

HINDUISM, CATHOLICISM, AND THE TRINITY

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In his by now world-famous encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II made a positively exceptional statement, remarkably important for any Catholic philosopher or theologian committed to the directives of Vatican II's Declaration *Nostra Aetate*. In the context of the theme of the interaction between philosophy and theology, the Pope wrote, "In India particularly, it is the duty of Christians now to draw from this rich heritage the elements compatible with their faith, in order to enrich Christian thought" (72). In this article, I attempt to obey this admonition by exploring elements in a Hindu experience of the divine that I believe complement and enrich Catholic reflection on the Trinity. To claim that Christian thought needs enriching doesn't mean of course that there aren't already valuable treasures stored up within the tradition of Christian reflection. On the contrary, it is a call to find new riches precisely by rediscovering the ancient ones and by re-familiarizing ourselves with the ways in which they were first discovered.

Revelation's first encounter with philosophy was surely with Greek philosophy, a providential encounter that came to perfection in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas. This classical Christian heritage in philosophy certainly deserves the name Greco-Latin, and Thomas draws on not only the venerable doctors in the Greco-Latin tradition, but all the ancient doctors of the Church. The Pope underscores the claim that the very hand of God can be discerned in the history of Greek philosophy as it came to maturity at a providential time. As this *kairos* converged with the "fullness of time" when "God sent his Son born of woman," it generated, beginning especially with St. Clement of Alexandria, an important synthesis of faith and reason, of philosophy and theology, that served to bring many to salvation. This is why as the Pope calls attention to India's great metaphysical systems, he insists nonetheless,

[T]he Church cannot abandon what she has gained from her enculturation in the world of Greco-Latin thought. To reject this heritage would be to deny the providential plan of God who guides his Church down the paths of time and history. This criterion is valid for the Church in every age, even for the Church of the future, who will judge herself enriched by all that comes from today's engagement with Eastern cultures and will find in this inheritance fresh cues for fruitful dialogue with the cultures which will emerge as humanity moves into the future. (72)

Though Christianity is a monotheistic religion that has much in common with the other two monotheistic traditions, to present it simply as such is misleading.¹ For in Christianity God is a *community*. For philosophers such as Clement, the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, though a mystery, helped solve the central philosophical problem of the one and the many. But the enlightenment was reciprocal. Not only did the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, once accepted as true through faith, shed light on the age-old problems of philosophy, but wrestling with the age-old problems in philosophy, also shed light on the mystery of the Trinity.

Faith perfects reason, but a reason enlightened by faith continues to explore what it believes in order to further strengthen it. This does not detract from the fact that faith is essentially a gift, but underscores the fact that reason itself, whether enlightened by faith or not, is essentially a gift as well. The synthesis that took place between Christian revelation and Greek philosophy was great precisely because Revelation had to confront not only the truths of philosophy, but also the truth of philosophy's problems. The energy generated by this sustained confrontation forced many precious stones of theological, philosophical, and cultural value, to emerge. As human beings began to know and love the Triune God more and more directly and intimately after Christ's *kenôsis*, philosophy's problems were "solved" precisely because a new appreciation of 'being' emerged. Perhaps we could say that the awareness of 'being' as 'existence'² took place within the context of theological and philosophical reflection on the dynamism of the Triune God revealed in Christ.

Another great confrontation, similar to the one that took place in the first one and a half millennia of Christianity, is ready to take place between Christianity and Indian thought, and it promises to be both challenging and fruitful. But as John Paul II makes clear, the Greco-Latin heritage is a criterion that is valid for the Church in

