel of Thought about Reality"). This larger work is an encyclopedic treatment of all the major philosophical questions considered important by Naiyāyikas. Although various bits and pieces of it have been translated and studied by Western scholars in a variety of European languages, there is as yet no complete translation of the whole thing. This is sad because Gaṅgeśa's work is considered by contemporary Naiyāyikas to be the single most important text in the entire Navya-nyāya ("New Nyāya") tradition. Vattanky's study contains, as he said (p. x), the longest section of the *Tattvacintāmaṇi* to be translated into English and given detailed study.

And in the third (249–411) he gives a detailed and perspicuous commentary of his own on Gaṅgeśa's text. His book is thus essentially historical and is intended primarily for professional historians of Indian thought and (to a lesser extent) for Western philosophers. Although he is himself a member of the Society of Jesus, Vattanky nowhere makes any attempt to enter into systematic theological dialogue with Gaṅgeśa. This is perfectly appropriate given his stated aims and goals; but it is also the case that the material he presents provides a very rich resource for such dialogue. It is to be hoped that other theologians, not trained in the intricacies of Nyāya thought, will read it and use it as theologians should; but it is also to be hoped that Vattanky will himself enter into this purely theological arena in subsequent works. His historical and expository aims also make his work difficult for nonspecialists. The Naiyāyika discourse is extremely technical—especially those parts of it concerned with purely logical matters—and the uninitiated reader will have to make a significant intellectual effort in order to follow the twists and turns of the argument. But the difficulties are not, perhaps, greater than those attendant upon understanding a medieval Latin theological text.

The systematic thinkers of the Nyāya tradition were all theistic. The surface of their discourse suggests that they were so for purely logical reasons, that they were forced to postulate the existence of *īśvara* as a necessary *explanans* for the *explanandum* of the perceived order in the cosmos.<sup>18</sup> The same appears true for their chief intellectual opponents in India, those Buddhists whose “principled atheism”<sup>19</sup> was for a thousand years one of the major spurs to increasing the sophistication of the philosophical formulations of arguments for the existence of God on the part of Naiyāyikas.

But for neither Naiyāyikas nor their Buddhist opponents can this appearance of the overriding importance of logical argumentation have been the whole story; even for intellectuals there are always nonrational causes that require the assertion of certain positions and the denial of others. In the case of the Naiyāyika theists, such nonrational causes no doubt included the centrality of devotionism to their religious practice: Gaṅgeśa's treatment of *īśvarānumāna* (inferential reasoning about God), the most rationalistic enterprise imaginable, begins with an invocation

<sup>18</sup> Oberhammer puts this nicely: “Für Uddyotakara und mit ihm für den ganzen Nyāya wird Gott nicht deshalb als Ursache der Welt erkannt, weil nur er im vollkommensten Sinn des Wortes existiert, sondern er wird als existent erkannt, weil er als eine Ursache der Welt nachgewiesen wird” (“Zum Problem” 7).

<sup>19</sup> I borrow the phrase from Richard P. Hayes, who used it in a presentation at the annual meeting of the Association of Asian Studies in Chicago in the spring of 1986. It also appears in the title of an unpublished paper of his which he has been kind enough to share with me.



to Ganeśa, an important Indian deity. Similarly for the principled atheism of Buddhism: it too appears largely to have been determined (causally) by profoundly held soteriological convictions, convictions concerning the deleterious effect of theistic belief upon ethical practice and, indeed, upon all those motivations that make the practice of Buddhism possible. The polemical (anti-Naiyāyika) literature of Buddhism, though, does not make these nonrational factors apparent. This literature is unremittingly philosophical and polemical, and it is upon these elements that Vattanky focuses his attention.

Of what kind of deity, then, were Naiyāyikas interested in demonstrating the existence, and Buddhists in denying the existence? The "orthodox" Naiyāyika position, standard after the Uddyotakara (ca. sixth century C.E.), says that God (*īśvara*) is an eternal and atemporal substance (*dravya*); that he is the efficient cause (*nimittakāraṇa*) of the existence of the universe, though not its sole or material cause (creation *ex nihilo* is not something that Naiyāyika theologians argued for); that he is omniscient (*sarvajña*), and that the knowledge he possesses is atemporal and unmediated. The direct and unmediated character of God's knowledge was generally understood by Naiyāyikas to suggest that God cannot attain knowledge through the use of language, since all knowledge attained in that way is mediated. This, in turn, was understood to mean that God can neither know nor assent to any proposition. This model of understanding divine omniscience thus provides an interesting contrast to the propositional model current in much Anglophone philosophy of religion. It also contains some interesting parallels with, for example, Aquinas' view of God as pure act, a being whose absolute simplicity entails the absence of separation between his knowledge and its object.

Almost all of these attributes were extensively discussed in the literature, both Naiyāyika and Buddhist, and some of them (especially the question of God's embodiment and of the nature of his knowledge) produced some dissension within the Nyāya ranks. This is a story that the first section of Vattanky's book covers thoroughly and well. But of more direct interest to Buddhist and Nyāya philosophers than God's attributes, the great-making properties which it was thought that he necessarily must have, were the arguments used to demonstrate the existence of their possessor.

