



## AFTER APPROPRIATION: EXPLORATIONS IN INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

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religious intellectual texts  
as a site for intercultural  
philosophical and theological  
reflection: the case of the  
*Śrīmad Rahasyatrayasāra* and  
the *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu*

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I. REFLECTIONS

*Introduction*

I propose that religious texts – considered seriously, in depth – constitute a most appropriate and fruitful place for reflection on philosophical and theological issues in an intercultural context. This is because such texts

provide access to worlds of thought that are invariably complex and diverse terrains, partly accessible and partly particular, insider discourse, branching off in various diverse and elusive ways. Such texts are often particularly rich in style and in reader expectations. Two such texts from two traditions, read together, create an array of intercultural possibilities that can generate a considerable range of philosophical and theological reflection. This kind of reflection on complex texts that are both philosophical and theological, highly rational and richly imaginative, is superior to thematic comparisons; for the texts resist conclusive generalizations and keep introducing cultural and religious specificity back into generalizing discourses.<sup>1</sup>

I thus reaffirm my long-term interest in the close study of texts as productive of religious and philosophical insight in part because of what I have learned from a more generalist and generalizing project I was part of from 1995 to 2000: the Comparative Religious Ideas Project (CRIP) directed by Robert Neville at Boston University, a five-year venture that involved only fifteen participants and led to three edited volumes, *The Human Condition*, *Ultimate Realities*, and *Religious Truth*.<sup>2</sup> CRIP was a very fine effort to bring together theorists and philosophers of comparative work (such as Neville himself) and tradition-specific specialist scholars (such as myself, in this instance), for the sake of creating a more integral conversation that would be both theoretically satisfying and responsible in particular disciplinary detail. Our hope in CRIP was to bridge the gap between the theoretical frameworks for comparative work and the highly professionalized detailed scholarship of the specialist, rooting the former in detail and liberating the latter from the control of narrow groups of specialist experts.

My impression, however – shared by others both in the project and observing it – has been that the volumes arising from CRIP did not achieve the integration that was hoped for. Rather, they less successfully placed specialist studies between meta- reflections on traditions and themes, and even on particularities. Readers have tended to read selectively, without having to engage the whole project. From the particularities of the conversation, the participants sought a common ground in general thematic issues, but this thematic generality failed to keep up with the particularities of what had been learned; we would have been better off, I decided, in more particularity and less generalization.

In the course of CRIP, I had been stressing specific Hindu traditions' claims about truth and the accessibility of truth to those willing to reason coherently, and all of this was related to my own book, *Hindu God, Christian God*.<sup>3</sup> But after that I wrote that book and was aware of the complexity of my own production, I ended up reaffirming the view that learning across traditional boundaries takes a very long time and cannot be speeded up by swifter theorizing – and is best mediated by long reflection on carefully studied texts. So now I am again interested in the possibility of gaining help from richly variegated texts that afford multiple points of access but also connect one to the other points of access.

The rest of this reflection has to do with an intercultural reading project that I finished recently, dealing with a Tamil Hindu text and a French Catholic text.<sup>4</sup>

## BY WAY OF EXAMPLE, TWO TEXTS

I wrote about two extraordinarily rich and complex religious texts: first, the *Śrīmad Rahasyatrayasāra* [*Essence of the Three Mysteries*; henceforth *Essence*] by the fourteenth-century Hindu theologian Vedānta Deśika (Veṅkaṭanātha), a work that is an exegesis of the three holy mantras [rahasyas] of his tradition and argument for radical surrender to God; second, the *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu* [*Treatise on the Love of God*; henceforth *Treatise*] of the seventeenth-century French Catholic theologian (and bishop of Geneva) Francis de Sales, a text that argues that the deep pleasure and satisfaction of “Nothing but God” is the only true destiny of the human person.<sup>5</sup> The *Essence* is a key work for the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition (dedicated to the worship of the deities Nārāyaṇa with his consort Śrī), and a kind of *summa* of spiritual theology; it was written at the end of Deśika's life, intended to provide a full and correct framework in which to understand and practice of surrender to God. Francis de Sales's most famous work is the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, but the *Treatise* offers his full vision of the mystical life of the Christian – toward unity with God in love – with its philosophical grounding.

Both the *Essence* and the *Treatise* are classic religious texts offering philosophical starting points that are, at least in theory, accessible to any intelligent and attentive reader. They can be read and understood, and they are forceful enough to provoke reactions, and then possible empathy

and intentional engagement. Both move from philosophical starting points to increasingly tradition-specific assertions that require insider belonging and loyalty. Both respect reason but push on to engage more mystical claims that can be partly understood, while possibly remaining in significant ways inaccessible to those who have not participated in the life and practices of its tradition. The *Essence* and *Treatise* are complex texts including varied kinds of discourse, which Deśika and Sales claim to be successfully melded into whole texts.

Because the *Essence* and *Treatise* are reasoned treatises that make philosophical claims that then open into theological and mystical claims, they can be read in a distanced and speculative fashion, they can be thought about, but they can also be appropriated in an increasingly engaged way by those who would take them to heart and even pray with them, through them.

For the sake of an example to accompany this brief paper, I have paired the third chapter of the *Essence* with Book I, chapters 15–17 of the *Treatise*, and appended both sections in translation. I urge readers to spend some time with them since there is really no other satisfactory way to understand what I mean. Reading carefully is the substance and the point. These sections are early in each work, part of the foundations intended to prepare for their later arguments in favour of complete surrender to God; for it is necessary, they believe, to make the case that the higher ideals and sentiments of divine love are, not merely unexpected or miraculous graced events, but also completions to human existence even as ordinarily understood. Let us now consider each text in turn.