every age. Thus, what I attempt to do in the present article is to re-present the Church's teaching on the Trinity using traditional Greco-Latin philosophical concepts, which still have great fecundity since they have developed within that new awareness of being to which I referred above. However, instead of trying to reveal that fecundity through a pain-staking analysis of the philosophical development that led to it, a work that has already been done by many before, I want to show how these concepts both complement and are complemented by certain philosophical and religious (theological) truths in the Indian tradition. Even though neo-scholasticism succeeded in many important ways, it was also the case that, because it sometimes succumbed to the very kind of rationalism it was reacting to, it tended to preclude unwittingly the religious and humane dimensions of philosophy. Now since such dimensions are so plentiful in Indian thought, John Paul II has rightly pointed in that direction: "A great spiritual impulse leads Indian thought to seek an experience which would liberate the spirit from the shackles of time and space and would therefore acquire absolute value. The dynamic of this quest for liberation provides the context for great metaphysical systems" (72).

I remember a discussion I once had with a learned theologian and deacon of the Church, who objected strongly to my insistence on using terms such as 'nature,' 'generation,' 'spiration,' 'essence,' 'active,' 'relation,' 'passive,' 'opposition,' 'procession,' and 'hypostasis' to speak about the mystery of the Trinity. When I conceded and suggested that he introduce another linguistic apparatus, I discovered he didn't have one. It wasn't that he was unfamiliar with this tradition, but he was convinced that the concepts had lost their meaning. In many ways I agreed with him, but the point I tried to make was that it was up to the Catholic philosopher and theologian to find a way to make the old terms live again. This didn't mean, I attempted to explain, that we couldn't introduce new terms, or that we couldn't be more biblical in our language, or even that we couldn't introduce a new metaphysical system altogether, but I claimed then, and still maintain, that even with the most ingenious systems – such as the new system of Rielian philosophy, for instance – we are forced to wrestle with the linguistic apparatus that we have inherited. And rather than viewing this as a drawback, I think we should accept it with gratitude, for it is a solid tradition on which to build, even if we are, as we must, to criticize it. My experience has been that we are all too ready to throw out the old philosophical concepts without really plumbing their depths.

Let me first begin with the term *procession*. The traditional meaning of this term points to the activities or movements of knowledge and love. But the movement here is an end in itself, unlike locomotion, which has a starting point and a finish line. So rather than a race, what we have is a dance. This eternal dance involves the two distinct, but never separate, activities of knowledge and love. For one can never love that which one does not somehow understand, and one can never understand that which one does not somehow love. Traditional speculative explanations speak of the Son proceeding eternally from the Father by way of *generation* and the Holy Spirit proceeding eternally from the Father through the Son by way of *spiration*. Generation concerns knowledge and the intellect, whereas spiration concerns love and the will. Again, these are not exclusive, but are complementary. The former may be spoken of as a *proceeding forth* from, and the latter as a *proceeding back* to, with each procession associated with two *relations* respectively. The relation of the Father to the Son and the relation of the Son to the Father are the first two relations. These are associated with the first procession. Then we have the relation of the Father and the Son to the Holy Spirit and the Relation of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son. These third and fourth relations are associated with the second procession. The relations are real; they are not simply mental or logical relations.

The first relation of the Father to the Son is also spoken of as *active generation*. That is to say that the Father is the *knower*. The second relation of the Son to the Father is spoken of as *receptive generation*. The Son is the *known*. Or to put it in biblical terms, the Father is the *speaker*; the Son is the *spoken* word. By eternally speaking but one word, the Father says everything that can ever be said. This is an expression, among other things, of the Father's omniscience, which he eternally gives to his Son. The Father knows himself as Father in the Son. The Son knows himself as Son in the Father. The third relation is spoken of as an *active spiration*. The fourth relation is spoken of as a *receptive spiration*. As these two relations are associated with the second procession, which involves the eternal return of the Son to the Father, the third relation (active spiration) is contained, as it were, in the fourth relation (receptive spiration). In other words, of the four real relations, only the active generation, the receptive generation, and the receptive spiration are really distinct from one another. The active spiration is not really distinct from either the active generation or from the receptive generation; it is rather virtually distinct from them. It is

only really distinct from the receptive spiration. The receptive spiration, which constitutes the person of the Holy Spirit, contains within it a relation that is really distinct from itself, but not really distinct from the first and second relation. The three really distinct relations are the three really distinct persons. And there is no real distinction between the persons and the relations. The Divine Persons are the Divine Relations and vice-versa.