The standard-issue Naiyāyika argument for the existence of God runs like this:

\*1 The universe has a sentient creator

\*2 Because it has the property of being an effect

\*3 Because all existents which have the property of being an effect also have the

property of having a sentient creator.<sup>20</sup>

Karl Potter has called this and its variants a “cosmoteological argument” since it shares some features of both what in the West is usually called the “cosmological argument” and what is called the “teleological argument.”<sup>21</sup> Buddhists attacked (and Naiyāyikas defended) every element in it. The subject term (“the universe” in \*1) was questioned and refined, further questioned and further refined, as also were the qualifier to be predicated of the subject term (“having a sentient creator” in \*1), the reason given (\*2 above), and the statement of universal concomitance in \*3. To explore the details of these refinements would require opening up the whole realm of Indian logic and metaphysics, something which Vattanky’s book does admirably but which cannot be effectively done here. All that can be said is that the usual Buddhist objections to this argument and its variants were of two kinds. The first centered upon the argument’s validity, asking questions especially about the reason given in \*2 and the truth of the principle of universal concomitance stated in \*3. The Buddhist objections here show that, for Buddhists, it is perfectly easy to explain the observed cosmos with its complex sequence of causes and effects, without recourse to talk of *agency* (“sentient creators”) to explain *all* effects. They also show that, for Buddhists, it makes no sense to speak of an eternal, immutable substance (*īśvara*) having temporal effects or, more strongly, of such a substance having any kind of relation to the transient world of cause-and-effect without losing the immutability which it is supposed to have. The second kind of Buddhist critique allows the validity of the argument (for polemical purposes) but tries to show that the conclusion stated in \*1 is not what the Naiyāyika wants, that it will not bring him to the existence of *īśvara* but only to the existence of some sentient agent or other. A number of interesting puzzles are raised in this context about the relationship between agency and embodiment.

The Naiyāyika responses to these and similar criticisms are complex and many-leveled. It is the burden of Vattanky’s work to analyze them in detail. Here I shall mention only one, Gaṅgeśa’s response to the criticism that the argument given above possesses the fault of proving something other than what it is intended to prove: that it proves, at best, that the universe has a sentient cause which may be nothing more than

<sup>20</sup> An abbreviated form of this argument is stated at the very beginning of *Gaṅgeśa’s Doctrine* 169.

<sup>21</sup> Potter, *Indian Metaphysics and Epistemology* 102 ff.

an individual “adventitiously qualified by” sentience<sup>22</sup> (perhaps some kind of powerful practition of Yoga) and thus not God. Gaṅgeśa’s reply is that the sentience predicated of the agent in the *probandum* (the predicate whose application to the subject term is to be demonstrated by the argument, in this case “having a sentient creator” in \*1 and \*3) is intended to be an essential property of the agent in question, not an adventitious one, an attribute that the agent possesses essentially and inherently. And, argues Gaṅgeśa, any agent who possesses as an essential property the kind of sentience necessary and sufficient to act as the efficient cause of the universe’s existence will, *per definiens*, simply be *īvara*, since to essentially (which, in part, means “always”) possess that property is precisely to be God and not to be some other (lesser) agent. The Buddhist, in turn, is not happy with the idea of essential (eternal) properties of this kind—and so the argument goes.

This small excursion into Naiyāyika metaphysics, courtesy of Vattanky’s work, may have given some taste of what *īśvaravāda* in the hands of Indian intellectuals was like. If it inspires some Christian theologians to take it seriously as an alternative way of *sermo de Deo*, to learn and appropriate its syntax and grammar for their own purposes, the gain will be great for both Indian Naiyāyikas (of whom there are still plenty around) and Christian theologians.

A concrete suggestion as to one important set of issues which Christian theologians might be led to think about as a result of appropriating Naiyāyika discourse may be in order as a conclusion, although nothing more than a very tentative suggestion can be made here. The standard-issue Naiyāyika position on God’s relation to the world is that the former is the latter’s instrumental or efficient cause. God arranges and shapes the world; he supervises the operation of the causal forces that keep it functioning. But he is not the direct material cause of the existence of every object in it, and is not responsible for either the creation of, or every detail of, the operations of the world’s causal processes. This becomes most evident in discussions of the operations of *karma*, that force whereby a human’s volitional actions have appropriate effects on his or her future. God’s ordering of the cosmos is limited by (and indeed is often said to be directly reflective of) the nature and quantity of the karmic merits and demerits of sentient beings. One’s immediate reaction might be to say that this is simply a rather idiosyncratic form of deism; and so it may turn out to be, upon standard Christian categories. But it

<sup>22</sup> Vattanky, *Gaṅgeśa’s Doctrine* 188–89 (for the translation) and 294 ff. (for the commentary). I am simplifying Gaṅgeśa’s argument considerably here; to use the full battery of Navya-Nyāya technical terminology would make the issue excessively complicated for the purposes of this piece.

might be worth considering, theologically, what the advantages are in conceiving of God's functions in this way. Is it possible that, by taking an appropriately developed and complex karmic theory into both their theological anthropology and their cosmology, Christian theists might find their *sermo de Deo* enriched? Or will it turn out that there are profound reasons from within the Christian theological tradition that make it impossible to appropriate this aspect of Naiyāyika *īśvaravāda*? Whichever should be the case, much might be learned from giving serious theological consideration to this issue.