### ESSENCE OF THE THREE MYSTERIES, CHAPTER 3: ON THE PRIMARY AND DISTINCTIVE DOCTRINE OF THE ŚRĪVAIṢṄAVA TRADITION

Here is an outline of *Essence*, chapter 3, “On the Distinguishing Doctrine of Our Tradition”:

- a. Opening verse
- b. The meaning of “distinctive doctrine”

- c. The distinguishing feature of our Vedānta: the lord as possessor of all as his body, as support of all, and as the one on whom all depends
- d. The analogy of beings and their qualities and defining characteristics
- e. The Lord supports all by his proper form and his will
- f. The Lord upholds nature by his proper form and by will
- g. The relationship of depending and being depended on
- h. This knowledge of dependence as fruitful and exclusive
- i. The distinctive teaching is revealed in the three holy mantras
- j. The traditional teaching of Appuḷḷār on the *Tiru Mantra*
- k. The *Tiru Mantra* and the freedom distinctive to humans
- l. Concluding Tamil and Sanskrit verses

In ways that cannot be adequately detailed here, Deśika is setting up the entirety of his *Essence* – all thirty-two chapters – in this chapter. The theme of the human’s utter dependence and the divine’s utter intent to protect the human appears regularly and variously in the chapters to follow, and, as the title of the work suggests, in the regular reference to the truths of self and God as inscribed in the three mantras. A basic philosophical point about finitude is played out in a variety of theological and devotional ways.

Deśika does not discuss where Rāmānuja might have gotten the idea of the *body–possessor of the body* (*śarīra–śarīri*) relationship, although we know that the *dependent–depended upon* (*śeṣa–śeṣi*) relationship of utter dependence is most easily traced to the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras* of Jaimini and notions of ritual utility. In Rāmānuja’s usage (in the *Vedārtha Saṃgraha*, for instance)<sup>6</sup> both the *body–possessor of the body* and the *dependent–depended upon* relations are allied with a more elaborate theory of denotation, toward a striking conclusion about how language works and words mean: all words refer, not only to bodies and possessors of those bodies in our world, but ultimately to the Lord who is the inner support of all dependent realities.

But it is key that, at the start of the process, there is nothing in particular about this distinctive (*pratītantra*) idea that requires one to be a Śrīvaiṣṇava to understand it. Much of the middle of chapter 3 (sections e–h) is about the divine presence and intention that keep the universe in working order, and Deśika is very interested in how God supports all things by his simple existence and also by the divine will.

It is only in the latter part of the chapter that Deśika turns to the religious/spiritual meaning of the body–possessor of the body and dependent–dependent upon relationship he has explained philosophically, by now turning to the liberative fruitfulness of knowing this relationship to God, and, for conscious beings, by choosing to affirm what is already ontologically the case; utter dependence (*śeṣatva*) counts as a distinctive religious position that is nonetheless first presented as a philosophical position that does not require faith or a learning of tradition. Later, it becomes a matter of ethics – service (being a servant, slave: *dāsatva*) – which then too is a matter of a spiritual life lived entirely in accord with dependence on God. One cannot end as a philosopher, but certainly one can begin as a philosopher.

When we get to the reflections on the *Tiru Mantra* (and other mantras) and the inner truths of the tradition (sections i, j, k), it is obviously the case that we have now become involved in insider discourse that requires respect for the mantras and a willingness to listen to and accept the traditional oral teaching of Appuḷḷār, Deśika’s own teacher. These points are ostensibly inaccessible to non-Śrīvaiṣṇavas, and of little interest, and yet – this is the key point – for Deśika there is a natural and inevitable flow from the philosophical explication to the scriptural and mantric analyses, and to reflections drawn from the oral tradition.

Finally, the opening and closing verses of the chapter seem intended by Deśika to reach a wider audience that may find Deśika’s arguments hard going, but can still appreciate the loveliness and devotion of such verses. Appreciative readers can thereby begin to appropriate, simply on the basis of beautiful words that “happen” to be rich in potent meaning, the underlying insight into dependence on God as a life-transforming reality. But I suggest that the verses are *more* accessible to readers when they understand the philosophical and linguistic and exegetical arguments in the chapter; for here, too, the boundaries are not fixed, and what is true easily shifts into what is beautiful.

## TREATISE I.15–17: ON THE NATURAL LOVE FOR GOD AND THE FRUSTRATION OF THAT LOVE BY SIN

In the *Treatise* I.15–17 we do not see so dramatic a shift from philosophy to traditional wisdom, but there is still a very imaginative diversity to Sales's discourse, which includes philosophical grounding and a variety of spiritual claims. Here is my outline of the three chapters:

*Treatise* I.15, "Of the affinity there is between God and man"

- a. The testimony of Aristotle; indications from ordinary experience
- b. Human Pleasure in God is natural, but also known from scripture
- c. The analogy of human and divine natures and ways of being and knowing
- d. The reciprocal fulfillment of God and the human
- e. Analogies: mother's milk; erotic affinity; wine and breasts
- f. An appetite satisfied only in God

*Treatise* I.16, "That we have a natural inclination to love God above all things"

- a. The inclination to God is both natural and supernatural
- b. The desire for God persists even in the current state of things
- c. The analogy of a partridge seeking its true mother
- d. The instinct for God is never lost

*Treatise* I.17, “That we have not naturally the power to love God above all things”

- a. The inclination toward God diminished by sin
- b. The testimony of the philosophers
- c. The failure of the philosophers to follow through on their knowledge
- d. Imperfect love and the weakness of the will

Sales first (section I.15.a) stakes out a philosophical starting point, when he begins chapter 15 with reference to Aristotle’s teaching on the proclivity of humans toward the celestial realm, in their search for happiness.<sup>7</sup> What philosophy declares, scripture confirms (section I.15.b)

Enlisting Aristotle as an ally, Sales echoes the classical Christian theological view – of Augustine and Aquinas, for instance – that humans are both innately oriented to God, happy only in that relationship, but also, in the current condition of original sin, unable ever to complete and satisfy that desire for union with God. Strikingly, he then (section I.15.c) takes up in a rather matter of fact fashion the analogy between the nature of the soul’s self-knowledge and the Trinity’s own knowledge of itself. While the latter is of course a specifically Christian doctrine, it is here presented in a rather matter of fact fashion, as accessible in reason to audience members willing to think about this truth that they already know.

Similarly, the reflection (in section I.15.d) on the joys of giving and receiving – the wondrous exchange of God and humans, by which both are fulfilled – does not at first demand any particular Christian insight – until Sales rather definitively determines that giving is better, because Jesus so indicated by his words and example. But clearly Sales is hoping to achieve more by turning (in section I.15.e) to the *Song of Songs*, and then to the images of breast feeding and erotic affinities; he wants to awaken the minds and desires of his readers, to make real his point on the natural intimacy of the self and God.