To say that the third relation (active spiration) stands in opposition to the fourth relation (receptive spiration) only is another way of saying that the third relation is contained within the fourth. The key to understanding why is both the third and fourth relations are associated with the second procession. The procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father through the Son is to be identified with the eternal return of the Son to the Father. When the Son returns to the Father, his relation to the Father is altered. This alteration, however, is virtual, not real. The Son is forever receptive generation and the Father is forever active generation. But in his return to the Father, the Father, as it were, enters into a place of receptivity in order to eternally receive the Son back. The Son, though always a receptive relation, returns actively to the Father. This active dimension, only virtually distinct from both Fatherhood and Sonship, is really distinct from the Holy Spirit, who is receptive spiration.

Created beings participate in this mystery. It is like the son who comes back to his father when the father has aged to the point where he can no longer take care of himself. This, like all affirmative language about God is only an analogy, but it may help. As the son serves his father in this condition, the father's relation to his son is now completely receptive, but in spite of this changed relation, the son is forever his father's son. Thus, his relation to his father is still essentially receptive. If the father has loved his son, then his son will come back in love to serve him who first gave him his very being. If the son was not loved, he will not return to his father.

Now the Son and the Holy Spirit eternally proceed from the Father and therefore their respective relations to the Father are always, first and foremost, receptive. But there is an active dimension in the Son's return, which involves the Holy Spirit. A few more analogies may prove helpful here. If the teacher's relation to his student is forever and exclusively active, and he never steps back to let the student reveal his own internalization of the knowledge he has imparted to him, then no real teacher/student relationship exists; in fact, no genuine knowledge has been ex-changed. Every

good teacher, who really *loves* the student to whom he is giving knowledge, will step back at the right time and let the student return. In other words, it is impossible to transmit truth without love. This is radically different than simply giving information, which does not require persons to love. One reason why students often get so bored with their teachers is that they sense the lack of anything important happening. In other words, they seem to know when they are really receiving knowledge and when they are just being “used” to fulfill an impersonal function that lacks any significant meaning. These analogies are admittedly somewhat strained, but may point us in the right direction.

The three Divine Persons of the Trinity, then, have a communal life wherein they exchange knowledge and love according to a sacred order. Each divine person possesses equally and totally the numerically one Divine Nature, but each of the persons possesses it differently. They don't share the Divine Nature, of course, because this would mean that the Divine Nature is more than one and can be divided up. This is why the Council fathers said “The Son is God in every way that the Father is God *except* that he is not the Father.” The Son is the known, not the knower, but since he has been known in love, he enters, again through love, into the place of the knower. As the mutual love of the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is present when the Son goes out from the Father and present when the Son returns to the Father, but in the first case his presence is purely receptive, in the second case, his presence is also active in the Son. The Son, in eternal obedience to the Father, like a hand, plays his knowledge/love melody, the Holy Spirit, like another, plays a different complementary love/knowledge-melody. Both hands obey the artist-Father, who eternally receives the combined effect of this activity as he revels in the joy and beauty of the song. This image came to me once when listening to one of Bach's piano concertos, each hand doing its own thing, two hands playing in perfect harmony, perfectly fulfilling the command of the artist - and for no other reason than the goodness and beauty of the concerto itself.