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STEVEN COLLINS' *SELFLESS PERSONS: IMAGERY AND THOUGHT IN THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM*

Karl Rahner's comment, "dogmatic theology today must be theological anthropology," epitomizes a long and continuing process in modern Christian theology.<sup>23</sup> This process has been a search for foundations adequate both for interpreting inherited confessional traditions and for responding to post-Enlightenment atheistic critiques of religion. The turn to anthropology, taken in its classical sense, is thus a sustained attempt on the part of theologians to reaffirm not only the legitimacy but also the necessity of "God-talk" in human life. More and more, "Christian theology's effort is now to demonstrate . . . that on the basis of the evidence of human existence and behaviour, the religious thematic is unavoidable."<sup>24</sup>

Rahner saw that such an "anthropocentric view" would be fruitful,<sup>25</sup> and indeed most theologians have made this anthropological turn with enthusiasm. Finally, it seemed, in the words of Lonergan, that "a conceptual apparatus that at times clung pathetically to the past is yielding place to historicist, personalist, phenomenological, and existential notions."<sup>26</sup> But as theologians took advantage of modern vocabulary and conceptions of human nature, they also acknowledged that humans are historically situated in the world, their knowledge conditioned by a variety of social and cultural contexts. And thus, because theology, like any other intellectual practice, presupposed a culture's philosophical conceptions and values, it would change as its surrounding culture changed.

<sup>23</sup> Karl Rahner, "Theology and Anthropology," *Theological Investigations* 9 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 28.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J., "The Legitimacy of the God Question: Pannenberg's New Anthropology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 52 (1986) 290.

<sup>25</sup> Rahner, "Theology and Anthropology" 28.

<sup>26</sup> Bernard Lonergan, "Theology in Its New Context," *A Second Collection* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 58.

Stated so baldly, this latter dimension of anthropocentrism is perhaps an obvious one; but at least it should make us less sanguine in expecting that anthropology will provide the long-sought foundations for Christian claims to universal truths. We are forced to ask whether it is possible to acknowledge the particularity of piety and theology and still affirm that "the Christian message is not bound to any particular culture, (but) . . . is potentially universal."<sup>27</sup>

All of us are aware how difficult this question is, and how painful it is to contemplate that the answer may be "no." The impulse for the initial turn to theological anthropology was a response to this possibility, in so far as it rejected a strictly confessional identity for the Christian message. Answering this question remains an enormous task; help in gaining some measure of control over the issue would probably be welcomed, whatever its source. I would like to suggest that a great deal of assistance may be gained from reflection on materials found in the study of non-Christian religions.

This assistance will not be some kind of easy verification of Christian truths, although this has been sometimes expected.<sup>28</sup> On his deathbed the great Swedish theologian/historian of religion Nathan Söderblom witnessed, "There is a living God, I can prove it by the history of religions."<sup>29</sup> Alas, what scholars have learned about human religion since Söderblom's death in 1931 makes it difficult to accept such a proof without feeling disloyal to the facts. In part, this is because the values of our culture have changed; we tend to organize our facts in a way that emphasizes their cultural and historical distinctiveness.<sup>30</sup> If Söderblom belonged to a generation still committed to Enlightenment values of universality, today's historians of religion are more apt to agree with Wilfred Cantwell Smith:

It is not the case that all religions are the same. Moreover, if a philosopher asks (anhistorically) what they all have in common, he or she finds the answer to be "nothing," or finds that they all have in common something so much less than each has separately as to distort or to evacuate the individual richness and depth

<sup>27</sup> Marcello de Carvalho Azevedo, S.J., *Inculturation and the Challenges of Modernity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1982) 1.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., the use of historians of religion by Bernard Lonergan, S.J., in *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 101-24.

<sup>29</sup> Nathan Söderblom, *The Living God* (London: Oxford University, 1933) xxviii.

<sup>30</sup> For a programmatic statement of this orientation in the history-of-religions discipline, see Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Inaugural Address at the Collège de France, 5th December 1975," *Social Science Information* 16 (1977) 10. George Lindbeck has addressed the implications of this shift for theology in *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984) 30-45.

and sometimes grotesqueness of actual religious life.<sup>31</sup>

The perception of religion as particular has meant that professional students of religion have more commonly assumed their task as grasping other peoples' points of view, understanding their visions of the world.<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately for the purposes of theological anthropology, they have been less concerned with the universals of human religion and nature. Contemporary studies of religion seem to be a direct challenge to any theological assumption of a common human experience.

While it is true that today we like to guard the unique, even the uniquely grotesque, it is also true that we are enthusiasts of hermeneutics. The post-Enlightenment "turn to the subject" included a sensitivity to the processes of interpretation. Western thinkers, including theologians, strove to become more self-conscious about those concepts they had simply assumed in their perceptions of the world. The difficulty of this task was immediately recognized; as David Hume said, "The views the most familiar to us are apt, for that very reason, to escape us."<sup>33</sup>

It is in this hermeneutical context that the study of other religions can prove helpful to theology, because its resulting comparisons provide a way of putting one's own conceptions and values in perspective. Louis Dumont has said that "whenever we lay bare an idiosyncrasy of the modern mind, we make a little less impossible the task of universal comparison."<sup>34</sup> With universal comparison still a goal, we may want to postpone judging the utility of anthropology as the main vehicle for modern theological reflection.

Modern hermeneutics reminds us that, for anthropology to serve as a foundation for our theologies, we must uncover the cultural roots of our anthropological conceptions and the assumptions that accompany these conceptions. This is essential if we are to avoid allowing theological anthropology to consist "of little more than a vague . . . project nursed in a compost of philosophical reminiscences."<sup>35</sup>

Fortunately, to this end we have a valuable aid for comparison in Steven Collins' *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism*.<sup>36</sup> Collins has written his book to be used for just this kind of

<sup>31</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 47.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Louis Dumont, *From Mandeville to Marx* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1977) 19.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Dan Sperber, *On Anthropological Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982) 10.