I.16 is at its core another affirmation of Catholic doctrine: sin damages and diminishes the innate human inclination toward God, but cannot destroy it. Yet here too, Sales offers a variety of reasons and analogies

and does not depend simply on doctrine. Thus, just as a partridge chick raised by a partridge other than its mother instinctively seeks out its own mother, even a wandering soul inevitably and by instinct seeks for its true source, mother, God. The whole of I.16 is at once a careful analysis of the natural realm, which Sales wants to preserve, and a meditation on the role of grace, which for Sales is everywhere in nature.

I.17 is notable also because of its mention of philosophers. Here Sales employs another classic Christian apologetic strategy, both calling the pagan philosophers as witnesses to the truth of the one God and as examples of those who know what is true but do not follow up on it. This reading of the philosophers – sweeping, undocumented in the *Treatise* – is all about applying the judgment of *Romans* 1 to them, a move that requires confidence that Greek philosophers can be thus judged according to the New Testament. But two further points can be made. First, Sales is serious that the testimonies of the philosophers count for something; they do testify to the truth, and reading them illumines the truth of the one true God. Second, attacking the philosophers is not itself a goal. Sales's point (like that of Deśika later on, in chapter 7 of the *Essence*),<sup>8</sup> is that knowledge by itself is of no profit; an honest knower must recognize and live out the implications of what one has found to be true and change one's life. Sales's claim, correct or not, is that many a great philosopher had the right ideas but failed in courage and virtue when it came to stating forthrightly and living honestly what he (or she) had understood to be the case.

Together, the three chapters, with their inscribed references to scripture, the Greek philosophers (and Augustine's views on them), offer an intellectual terrain that is accessible as text and a set of ideas, and yet too an entrée to Christian-specific insights, apologetic and mystical. As one picks up the *Treatise* and begins to read it, one also begins to understand each of the elements Sales brings together, and all of them as interwoven, from the generally accessible to the more specifically Christian insider discourse.

## READING DEŚIKA AND SALES TOGETHER, AS THE FOUNDATION FOR AN INTERCULTURAL REFLECTION

Against the background of a careful reading of the two excerpts – a reading merely suggested here, not fully practised – we can now engage in an additional and also complex operation of intercultural philosophical and theological reflection.

Each text affords access to a reasonable and intelligent reader but draws that reader into more particular and less comfortable modes of insight peculiar to each tradition itself. Reading the *Treatise* as a Roman Catholic, I am reminded of familiar themes, beliefs, and values, and I am taught to see them a little differently and more deeply; reading the *Essence* as a Roman Catholic, I begin to understand the unfamiliar, getting drawn into the ideas and then to beliefs and affective connections of the Śrīvaiṣṇava community. Reading them both together, both become both more and less familiar as expositions of ideas and beliefs and practices, and together create new combinations for consideration in a variety of ways. We can consider in turn issues of content, method, and the transformation of the reader. *Essence* 3 and *Treatise* I.15–17 read together as an intensely interesting and provocative, but also unruly and open-ended, site for an intercultural philosophy or theology that is *philosophical* and *religious* and possibly *mystical* too, if the individual texts and their combination do their work.

### CONTENT

Reading the selected *Essence* and *Treatise* passages together allows us to reflect on the nature of the human in relation to the divine, beginning with basic anthropological and theological notions about human and divine beings. Both Deśika and Sales have strong and similar views about the orientation of all beings to God, and about how humans are in a position to observe this dynamism in nature and in themselves, making a choice to affirm the dynamism and live in accord with it. In a way that is not reducible to theses or general concepts, but which nonetheless is not overly encumbered with tradition-specific claims, these texts, read together, provide for us a site for an intercultural reflection on human nature and

related matters; for they are written as if philosophy and faith rest on a continuum.

If one chooses, one can use these texts as a basis for arguing that there are universal – or at least universalizing – patterns to “the human” and its relation to “the divine”; for both Sales and Deśika argue for the same general pattern of human dependence on the divine, the finite on the transcendent, despite the vast differences in their religious and cultural locations and the utter lack of any shared historical context. However interesting such claims may be, they ought not to replace attention to the texts, since both authors want to do more than make claims about human nature, and their texts are always saying more than any set of claims drawn from them.

Both write with passion, and both put forward affective and imaginative claims and insights about desire and instigative of desire, as a physical and spiritual reality, about the natural and unexpected ways in which desire is fulfilled, and thus too thereby opening paths into the two traditions’ positive religious and even mystical claims. In terms of ethical implications, both point to the ideal of a life entirely dedicated to God, and lived with a sense of not belonging to oneself, and then specify these implications in terms of more articulate communal religious values.

It is still more elusive to think about whether we also find in the *Essence* and the *Treatise* deeper mystical resonances lending credence to the view that mystical experiences are at least similar across religious and cultural boundaries. But one could just as easily accentuate differences in emotion or affect, noticing for instance that Sales’s appeal to the *Song of Songs* and “the kisses of the mouth,” is quite apart from Deśika’s intense but restrained reflections on the graciousness of the divine teacher or the steadfastness of Rāma, Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa in their forest travels.

## METHOD

Each text “works” on multiple levels and makes connections among linguistic, philosophical, theological, mystical, and other tradition-based resources. When the texts are read together, the possibilities are maximized and intensified. Taken seriously, the continuum of traditional, religious, and rational insights written into the *Essence* 3 and *Treatise* I.15–17 facilitates a new conversation that can be philosophical and about human nature

and finitude, or theological and about dependence on God, or pious and tradition-specific, or even a matter of rhetoric, related to the deeper and more particular ways by which writers touch the hearts of attentive readers who are open both to ideas and to religious sentiment. All of this can be thought and written through comparatively, perhaps beginning with the rhetoric of such texts.

This shared reading provides a complex starting point – reference, foundation, directions – for an intercultural reflection, philosophical or theological. Each text is itself a synthesis compounded by its author; together, the paired texts constitute a still more complex conversation in which the reader who is philosophically or theologically inclined reads his or her way back and forth across the spectrum of matters philosophical and theological, or rational and affective.