Speculative theology, deeply rooted in the categories of Greek philosophy, tries to get a hold of the mystery whereby the three divine persons know and love one another. But for the one not familiar with these categories, and indeed with the whole discovery of being that began with the first metaphysician, Parmenides, such speculative thought is bound to disappoint. As already mentioned, the neo-scholastic attempt was admirable and successful, precisely because it rediscovered the dynamic notion of

being, but for reasons related to the nature of what it was attacking, it also fell short of making philosophy, and thus speculative theology, live again. One way of bringing out the rich meanings hidden in this linguistic apparatus is to hold it up to the light of the wisdom contained in Holy Scripture, a wisdom that molded the categories and language in the first place. The book of Holy Scripture I have in mind might surprise since it is not even part of the New Testament. It is the *Song of Songs - Shir HaShirim* in Hebrew. Another complementary way is to hold it up to the *cultural* light of the eternal wisdom contained in a Hindu experience of the Divine

Important Jewish and Christian exegetes³ have compared the *Song of Songs* to the Holy of Holies in the Temple. And not a few Christian readings have seen in the opening line of the Song a hint and foreshadowing of the mystery of the Trinity: *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.*⁴ Mainline Jewish readings have long understood the Shulamite girl of the Song as a symbol of Israel and the King as a symbol of God. Thus, they saw three main elements at play: the lover, the beloved, and the love between them. Christian readings have long seen the Song as pointing to the ineffable inscrutability of the Trinitarian love both in itself and for creation, which participates in and reflects this love. The Father was seen as the Lover, the Son was seen as the Beloved, and the Holy Spirit was seen as the love between them. Or in the words of the Song: *Let him kiss me* implores the Father, *the mouth* refers to the Beloved Son, and *the kiss* embodies the Holy Spirit who unites the Father and Son. And then on another plane: the one Triune God was seen as the Lover, and all of creation itself was seen as the beloved. The third element, again, was seen as that of the love between the creator and creation.

Though all of creation participates in the being of the Trinity, the Song shows us that human *eros* participates in a particularly unique way. Of all the different kinds of love, *eros* perhaps can help us to understand best the Trinitarian exchange of love. This may be one reason why, on his deathbed, St. John of the Cross interrupted the Carmelite prior who had been reading to him the prayers of recommendation for the soul, to ask him to talk rather about the Song of Songs. After the verses of the Song were read to him, all he could say was "Oh, what precious pearls!"⁵

To put the doctrine in the context of *eros* love, and in the context of an Indian experience of the Divine, helps to bring it to life. In the following extract from a rather obscure novel I wrote

about an Assistant Professor who sought to do this very thing, I have tried to illustrate what I mean.

And although he was becoming disillusioned with academic activity in general, he was successful in the academic environment. He knew that, given his familial responsibilities, he couldn't just give it all up. Not a few of his students literally worshipped him, which at times proved to be near disastrous, especially when these students were young, beautiful, and female. His family and friends joked with him about it and he didn't take it very seriously either until once he found himself very involved with a particular young lady, who unexpectedly and mysteriously entered fiercely into his life and soul. It was the first time in thirteen years of combined teaching in America and the Middle East that such a thing had happened with one of his students.

She fell in love with him, as she later told him, while he was giving a lecture on the epic of *Gilgamesh*. He had been drawing a comparison between it and Homer's *Odyssey* and claiming that both epics dealt in similar ways with the necessary tension between the wilderness and domestic life. Enkidu, the wild man, in the older Akkadian epic, was somehow analogous to Kalypso in the Greek epic, he argued.

"I've read Homer," cried one student, "but I don't see your point at all sir."

"What I mean is that Enkidu is the one that first prevents Gilgamesh from settling down to a domestic life of marriage and children, and Kalypso, as you know, also threatens the domestic life of Odysseus. Both Enkidu and Kalypso represent different dimensions of human instinct, which are not simply negative realities, but necessary ones for the very taming of human instinct. In other words, the same forces that endanger us are the very same ones that sustain and refurbish us."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Well some of you are still familiar with rural living, think about it in terms of our cultivation of the earth, in terms of the farm and the wilderness. I think it was Sir Albert Howard who said something like 'to learn the fertility of the farm, we must study the ferociousness of the forest.'"