<sup>36</sup> Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982.

hermeneutical comparison, out of a conviction "that a great deal of contemporary philosophy [and, I would add, theology], particularly in the English-language tradition, suffers from a lack of historical and social self-awareness"(1). Collins is very successful in making his book accessible to the nonspecialist reader. He is so able a writer that any reader, even one who comes to his book knowing nothing about Buddhism, will be engaged by his careful investigation of Buddhist ideas of the person and of selfhood.

Collins argues that Buddhist "speculative thought derives from concerns and presuppositions radically different from those of western philosophy. Such an alien tradition, however, is important for us not *in spite of* but precisely *because of* these differences and the difficulty we have in understanding them" (1). In this vein, Buddhist ideas about persons are challenging and significant to anyone interested in theological anthropology precisely because these ideas revolve around a protracted denial of the self, a denial which is absent from most of Western thought.<sup>37</sup>

Western investigators have had a great deal of difficulty in comprehending what Buddhists mean when they speak of a person being "not-self" (Sanskrit *anātman*, Pali *anattā*), and most readers will initially share this bewilderment. There is a temptation, to which scholars (and a few heterodox Buddhists) sometimes succumb, to explain away what the doctrine seems to be saying, by substituting a content closer to what we expect, such as "Buddhists are positing a transcendent self even as they criticize conceptions of selfhood accepted by their South Asian contemporaries."

Since Collins is intent upon conceptual contrast, he does not take this route.<sup>38</sup> Rather, he takes some very strong statements of the doctrine as the starting point of his analysis. He quotes Walpola Rahula, a noted Sri Lankan scholar-monk, to give an introduction to the doctrine and to

<sup>37</sup> A few philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition, such as Derek Parfit, have recently proposed conceptions of personal identity which are similar to some Buddhist formulations. Collins has discussed some of these in "Buddhism in Recent British Philosophy and Theology," *Religious Studies* 21 (1985) 475-93. Another work, which Collins has edited and contributed to, is also relevant for those interested in exploring the cultural presuppositions of theological anthropology: *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, ed. Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Luke (New York: Cambridge University, 1985).

<sup>38</sup> Collins, in setting up this strong contrast, follows Louis Dumont; Dumont's large-scale comparison of Indian and Western notions of personhood has recently been criticized for making "one place or society grist for the conceptual mill of another." Such criticisms could also be applied to Collins' comparative intentions. See Arjun Appadurai, "Is Homo Hierarchicus?" *American Ethnologist* 13 (1986) 745-61; quotation above is from 745.

show "some of the perhaps unexpected implications and consequences which Buddhism supposes the opposing belief in the existence of a self to have" (4).

Buddhism stands unique in the history of human thought in denying the existence of such a Soul, Self, or *Ātman*. According to the teaching of the Buddha, the idea of self is an imaginary, false belief which has no corresponding reality and it produces harmful thoughts of "me" and "mine," selfish desires, craving, attachment, hatred, ill-will, conceit, pride, egotism, and other defilements, impurities and problems. It is the source of all the troubles in the world from personal conflicts to wars between nations. In short, to this false view can be traced all the evil in the world (4).

It is perhaps surprising that just as Western culture, including Christian theology, is convinced that there really are such entities as persons, assuming this to be a self-evident fact which has profound normative consequences, so the Theravāda Buddhist tradition is equally convinced that there are not. As Rahula's statement above indicates, Buddhists claim equally profound normative consequences for this fact. Collins gives an excellent and succinct survey of the historical context in which this Buddhist conviction first took shape, and then looks at the role this idea has played in the varieties of Buddhist thought and practice. He examines how Buddhists, holding this idea as central, go on to explain such difficult issues as experience, action, moral responsibility, and personal identity.

One of the assets Collins brings to his book is his critical understanding of the historical and ethnographic scholarship concerned with Theravāda Buddhism. He is well aware that contemporary reports of actual Buddhist practices seem to require assumptions that contradict the scholastic doctrine of selflessness, especially when the aim of these practices seems to be the well-being of particular persons in future lives. Given this discrepancy, Collins attempts to explain how we are to interpret "adequately and holistically the relation of the stricter, intellectual kind of Buddhist thought and practice to the actual thought and practice of most Buddhists" (17).

It is in addressing this issue that Collins' analysis of Theravāda Buddhism is particularly rich and, for the Christian theologian, thought-provoking. He comes to the conclusion that this popular Buddhism, rather than being the undoing of scholastic ideas, is the necessary condition for the soteriological purposes of the not-self doctrine.

[S]ocially and psychologically it was and is necessary that there be both affective and cognitive selfishness in order that the doctrine of *anattā* selflessness can act, or be thought to act, as an agent of spiritual change. For Buddhist thought, the



existence of (for example) enthusiastically self-interested merit-making is socially, psychologically, and indeed logically necessary as the raw material which is to be shaped by *anattā* (152).

I would think that this conditional approval in Buddhist thought of assumptions which are ultimately rejected could prove helpful (to take just one example) to those Catholic theologians who are "rethinking" sacramental theology from an anthropocentric view: Could the Buddhist pattern provide a model for how to assimilate the pre-Vatican II emphasis on a cause-and-effect understanding of the sacraments with the more recent affirmations of sacraments as symbolic and disclosive? Is a strictly symbolic conception of discrete sacraments possible, independent of a somewhat mechanistic understanding of these same sacraments?<sup>39</sup> The Buddhist combination of acceptance and rejection of the self will not give Christian theologians answers to such questions, but it may provide a helpful framework in which they can be asked.