## CHOICES BY THE AGENT OF AN INTERCULTURAL REFLECTION

If one then reads more widely in the whole of these texts, and then in other texts as well, there will be no end to what can be imagined and understood, philosophically or religiously, by a careful and dedicated reader. If so, the reader has to make choices about how to read and what to privilege, but also can never do so in a way that forecloses other such choices.

All of this then depends on the authors of each text, on the scholar who brings the hitherto unconnected texts together, and on subsequent readers (including the intercultural scholar) who read the two together and manage to shape meanings for them. There is no sure way to prescribe how such readers – from one tradition or the other, or from neither – is to begin to decipher either the *Essence* or the *Treatise* – for example, by preferring historical or philosophical analysis, or instead by plunging more directly into the more “interior” moments of tradition-specific and mystical language. So too, it is up to such readers to decide whether to follow the texts as far as they go, or to stop with any segment of their analysis. And finally, it follows that the various combinations open for an intercultural reflection – stressing the philosophical or the theological or the mystical, highlighting differences or similarities, speaking on a distanced and meta-level or deciding to become autobiographical – are up to the reader.

In all these moments, no particular choices by any given reader can foreclose other such possible choices; and no determinations, however forcefully made, can succeed in stipulating *the* meaning of the reading practice or the consequences to be drawn from it. My approach thus requires attention again to the agent – author, intercultural scholar, reader – and the capacities of that agent to cross boundaries and to learn with agility in the new framework, beginning with what he or she finds more accessible but then also moving to what is less so because of genuine or seeming demands on the agent to decide how and whether to be also a participant. This kind of intercultural theology or philosophy of religion is an inherently provisional practice that one cannot ever be quite finished with. The reading goes on – to great profit – but nonetheless is never done with.

I suggest that this entire process, in which the reader is intensively and continually over time faced with two (or more) potent texts which can be read in various ways but in no way that successfully ends the reading of them, can make the reader into a philosopher or theologian or even mystic, with an openness and selectivity that are appropriate to our times, and with a hopeful openness to the mysteries of which such texts, still and continually available, continue to speak.

## ON THE LIMITS OF MY APPROACH

This is an approach that plays to my strengths and interests, but I would not seriously expect all intercultural work to proceed in this way. It is an approach that has its limits too. It is time-consuming, exhausting, and very slow-moving. However interesting this interplay is, it occurs only on a very small scale. The intercultural conversation is reduced to two cultural and religious traditions, and within that to the writings of specific thinkers and, often enough, as here, to specific manageable sections of such texts. It cannot seriously be justified as merely starting small; at such a pace as I am suggesting and illustrating here, not even a very large section of the engaged traditions could ever be covered. There would be no question of dealing with four or five or six such traditions, even if under ideal circumstances an energetic and learned person might deal with a number of texts, and possibly with a third tradition.

But then the more complex problems I have noticed with regard to the CRIP project re-emerge, should we try to figure out how to streamline things, for the sake of those who want to compare on a grander scale and without the patience to read very carefully over a very long period of time.

But, for now, the proof is in the reading: the following, larger part of this essay is not merely an appendix. Rather, it is the essential site where the work of an intercultural reading takes place, as readers seek to make sense philosophically and religiously of the claims and values proposed by Francis de Sales, Vedānta Deśika, and myself as a writer who has drawn them into my own project.

## II. TEXTS

### *ESSENCE OF THE THREE MYSTERIES*, CHAPTER 3, “ON THE DISTINGUISHING DOCTRINE OF OUR TRADITION” by Vedānta Deśika

#### *a. Opening verse<sup>9</sup>*

“All this world –  
what is and endures, its activity and results –  
is the first maker’s body,  
in accord with rules regarding what it is to be depended  
upon, and the rest:”  
when one sees all this,  
the Lord is seen in the mirror of the “pervasive” mantras,  
and  
one plumbs the workings of the minds  
of those deep, uncreated peaks [our teachers].

*b. The meaning of “distinctive doctrine”<sup>10</sup>*

“Distinctive doctrine” (“*Pratitantra*”) indicates some idea that is not commonly shared; it distinguishes one’s *siddhānta* (firm, core position), such as is not accepted by proponents of other such *siddhāntas*.

*c. The distinguishing feature of our Vedānta: the lord as possessor of all as his body, as support of all, and as the one on whom all depends*

If you ask what is that primary and non-common meaning belonging to our Vedānta system (*darśana*), it is the relationship of body and self between the lord and conscious and non-conscious beings. In this regard, the Lord is the possessor of the body (*śarīri*) – he is he who supports (*dhāraka*), in terms of restriction regarding things that are conscious or non-conscious; he is the controller (*niyanta*) and the one to whom all belongs (*śeṣi*). Conscious and non-conscious beings are the *śarīra* – things which are supported (*dhārya*) with respect to the lord, and also controlled (*niyamya*), and dependent (*śeṣa*). He is the support and controller for conscious and non-conscious beings, by his proper form and will, as prompting their existence, continuation, and activity.

*d. The analogy of beings and their qualities and defining characteristics*

How? Just as the dharmas defining the Lord’s proper form and the *guṇas*, specifying his defined proper form [depend entirely on him but remain distinct], similarly, with respect to all those things that are separate from him, he is the support, without interruption and by his proper form.

He is also the support, as substance, for the *guṇas*, etc., that rely on other substances. Some say that it is by way of the living selves (*jīvas*) that the Lord is the support for the bodies carried by those living souls. Other teachers (*ācāryas*) say that he is support by his proper form, though using the living selves as the means to that.

*e. The Lord supports all by his proper form and his will*

Thus, all things are inseparable specifications with respect to the Lord's proper form, and so their existence, etc., are dependent on the existence of that [divine] abode.

Yet the existence of all things depends on his will; that is, things that are impermanent arise by impermanent wishes, permanent things by his permanent wish. The discerning have distinguished this by the *śloka*,

By your wish alone is the existence of all things.  
[Those which are eternally pleasing to you are eternal,  
eternally by their own proper form exclusively dependent  
on you –  
thus your auspicious *guṇas* are examples for us.]  
(*Vaikuṇṭha Stavam* 36 of Āḷvāṇ)

And so, their continuation – continuance in existence – dependent on the Lord's will – and so it is said that all depends on the Lord's will.