Academic interpretations of other religions thus may suggest alternative ways of reappropriating our own confessional tradition, even when we find it difficult to appropriate insights directly from the religious traditions themselves. An illustration of this potential can be taken from Collins' analysis of the imagery of houses, rivers, and vegetation, which Buddhists have employed in their discussions of personal identity. Some of Collins' explication may be quoted to illustrate the striking effectiveness of this imagery.

A sequence of 'individualities' . . . also is a process of vegetative growth: the 'human puppet' arises neither through the agency of self nor other, but 'by reason of a cause,' just as a seed grows in a field nourished by moisture. Different persons . . . are produced, with different physical and psychological attributes, through differences in *karma*, just as different trees are produced by different seeds (223).

As Collins suggests, "the study of imagery can reveal not only the wider imaginative world in which religious or philosophical ideas are embedded, but also how unanalysed and unconscious metaphors can be built into modern interpretative thinking" (225). The Buddhist imagery of vegetation and houses may strike the Christian theologian as alien, yet, by raising the question of functional counterparts in the Christian traditions, it may alert us to neglected dimensions of our own traditions. Caroline Bynum's recent work on the body-and-food imagery used by medieval nuns could be profitably read as a sequel to Collins' work.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> These questions, inspired by Collins, also owe much to the recent work of Susan A. Ross at Loyola University of Chicago.

<sup>40</sup> Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987).

House imagery, of course, is familiar in the Christian imaginative world too. Furthermore, as the Sunday-school picture of Jesus knocking at the door of the heart indicates, this house imagery is primarily linked to body imagery—even if the resulting connotations are vastly different from Buddhist ideas. For the Buddhist, the combination of house-and-body imagery conveys the constant change inherent in life: “A monk is recommended to accept alms-food for the maintenance of his body, just as the owner of a decaying house uses props for its maintenance” (167). In Western thought “a house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability.”<sup>41</sup> This contrast between Buddhist and Western connotations of change and stability may help us to become more self-conscious about the imaginative patterns through which we perceive the world. At the very least, works like Collins’ remind us that a universal anthropology is not a given, something which “everybody knows” at first hand.

When theology was cosmological in orientation, Christians found themselves compelled to devise proofs for the existence of the God of whom they spoke. A study of Buddhist definitions and images of persons, made available to us by Steven Collins, makes us aware that the necessity of this task has not been removed by a shift to anthropocentrism. By embracing anthropology as a foundation for theological reflection, we may have thought that finally we could begin to rebuild our theological houses on rock; but Buddhism could turn out to be the geology that reminds us that rocks eventually become sand. The Buddhist challenge to theological anthropology may assist Christians to ask anew whether the turn to theological anthropology is the best way to affirm the universality of the Christian message.

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JOHN CARMAN'S AND FRÉDÉRIQUE MARGLIN'S *PURITY AND  
AUSPICIOUSNESS IN INDIAN SOCIETY*

Recently, one of my students, when for the first time confronted with Peter Berger's notion that religion is a “nomizing” phenomenon, ordering the cosmos and giving everyday life its structure and meaning, responded with incredulity. Surely “true religion” has to do with the other world! Surely “true religion” does not simply name the known, is not the dictator of kinship rules, the regulator of diet, ordainer of sexual propriety, surely not the mirror of the *status quo*! Authentic religion is supposed to involve the Other, the Limit, the Profoundly Mysterious.

Before me, in other words, was a living incarnation of the post-

<sup>41</sup> Gaston Bachelard, quoted by Collins, *Selfless Persons* 166.

Christian retreat from the world, religious but without religion, a sort of modern gnostic, finding nothing of the sacred in this world, but willing to hope for a message from an alien world, mysteriously conveyed outside the channel of culture, i.e. outside ritual and social conventions.

We are aware of the process whereby our Western society has been systematically secularized, God pushed to the margins while everyday life is symbolically impoverished and emptied of religious meaning. The roots of the process are very deep; indeed, under the call to reject "mere external forms," perhaps every reformer demythologizes.<sup>42</sup> This is a "Protestant principle" which did not begin with Luther; it was inherent in Paul's taboo-breaking critique of Jewish law. David Tracy sees a constant dialectic in the history of religions between "religions with a mystical-priestly-metaphysical-aesthetic emphasis and those with a prophetic-ethical-historical emphasis."<sup>43</sup>

I would argue that in India the distinction lines up somewhat differently, and this would be in the opposition of the priestly and the mystical. The mystics are the prophets, taboo-breakers, and demythologizers. Perhaps it is the Protestant, prophetic, certainly individualist sympathies of the Western mind which have made the study of Indian mystical traditions synonymous for many people with the study of the whole of Indian religious culture. But what of "the other side"<sup>44</sup> of Indian religion?

A recent volume of essays, *Purity and Auspiciousness in Indian Society*,<sup>45</sup> edited by John B. Carman and Frédérique Appfel Marglin, examines the complex Indian understanding of a social world religiously structured into castes of relative degrees of ritual purity in which people pursue their everyday tasks and religious obligations with a careful concern for the pure and the auspicious and by close observance of the religious calendar. But the book also makes note of the ways in which the more transcendental orientation of some religious thinkers calls into question the validity of the this-worldly aspect of "everyday religion."

<sup>42</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (New York: Pantheon, 1982) 52.

<sup>43</sup> David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 203.

<sup>44</sup> I have borrowed this phrase from John Strong; see his "The Other Side of Theravāda Buddhism," *Religious Studies Review* 12 (1986) 24-29.

<sup>45</sup> John B. Carman and Frédérique Appfel Marglin, eds., *Purity and Auspiciousness in Indian Society* (Journal of Developing Societies 1; Leiden: Brill, 1984). The volume includes the following essays: T. N. Madan, "Concerning the Categories *śubha* and *suddha* in Hindu Culture: An Exploratory Essay"; Ronald Inden, "Kings and Omens"; Alf Hildebeitel, "Purity and Auspiciousness in the Sanskrit Epics"; Vasudha Narayanan, "The Two Levels of Auspiciousness in Śrīvaiṣṇava Ritual and Literature"; Frédérique Appfel Marglin, "Types of Opposition in Hindu Culture"; Padmanabh S. Jaini, "The Pure and the Auspicious in the Jaina Tradition"; Stanley J. Tambiah, "Purity and Auspiciousness at the Edge of the Hindu Context—in Theravāda Buddhist Societies." Marglin wrote the introduction, Carman the conclusion.

Thus it joins a growing list of works on South Asian religions inspired by a dialogue between anthropologists and historians of religion which seeks to place the mystical-transcendental traditions of India ("the religions of the Nameless") into the context or structure of the religious society of India more broadly conceived, in which religion is the foundation for the social world ("the religions of the named").<sup>46</sup> I want to review the findings of this book in a way perhaps not altogether attuned to the purposes for which it was written but in a way conducive to theological reflection and true to the French sociological tradition in its quest for a more adequate understanding of what it means to be human.

Carman begins his concluding remarks to the volume by succinctly opposing the two realms:

There are two widespread pictures of Hindu society in the West. One is of the yogi performing great feats of physical and mental gymnastics, wandering through the world with his begging bowl or sitting motionless in the forest, deep in meditation. The other picture is of the Brahmin priest-scholar at the top of a vast hierarchy of hereditary communities that do not intermarry or even eat together outside the caste. The first picture is supported by the Indian philosophies elaborating various paths that renounce the world and lead to eternal salvation. The second picture has its scriptural support in a different set of sacred texts, the "law books" (*dharmaśāstras*). The first picture is summed up in the word for its goal: *moksha*, while the second is expressed in that Indian term with such a broad cluster of meanings: *dharma*.<sup>47</sup>

For most of my students—and, I would guess, most Americans in general—the great attraction for things Indian comes from the appeal of the first picture: the exotic Oriental of higher powers. The great stumbling block is the second: caste. The first image symbolizes the hope of finding a transcendental experience (and an escape from human religion bound by culture and language), while the second is an offense to largely unexamined assumptions about equality and individualism.

It was Louis Dumont who most vigorously articulated the position that the Indian society of castes had to be seen as an expression of Hindu *values*, especially the value of hierarchy, rather than the result of oppressors operating in a society of persons who held the values of individualism and egalitarianism but could not find a way to see them implemented.

<sup>46</sup> See Richard Gombrich, *Precept and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971); Melford Spiro, *Buddhism and Society* (2nd ed.; Berkeley: University of California, 1982); Stanley J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror, World Renouncer* (Cambridge: University Press, 1976) and *Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets* (Cambridge: University Press, 1984); Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (3rd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980); Madeleine Biardeau, *L'Hindouisme: Anthropologie d'une civilisation* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981).

<sup>47</sup> *Purity* 109.

The empirical reality, "the individual," did not exist at the level of ideology. The empirical individual was a part of the whole, limited by age, sex, and caste to a particular role. The empirical individual was not, as in the West, seen as the "incarnation of all things humanly possible," was not destined for salvation at the end of this one life, except and unless such an individual was about to be released from the bonds of *saṃsāra*. Such a person, a *saṃnyāsi* (renouncer), was symbolically outside society, no longer a member of caste or family, no longer *homo hierarchicus*, but in some ways like the Western individual, an embodiment of the whole, a symbol of everyone's transcendent destination, liberation (*mokṣa*) from rebirth in particular, limited states.

Within Dumont's scheme we have an inclusive image that accounts for the coexistence of the other-worldly ideal of *mokṣa* and the social ideals of particular duties (*dharma*). *Mokṣa* may be our ultimate concern, a value which beckons all but is realized only by a few in any given life cycle; but it "encompasses" rather than negates the world of *dharma* and caste. Thus the tolerant pluralism of Hinduism, based upon the conception of transmigration and socially expressed by caste, is still encompassed by the universalistic concept of final liberation.<sup>48</sup>

Dumont's emphatic proclamation that the relations between castes were *not* (primarily) governed by the laws of political power but by the fundamentally religious principle of ritual purity/impurity (the primary value for determining caste status) tended to obscure other "axes of value." Moreover, as Marglin points out, Dumont's structuralist method tended to lead scholars to see not only pure-impure oppositions in a strictly privative relation, but to make similarly exclusive oppositions with other values even where the data were not so obviously bipolar. Her essay in particular suggests the existence of both persons and events that may be discussed in terms of both purity-impurity and auspicious-inauspicious categories but which in the final analysis are fundamentally ambiguous.<sup>49</sup>

In many ways *Purity and Auspiciousness in Indian Society* may be taken as a collective critique of, and respectful response to, Dumont's influential work. Choosing to highlight auspiciousness as a category of value distinct from that of purity reflects a dissatisfaction with Dumont's exclusive concentration upon purity as the central organizing principle of Indian religion and caste society. Marglin's earlier work on the temple dancers (*devadāsīs*) showed that these women were simultaneously impure in their associations with sex, and yet auspicious in their state as

<sup>48</sup> Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, chap. 2 and the appendix, "World Renunciation in Indian Religions."