*f. The Lord upholds nature by his proper form and by will*

That heavy things are carried by his will is stated in scripture,  
The heavens, moon, sun, stars, sky, directions, earth, great  
oceans – by the manly power of Vāsudeva, the great self, are  
held in order.

[*Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana Parva* 254.136]

Thus they are rooted in their specific places, so that they don't fall.

If you ask what the proper form of the highest self does for such things that have being, continuation, and activity dependent on his will, it is the will of the highest self that makes it happen that all these various things depend on the proper form of the highest self. Thus, all things depend on the proper form of the Lord and also depend on the Lord's will.

In ordinary life, we see that the body depends on the proper form of that one that possesses the body, and on that one's will. After the time of that self's [living in that body], the body perishes when that living self

leaves it. That this is a dependence on the proper form, and not on the will, is clear in the states of deep sleep, etc.

In the waking state, it abides by the will lest it fall – and so one can say that it is dependent on the will. It is said to be founded on (*adbeyatva*) when it is dependent on the proper form; it is said to be controlled by (*niyamyā*) when dependent on the will.

*g. The relationship of depending and being depended on*

The Lord is the one on whom all depends; as it says,

He established the conscious and the non-conscious in their existence,  
enduring, and restriction, and so forth,  
indicating them as his own – thus the word of the Upaniṣads.  
Being the means and the goal – such is your Reality, not merely your qualities;  
and so, Lord of Śrī Raṅgam, I take you as my refuge, without pretext.

– [*Śrīraṅgarājastava* II.87]

All these things exist for his purpose, and their sole proper way of being is to be for the sake of this Other; he has control of them, and by them he has his glory.

*h. This knowledge of dependence as fruitful and exclusive*

What is the fruit for the conscious being of this support–supported relation? We respond: By this support–supported relation, there is the acquisition of a proper form that definitely is not separable – just as is the case with his knowledge, power, etc. By this dependent–depended upon way of being, in accord with that settled human goal which is in keeping with the self’s own understanding, there develops a taste for that human goal that is in keeping with his proper form. By the dependent–depended upon way of being and by the controller–controlled way of being, in accord with that human goal which is in keeping with his proper form, there is that specific means which has no need [for anything else]. It is this knowledge

that is the fruit. By these, that conscious being becomes one who has no other foundation, no other purpose, no other refuge.

*i. The distinctive teaching is revealed in the three holy mantras*

If you ask how this meaning is present in the first mystery [*rahasya* mantra, the *Tiru Mantra*, *aum namo Nārāyaṇāya*, Om, reverence to Nārāyaṇa]: In the word “Nārāyaṇa,” by the *tatpuruṣa* and *bahuvrīhi* forms of compound, we have both his being the support and the fact that he pervades all. Thus we grasp his proper form as specified by having no other foundation, etc. By the latter two words [in the mantra] which are the source for “being for the sake of the other” and “depending on the other,” we find “having no other purpose” and “having no other refuge.”

As for the jewel of a mantra [the *Dvaya Mantra*] that illumines the practice of taking refuge (*prapatti*), in its first clause, we find “having no other refuge,” and in its latter clause, “having no other purpose.” By both parts, [the *Dvaya Mantra*] illumines having no other foundation. These points are made in the *Carama Śloka* too, explicitly and implicitly.

Thus too, in the *Carama Śloka*, in order to win over the *siddha* means (the existent means, the Lord), we find the specification of the means that is to be accomplished [*sādhya* means, the means to be accomplished, taking-refuge]. By the *Dvaya Mantra*, we learn what needs to be meditated on at the time of performance; the *Tiru Mantra* illumines succinctly, as a small mirror show great forms, all the things that are needed.

*j. The traditional teaching of Appullār on the Tiru Mantra*

In the first word [*aum*], one sees the meanings found in the chariot of Arjuna, and in the verse,

Rāma went in front, [Sītā, whose waist is lovely, in the middle;  
behind, with bow in hand, follows Lakṣmaṇa.]<sup>11</sup>

[*Rāmāyaṇa*, *Arāṇya Kāṇḍa* 3.11.1]

In the second word [*namo*], by the word itself, and by the proper-being [*svabhāva*] underlying that meaning, one knows the meanings that pertain to [the other brothers], Śrī Bharata and Śrī Śatrughan.

The meaning of the word “Nārāyaṇa” is in accord with [what the *alvār* says]:

“I am not, without you; but see, Nārāyaṇa, you without me are not,” [*Nāṇmukaṇ Tiruvantāti* 7]

This is seen when one takes as an example the people of the Kośala land and the emperor’s son.<sup>12</sup>

The main thrust is seen in the first two words [*aum* and *namo*] – that is, respectively, the highest meaning that is reaching the goal, and dependence; that desired service – in which the one on whom all depends delights – lies in the meaning of the third word [Nārāyaṇa] in its dative form. All this is clear in the activity and cessation of activity that belong respectively to Lakṣmana and to his special *avatāra* that is Tiruvaṭi (the serpent Śeṣa<sup>13</sup>).

All this is Appuḷḷār’s way that occasions meditation on the *Tiru Mantra*’s meaning. In the same way, the meanings of the *Dvaya Mantra* and *Carama Śloka* are clear.

### *k. The Tiru Mantra and the freedom distinctive to humans*

In all this, the Lord’s being the one on whom all depend is illumined as a characteristic common to both the conscious and the non-conscious. But this must be reflected on, particularly regarding his being Lord with respect to conscious beings. That is, being-dependent is common to both [conscious and non-conscious beings], but now [with respect to the conscious beings], this is to be meditated on with the conclusive, additional specification of being-a-servant. The dependent–dependent upon relationship is common to both and is to be illumined by the dative [implied] in the first syllable.<sup>14</sup>

[With respect to the Lord and the self], being a servant and being a master are both specified here; this is manifest in the meaning [of Nārāyaṇa]<sup>15</sup> Thus both the general and the specific are found in “Nārāyaṇa.” The general state of dependence here further indicates that [human] state of being a servant and of doing service that pertain to the conscious being. By this specification, the human goal has the form of service.

Similarly, by being the one on whom all depends, the lord is connected to abundance; this specification insures that his goal will come to fruition. With respect to the protection of conscious beings, the Lord is [self-]established and powerful; aside from their behaviour that depends on him, conscious beings have no foundation and remain impotent; such is the connection. The Lord's being the one on whom all depends is non-adventitious and so too his being the controller is non-adventitious; likewise, [individual selves'] total dependence is non-adventitious and so too their being-controlled is non-adventitious. The "one who possesses" [that is, God] thus protects "what he possesses" [that is, living beings]; the "potent one" protects "those who are not potent." When he protects, the Lord protects selves controlled by karma, making them focus on the means [by which they can see the Lord's protection]. This restriction [to dependence on their karma] has to do with his own will.

## L. CONCLUDING TAMIL AND SANSKRIT VERSES

"He gave us our foundation,  
 he supports us,  
 he is the lord controlling us,  
 there is nothing that is not his,  
 he is our father, all is his,  
 there is no equal to him –  
 this one who wears tulasi leaves in his hair;  
 we are at his feet that are of inestimable value":  
 those learned in the Veda know this as its true content. (Tamil)

If in this final age someone most wise  
 knows this unique doctrine taught by the king of ascetics  
 [Rāmānuja],  
 a dawn dispelling the darkness of ignorance,  
 then right there right then  
 the tumultuous waves of chattering arguments,  
 the caprice of those establishing their own various views,  
 will subside at once. (Sanskrit)

TREATISE I.15: OF THE AFFINITY THERE IS BETWEEN GOD  
AND MAN by Francis de Sales<sup>16</sup>

*a. The testimony of Aristotle; indications from ordinary experience*

As soon as man thinks with even a little attention of the divinity, he feels a certain delightful emotion of the heart, which testifies that God is God of the human heart; and our understanding is never so filled with pleasure as in this thought of the divinity, the smallest knowledge of which, as says [Aristotle], the prince of philosophers, is worth more than the greatest knowledge of other things,<sup>17</sup> just as the least beam of the sun is more luminous than the greatest of the moon or stars, yea is more luminous than the moon and stars together. And if some accident terrifies our heart, it immediately has recourse to the Divinity, protesting thereby that when all other things fail him, it alone stands his friend, and that when he is in peril, It only, as his sovereign good, can save and secure him.

*b. Human Pleasure in God is natural, but also known from scripture*

This pleasure, this confidence that man's heart naturally has in God, can spring from no other root than the affinity there is between this divine goodness and man's soul, a great but secret affinity, an affinity that each one knows but few understand, an affinity that cannot be denied nor yet be easily sounded. *We are created to the image and likeness of God* [Genesis 1]: what does this mean but that we have an extreme affinity with his divine majesty?

*c. The analogy of human and divine natures and ways of being and knowing*

Our soul is spiritual, indivisible, immortal; understands and wills freely, is capable of judging, reasoning, knowing, and of having virtues, in which it resembles God. It resides whole in the whole body, and whole in every part thereof, as the divinity is all in all the world, and all in every part

thereof. Man knows and loves himself by produced and expressed acts of his understanding and will, which proceeding from the understanding and the will, and distinct from one another, yet are and remain inseparably united in the soul, and in the faculties from whence they proceed.

In the same way, the Son proceeds from the Father as his knowledge expressed, and the Holy Ghost as love breathed forth and produced from the Father and the Son, both the Persons being distinct from one another and from the Father, and yet inseparable and united, or rather one same, sole, simple, and entirely one indivisible divinity.

*d. The reciprocal fulfillment of God and the human*

But besides this affinity of likenesses, there is an incomparable correspondence between God and man, for their reciprocal perfection: not that God can receive any perfection from man, but because as man cannot be perfected but by the divine goodness, so the divine goodness can scarcely so well exercise its perfection outside itself, as upon our humanity: the one has great want and capacity to receive good, the other great abundance and inclination to bestow it. Nothing is so agreeable to poverty as a liberal abundance, nor to a liberal abundance as a needy poverty, and by how much the good is more abundant, by so much more strong is the inclination to pour forth and communicate itself. By how much more the poor man is in want, so much the more eager is he to receive, as a void is to fill itself.

The meeting then of abundance and indigence is most sweet and agreeable, and one could scarcely have said whether the abounding good has a greater contentment in spreading and communicating itself, or the failing and needy good in receiving and in drawing to itself, until Our Savior had told us that *it is more blessed to give than to receive*. [Acts 20. 35]. Now where there is more blessedness there is more satisfaction, and therefore the divine goodness receives greater pleasure in giving than we in receiving.

*e. Analogies: mother's milk; erotic affinity; wine and breasts*

Mothers' breasts are sometimes so full that they must offer them to some child, and though the child takes the breast with great avidity, the nurse

offers it still more eagerly, the child pressed by its necessity, and the mother by her abundance.

The sacred spouse wished for the holy kiss of union: *O, said she, let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.* [*Song of Songs* 1.2]. But is there affinity enough, O well-beloved spouse of the well-beloved, between thee and thy loving one to bring to the union which thou desirest? Yes, says she: give me it; this kiss of union, O thou dear love of my heart: *for thy breasts are better than wine, smelling sweet of the best ointment* [*Song of Songs* 1.2–3]. New wine works and boils in itself by virtue of its goodness and cannot be contained within the casks; but thy breasts are yet better, they press thee more strongly, and to draw the children of thy heart to them, they spread a perfume attractive beyond all the scent of ointments.

### *f. An appetite satisfied only in God*

Thus, Theotimus, our emptiness has need of the divine abundance by reason of its want and necessity, but God's abundance has no need of our poverty but by reason of the excellence of his perfection and goodness; a goodness which is not at all bettered by communication, for it acquires nothing in pouring itself out of itself; on the contrary, it gives: but our poverty would remain wanting and miserable, if it were not enriched by the divine abundance. Our soul then seeing that nothing can perfectly content her, and that nothing the world can afford is able to fill her capacity, considering that her understanding has an infinite inclination ever to know more, and her will an insatiable appetite to love and find the good; – has she not reason to cry out:

Ah! I am not then made for this world, there is a sovereign good on which I depend, some infinite workman who has placed in me this endless desire of knowing, and this appetite which cannot be appeased!

And therefore I must tend and extend towards Him, to unite and join myself to the goodness of Him to whom I belong and whose I am! Such is the affinity between God and man's soul.