<sup>49</sup> Marglin, *Purity* 1-10 and 65-68. See also Appadurai, n. 38 above.

the wives of the temple God. Purity and auspiciousness are separate axes of value and are not always homologous.<sup>50</sup>

Marglin's essay "Types of Opposition in Hindu Culture" goes beyond her previous work on the *devadāsīs* in its explicit critique of the structuralist method and its display of the essential ambiguity of the category of auspiciousness. Her article is rich and dense, and, given its central place in the volume, I will concentrate on it rather than summarily review the other essays of the volume.

The data for Marglin's discussion are taken from an analysis of "The Festival of the New Body" (*Naba Kalebara*) in Orissa, during which the images of the temple deities are changed. It takes place every 12 years during an intercalary month added to the lunar calendar. Marglin concentrates on the role of low-caste ritualists called *daitas* (literally "demons"), who are considered blood relatives of the deity but of tribal (and thus outcaste) origin. Normally they would be considered polluting and thus to be excluded from the presence of the deities in the temple, but during the *Naba Kalebara* they officiate at the ritual death and rebirth of the gods. They are in charge of finding the trees which will provide the wood for the new images. The *daitas* consult a goddess who, single and without male consort, is therefore herself a rich symbol of ambiguous, auspicious *and* inauspicious, power, associated with both fertility and disease. Accompanied by Brahmins, these low-caste ritualists bring back logs for fashioning the new gods. The old images are ritually prepared for burial, while the new ones are prepared for birth. In a temporary hut the *daitas* work, the inauspicious sounds of their axes muffled by the auspicious singing of the *devadāsīs*. Simultaneously, Brahmins are performing Vedic sacrifices and rites for the installation of new images. Finally:

At the end of the dark fortnight on the no-moon night, the *daitas* take the newly carved images into the temple. At that time the *daitas* are the only ones in the temple. They place the new images next to the old ones. The oldest among them is blindfolded and his hands are wrapped in cloths. He is left alone with both sets of images. All lights are extinguished. In the middle of the night, this man changes the soul substances from the old images into the new ones, in utter darkness and secrecy. It is believed that this man will die within the year. After

<sup>50</sup> Marglin, *Wives of the God-King* (New York: Oxford University, 1985). *Purity and Auspiciousness* also derives from the work of Veena Das, *Structure and Cognition* (2nd ed.; Delhi: Oxford University, 1982), and R. S. Khare, *Culture and Reality: Essays on the Hindu System of Managing Foods* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1976). In the Introduction to *Purity and Auspiciousness* Marglin notes that her coeditor Carman had much earlier made a clear distinction between purity and auspiciousness in a work ignored by anthropologists: J. B. Carman and P. V. Luke, *Village Christians and Hindu Culture* (London: Lutterworth, 1968) 32.

this awesome deed is accomplished, the other *daitas* come and take the old images to the burial ground . . . and hack them to pieces. They dig a deep hole and throw the pieces in it. Having accomplished this deed, they all go to a tank in the city to take a bath. The bath inaugurates for them a period of ten days of death impurity. The period of death impurity is observed by their families as well. It is said that since one of their blood relatives has died, they are affected by death impurity. The *devadāsīs*, who are the wives of Jagannātha, should on the same kinship grounds also observe a period of death impurity; however, they do not.<sup>51</sup>

The inauspicious work of this ritual is done by specialists, the *daitas*, who stand in a complementary relationship to the ever-auspicious *devadāsīs*; both are impure, in opposition to pure Brahmins. The *devadāsīs* are representatives of royalty, wealth, food, well-being, and sexuality, and thus are auspicious—but they are barred from procreation. Marglin notes that “though birth is identified in general as being an auspicious event, it is not unambiguously auspicious as the wedding ceremony.”<sup>52</sup> The *daitas* are involved in the clearly inauspicious rites of death, but also in the more ambivalent rite of birth. As the place of death is also the place of birth, the birth and death rites begin to merge into one event, dichotomies blurred; the sacred events take on an antistructural character.<sup>53</sup>

Marglin discusses several further points of interpretation of interest to the Indologist and the anthropologist. I hope this summary of her analysis conveys for the nonspecialist a sense of the complexity of the symbolic behavior associated with such rituals, expressive as they are of values like ritual purity and concern for the auspicious, or more abstractly for separation, space, social role, and hierarchy.

This kind of religious life, evident in many ways also in traditional Catholicism, involves a kind of “embrace of the particular” which is liable to be swept away by the universalizing impact of demythologization. In the understanding of universalistic thinkers, concerned with the transcendental referent of religion, purity must become nonsymbolic, a univocal sign of ethical or spiritual advancement. This is well documented in the volume’s papers on Theravāda Buddhism and Jainism, religions in which purity is associated with the transcendent (*nirvāṇa*, *mokṣa*) and not with physical rules of ritual etiquette.<sup>54</sup> In more universalistic theism,

<sup>51</sup> Marglin, *Purity* 71.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 74.

<sup>53</sup> I feel that the work of Victor Turner illuminated much of this material, although Marglin does not refer to it; see his *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).