## TREATISE I.16: THAT WE HAVE A NATURAL INCLINATION TO LOVE GOD ABOVE ALL THINGS

### *a. The inclination to God is both natural and supernatural*

If there could be found any men who were in the integrity of original justice in which Adam was created, though otherwise not helped by another assistance from God than that which he affords to each creature, in order that it may be able to do the actions befitting its nature, such men would not only have an inclination to love God above all things but even naturally would be able to put into execution just such an inclination.

For as this heavenly author and master of nature co-operates with and lends his strong hand to fire to spring on high, to water to flow towards the sea, to earth to sink down to its centre and stay there – so having himself planted in man's heart a special natural inclination not only to love good in general but to love in particular and above all things his divine goodness which is better and sweeter than all things – the sweetness of his sovereign providence required that he should contribute to these blessed men of whom we speak as much help as should be necessary to practice and effectuate that inclination.

This help would be on the one hand natural, as being suitable to nature, and tending to the love of God as author and sovereign master of nature, and on the other hand it would be supernatural because it would correspond not with the simple nature of man but with nature adorned, enriched and honoured by original justice, which is a supernatural quality proceeding from a most special favour of God. But as to the love above all things that such help would enable these men to practice, it would be called natural because virtuous actions take their names from their objects and motives, and this love of which we speak would only tend to God as acknowledged to be author, lord and sovereign of every creature by natural light only, and consequently to be amiable and estimable above all things by natural inclination and tendency.

*b. The desire for God persists even in the current state of things*

And although now our human nature be not endowed with that original soundness and righteousness which the first man had in his creation, but on the contrary be greatly depraved by sin, yet still the holy inclination to love God above all things stays with us, as also the natural light by which we see his sovereign goodness to be more worthy of love than all things; and it is impossible that one thinking attentively upon God, yea even by natural reasoning only, should not feel a certain movement of love which the secret inclination of our nature excites in the bottom of our hearts, by which at the first apprehension of this chief and sovereign object, the will is taken, and perceives itself stirred up to a complacency in it.

*c. The analogy of a partridge seeking its true mother*

It happens often amongst partridges that one steals away another's eggs with intention to sit on them, whether moved by greediness to become a mother, or by a stupidity which makes them mistake their own, and behold a strange thing, yet well supported by testimony! – the young one which was hatched and nourished under the wings of a stranger partridge, at the first call of the true mother, who had laid the egg whence she was hatched, quits the thief-partridge, goes back to the first mother, and puts herself in her brood, from the correspondence which she has with her first origin. Yet this correspondence appeared not, but remained secret, shut up and as it were sleeping in the bottom of nature, till it met with its object; when suddenly excited, and in a sort awakened, it produces its effect, and turns the young partridge's inclination to its first duty.

*d. The instinct for God is never lost*

It is the same, Theotimus, with our heart, which though it be formed, nourished and bred amongst corporal, base, and transitory things, and in a manner under the wings of nature, notwithstanding, at the first look it throws on God, at its first knowledge of him, the natural and first inclination to love God, which was dull and imperceptible, awakes in an instant, and suddenly appears as a spark from amongst the ashes, which touching our will gives it a movement of the supreme love due to the sovereign and first principle of all things.

## TREATISE I.17: THAT WE HAVE NOT NATURALLY THE POWER TO LOVE GOD ABOVE ALL THINGS

### *a. The inclination toward God diminished by sin*

Eagles have a great heart, and much strength of flight, yet they have incomparably more sight than flight and extend their vision much quicker and further than their wings.

So our souls, animated with a holy natural inclination towards the divinity, have far more light in the understanding to see how lovable it is than force in the will to love it. Sin has much more weakened man's will than darkened his intellect, and the rebellion of the sensual appetite, which we call concupiscence, does indeed disturb the understanding, but still it is against the will that it principally stirs up sedition and revolt: so that the poor will, already quite infirm, being shaken with the continual assaults that concupiscence directs against it, cannot make so great progress in divine love as reason and natural inclination suggest to it that it should do.

### *b. The testimony of the philosophers*

Alas! Theotimus, what fine testimonies not only of a great knowledge of God, but also of a strong inclination towards him, have been left by those great philosophers, Socrates, Plato, Trismegistus, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Seneca, Epictetus?

#### SOCRATES

Socrates, the most highly praised amongst them, came to the clear knowledge of the unity of God, and felt in himself such an inclination to love him that, as Saint Augustine testifies,<sup>18</sup> many were of opinion that he never had any other aim in teaching moral philosophy than to purify minds that they might better contemplate the sovereign good, which is the simple unity of the Divinity.

## PLATO

And as for Plato, he sufficiently declares himself in his definition of philosophy and of a philosopher, saying that to do the part of a philosopher is nothing else but to love God and that a philosopher is no other thing than a lover of God.<sup>19</sup> What shall I say of the great Aristotle, who so efficaciously proves the unity of God<sup>20</sup> and has spoken so honourably of it in so many places?

### *c. The failure of the philosophers to follow through on their knowledge*

But, O eternal God! those great spirits which had so great an inclination to love it were all wanting in force and courage to love it well. By visible creatures *they have known the invisible things of God*, yea even *his eternal power also and divinity*, says the Apostle, *so that they are inexcusable. Because that, when they knew God, they have not glorified him as God, or given thanks.* [Romans 1. 20ff.] They glorified him indeed in some sort, attributing to him sovereign titles of honour, yet they did not glorify him as they ought; that is, they did not glorify him above all things, not having the courage to destroy idolatry, but communicating with idolaters, *detaining the truth* which they knew *in injustice*, prisoner in their hearts, and preferring the honour and vain repose of their lives before the honour due unto God, *they grew vain in their knowledge.*

## SOCRATES

Is it not a great pity, Theotimus, to see Socrates, as Plato reports, speak upon his deathbed concerning the gods as though there had been many, he knowing so well that there was but one only?<sup>21</sup> Is it not a thing to be deplored that Plato who understood so clearly the truth of the divine unity should ordain that sacrifice should be offered to many gods?<sup>22</sup>

## HERMES TRISMEGISTUS

And is it not a lamentable thing that Mercury Trismegistus should so basely lament and grieve over the abolition of idolatry,<sup>23</sup> who on so many occasions had spoken so worthily of the divinity?

## EPICETETUS

But above all I wonder at the poor good man Epictetus, whose words and sentences are so sweet in our tongue, in the translation which the learned and agreeable pen of Jean de Saint-François Goulu, Provincial of the Congregation of the Feuillants in the Gauls, has recently put before us.<sup>24</sup> For what a pity it is, I pray you, to see this excellent philosopher speak of God sometimes with such relish, feeling, and zeal that one would have taken him for a Christian coming from some holy and profound meditation, and yet again from time to time talking of gods after the Pagan manner! Alas! this good man, who knew so well the unity of God and had so much delight in his goodness, why had he not the holy jealousy of the divine honour, so as not to stumble or dissemble in a matter of so great consequence?

### *d. Imperfect love and the weakness of the will*

In a word, Theotimus, our wretched nature spoilt by sin, is like palm-trees in this land of ours, which indeed make some imperfect productions and as it were experiments of fruits, but to bear entire, ripe, and seasoned dates – that is, reserved for hotter climates.

For so our human heart naturally produces certain beginnings of God's love, but to proceed so far as to love him above all things, which is the true ripeness of the love due unto this supreme goodness, – this belongs only to hearts animated and assisted with heavenly grace, and which are in the state of holy charity. This little imperfect love of which nature by itself feels the stirrings is but a will without will, a will that would but wills not, a sterile will, which does not produce true effects, a will sick of the palsy, which sees the healthful pond of holy love, but has not the strength to throw itself into it. [*John 5.7*]<sup>25</sup> To conclude, this will is an abortion of good will, which has not the life of generous strength necessary to effectually prefer God before all things. Whereupon the Apostle speaking in the person of the sinner, cries out: *To will good is present with me, but to accomplish that which is good I find not.* [*Romans 7.18*]

## Notes

- 1 On the problem of reading carefully and the resistance of texts to selective readings, see my recent essay, “Augustine, Apuleius, and Hermes Trismegistus: The City of God and Advice on How (Not) to Read Hindu Texts,” in Kim Paffenroth, ed., *Augustine and World Religions* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2008), 141–72.
- 2 *The Human Condition; Ultimate Realities; Religious Truth*. 3 vols. The Comparative Religious Ideas Project. Edited by Robert C. Neville (New York: SUNY Press, 2000).
- 3 Francis X. Clooney, S.J., *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries Between Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- 4 *Beyond Compare: St. Francis de Sales and Śrī Vedānta Deśika on Loving Surrender to God* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008).
- 5 See “Forms of Philosophizing: The Case of Chapter 7 of Vedānta Deśika’s *Śrīmad Rahasya Trayā Sāra*,” Satya Nilayam and “Passionate Comparison: The Intensification of Affect in Interreligious Reading – A Hindu-Christian Example,” *Harvard Theological Review* 98, no. 4 (2005): 367–90.
- 6 See, for instance, Paragraphs 13–17 (SS Raghavachar tr.).
- 7 In the *Treatise*, de Sales mentions Aristotle by name fourteen times, Plato six times, and other philosophers occasionally in the *Treatise*. See also XI.10, in which he attacks pagan virtue as self-indulgence.
- 8 See Clooney, “Forms of Philosophizing: The Case of Chapter 7 of Vedānta Deśika’s *Śrīmad Rahasya Trayā Sāra*,” *Satya Nilayam: Chennai Journal of Intercultural Philosophy* 8 (August 2005): 21–33.
- 9 I have consulted the Ayyangar translation (1956), but the translation here is my own. In both the *Essence* and *Treatise*, subtitles are my additions.
- 10 In his recent commentary on this chapter, the Ahobila Math Jeer Swāmi indicates that Deśika explains his use of pratitantra in the *Nyayaparīsuddhī*, but I have not been able to discern which passage he means.
- 11 The *Sārāsvadīnī* says that the example of Arjuna indicates the *śeṣa-śeṣi* relation, and the *Rāmāyaṇa* verse indicates, with Rāma, Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa, the respective components of the a-u-m sequence.
- 12 That is, the inability of the people of Ayodhyā to live without Rāma.
- 13 *Śeṣa* is thus a “totally dependent being” and also “the serpent entirely at the service of Nārāyaṇa.”
- 14 That is, the “a” in Aum stands for the Lord and is in the dative, as is “Nārāyaṇa.”
- 15 Understood to mean, “He is the support [*ayana*] for all beings [*nara*].”
- 16 I have used the Mackey translation. See Clooney’s letter of correction. *Treatise on the Love of God by St. Francis de Sales*. Translated by Henry Benedict Mackey, OSB. Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers Inc. 1997 [1884].

- 17 By Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals* 1.5 [part] “Of things constituted by nature some are ungenerated, imperishable, and eternal, while others are subject to generation and decay. The former are excellent beyond compare and divine, but less accessible to knowledge. The evidence that might throw light on them, and on the problems which we long to solve respecting them, is furnished but scantily by sensation; whereas respecting perishable plants and animals we have abundant information, living as we do in their midst, and ample data may be collected concerning all their various kinds, if only we are willing to take sufficient pains. Both departments, however, have their special charm. The scanty conceptions to which we can attain of celestial things give us, from their excellence, more pleasure than all our knowledge of the world in which we live; just as a half glimpse of persons that we love is more delightful than a leisurely view of other things, whatever their number and dimensions. On the other hand, in certitude and in completeness our knowledge of terrestrial things has the advantage. Moreover, their greater nearness and affinity to us balances somewhat the loftier interest of the heavenly things that are the objects of the higher philosophy.” Sales refers to but does not quote the text.
- 18 *City of God*, VIII, 3. The editor of the *Treatise* notes that the references to *The City of God* are noted by de Sales himself.
- 19 *City of God*, VIII, 9.
- 20 *Metaphysics*, 12.10; *The World* (near the end).
- 21 *City of God*, VIII, 12.
- 22 *City of God*, VIII, 12.
- 23 *City of God*, VIII, 23–24.
- 24 In his *Les propos d’Épictète, recueillis par Arrian, Auteur Grec, son disciple* [1609].
- 25 With reference to the pool of water at Siloam, able to heal after being touched by an angel.