<sup>54</sup> See the essays by Jaini and Tambiah, n. 45 above. Jaini notes that Jains have “divorced worldly life from the notion of purity. They see sacredness instead in renunciation” (89). Tambiah notes that impurity for the Buddhist monk refers to mental defilements (95) and that the notion of impurity held by Brahmins is rejected by Buddhists with

the "auspicious" is no longer a category appropriate to distinctions between well-being and poverty, marriage and widowhood, etc., but is characteristic of all life given over toward God.<sup>55</sup>

In his concluding reflections Carman states that Indologists

have made considerable progress in understanding *dharma* and *moksha*, but thus far . . . have not paid sufficient attention to the relation of both to two other legitimate goals of human life: *artha*, which means both power and wealth, and *kāma*, the satisfaction of desires. Both the traditional kind and the married woman embody a value closely related to *artha* and *kāma*, the value of auspiciousness.<sup>56</sup>

Examining the different and complex relations of these axes of value, all the authors of *Purity and Auspiciousness in Indian Society* have provided both specialists and nonspecialists with a detailed map, and a map with an accurate projection, of the systems of South Asian cultural and religious values. Such a structural map of Indian religious culture better takes into account the relatedness of worldly and other-worldly values.

Perhaps ritual purity and auspiciousness do not seem to be essential aspects of religion to most Western Christians. Indeed, as one of the book's authors noted, even Indian Jesuits have claimed that "auspiciousness" was a superstitious concern of non-Christians which had no place in their religious vocabulary.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps this is the reason for certain Orientalist (in Said's sense of the word) distortions in Indology; perhaps, as a point of reflection and self-awareness, it is the source of much confusion about *homo religiosus* in general. It is noteworthy that the very word "auspicious" that is chosen to translate a group of Indian religious concepts is itself traceable to ancient Roman religion and pertains to the reading of omens.<sup>58</sup> This suggests that Roman Catholicism may not provide direct analogues in its sacramental theology, and such may have to come indirectly through the Roman material. In any case, the general lack of proper analogues in our culture suggests how sacramentalism has receded from Western consciousness.

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vigorous polemical intent. This sort of universalism was contagious: "It is quite likely that in the history of brahmanical ideas and practices, it is the influence of early Buddhist and Jaina ethical values and practices that transformed the moral and ritual horizons of the Vedic Brahmans and made them relate their vocation to the renouncer as much as to kingship and the society in general" (106).

<sup>55</sup> In her essay Vasudha Narayanan (n. 45 above) shows how the inauspiciousness of death, e.g., is re-evaluated at the level of theological reflection on the transcendent nature of God's auspiciousness.

<sup>56</sup> *Purity* 108-9.

<sup>57</sup> Madan, *Purity* 25, n. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Inden, *Purity* 30.



The emphasis upon the transcendent and the universal in theological discourse has often led to a misunderstanding of the nature of meaningful religious life. From Kierkegaard to the deconstructionists it is all high drama and *Angst*. The emphasis on radical otherness and questions of ultimacy loses touch with religious life in its particularities and its easy familiarity and concreteness, and relies upon abstraction and emotion. In reflecting on the relaxed and playful way in which a Mexican peasant spoke of a miraculous image of the Christ-child, Victor and Edith Turner write that "it was the tone of a culture in which the religious domain is accepted as naturally as any other. Puritanism, in alienating religion from the realm of the miraculous, has also, paradoxically, alienated the everyday realm from the religious."<sup>59</sup> By contrast, they note that in our society "religion has become less serious but more solemn"<sup>60</sup> or a leisure activity that to be truly religious has also to be sentimental.

The loss of the sacramental dimension of Catholic religious life has been accelerated by the focus of theologians<sup>61</sup> on the universal, the ethical, the abstract. Rituals are now routinely given theological explanation *even while being performed*, a signal of the puritan distrust of the power of the symbolic and mythic to be expressive on their own; the image *must* be explained. Perhaps it will be the anthropologists and historians of religion<sup>62</sup> who might remind us that religious life is sustained by more than theological belief and mystical emotion. It is sustained by concrete acts of piety, i.e. communally accepted gestures and performative utterances which make up a Confucian sort of religious etiquette.

*Purity and Auspiciousness in Indian Society* will not be an easy book for those not initiated in Indian studies. It is full of complicated details. But piety<sup>63</sup> itself is always constituted in specific details. A sort of Hindu-Christian dialogue has been conducted over the last 200 years which has more often than not relied upon abstractions about the Absolute, a process of mutual demythologization which contributes to the dissolution

<sup>59</sup> Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University, 1978) 73

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 36

<sup>61</sup> It is interesting to notice that the index of Hans Kung's *On Being a Christian* does not list "Eucharist," "liturgy," "ritual," or "sacrament." Kung interprets Catholicism in a Barthian, historical-ethical way.

<sup>62</sup> I am thinking here primarily of Victor Turner, Mary Douglas, Clifford Geertz, and Mircea Eliade. Note David Tracy's discussion of Eliade in *The Analogical Imagination* 205 ff., especially Tracy's comments on Eliade's "retrieval of the genius of Eastern spirituality," which emphasizes "the sacred in image, icon, ritual, logos and cosmological theologies" (208).

<sup>63</sup> A legacy of Schleiermacher is the use of the word "piety" to connote religious enthusiasm and an emphasis on feeling. I use the word in the sense of "attention to religious observance."

of the necessarily particular religious acts upon which religious life, Hindu or Christian, is founded. If *homo religiosus* says the rosary daily and abstains from fish on Fridays,<sup>64</sup> or chants the names of Viṣṇu and observes full-moon days, should not our theological reflection take account of such practices? The presumption that such activity is nonessential, even idolatrous, might so imperil the incarnate religious life of sacred time and sacred space as to render it an easily forgotten, replaceable system of fluctuating ideas.

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<sup>64</sup> See Mary Douglas' "The Bog Irish," in her *Natural Symbols* 37-53, for a discussion of Friday abstinence and the process of demythologization.