At this, a favorite poem spontaneously came to mind which cleverly connected the related themes and with ample ex-

pression he recited it for his students with unaffected conviction:

*Whose woods these are, I think I know
His house is in the village though
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow*

*My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Beneath the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year*

*He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake*

*The woods are lovely dark and deep
But I have promises to keep
And miles to go before I sleep
And miles to go before I sleep*

There was a general quiet in the room once he had finished and a few had contented smiles on their faces. Dr. Sleiman was pleased that he'd delighted them and genuinely satisfied that they'd learned something important. But his delight turned hastily to anguish when one student hooted out "Sir Albert... who... wrote the poem sir?"

"No, No, the poem was penned by Robert Frost", he said, "the eminent American poet. Sir Albert Howard was ... Oh never mind, never mind."

"Should we know those names for the test?" complained one student.

"No. No. My only point is there's a lot of wisdom in these ancient epics; the people who wrote them were positively intelligent and we can learn a lot from their insights; they were remarkably advanced."

"But as compared to what?" fired back one student without even raising his hand. "You surely don't want to compare our advanced civilization to their's, do you sir?"

"Yes, I am doing just that."

“But we have automobiles and television sets; things those ancient and medieval societies couldn’t even conceive of.”

The student’s tone was rather mischievous, causing some of his friends to chuckle. Thomas was ready to launch into his tirade against what he considered to be two of the most destructive inventions of the modern world, but he constrained himself and wondered whether it would make any difference, especially since he had not yet given up either his own car or television, though he wanted to desperately.

“If it were just up to me, I would give them up in a heart-beat, but I must live in this oppressively modern mechanized world,” he said under his breath.

He wondered at times like this whether his teaching vocation had any meaning. The misconceptions and prejudices were so deep seated in so many of his students, and even in so many of his colleagues, that he doubted whether they could ever be overcome. Inevitably, however, a savior would take flesh in the form of another question put forth by another student that would lift him out of the distress of his disheartenment:

“Could you give us another example of the kind of wisdom you are referring to sir?”

“Why certainly, Juliet. Notice the sustained meditation on the different kinds of *love* in these epics. And notice how this meditation is connected to another meditation on the beauty and wisdom in nature, a meditation that has all but ceased due to the way in which modern technology has tried to master nature.”

Actually, she couldn’t recall precisely if it was during his explanation of the different kinds of love or during his recitation of the line from Frost, “*the woods are lovely dark and deep, but I have promises to keep,*” that she actually gave herself up to him forever, but she knew that it had happened sometime during the Enkidu presentation.

“What do you mean by the different kinds of love, sir?”

“Well, the ancients had different words for different kinds of love. First there was *storge*: that is to say, family love; the natural and mutual affection of parents and children and of brothers and sisters for one another, which was sometimes expanded to similar relationships such as that of a King and his people. Then there was *philia*: the happy love of intimate friends, usually, but not exclusively, between members of the same sex. Then they had *eros*: a passionate and wild love between a man and a woman with an energizing fecundity that leads to a deep and

joyful renewal of life leading back to *storge* in the reality of the child. And finally, *agape*: a radically transcendent and incomprehensible divine love whose sacrificial immanence unites, orders, and perfects all of the other loves in totally unpredictable and mysterious ways. This latter word for love, although in use in Greek before the Christian era, was immortalized by the writers of the New Testament when they used it to express the essence of God as revealed in Christ Crucified.”

Many of his students had become notably interested while others had just drifted away.

“Now just how this ordering and perfecting of all the other loves by *agape* takes place is one of the great Christian mysteries and can never be explained fully or defined. The best way perhaps to begin to say something meaningful about it is to turn our attention to the Christian teaching on the Holy Trinity, wherein we are given a glance into the secret essence of God’s inner life. There we find that God is a community of persons who love one another infinitely and eternally. That is to say, God is not simply one person, with different masks, but three real distinct persons whose eternal *ex-change* of knowledge and love is so hot and so fast that it can never be measured. Thus it is outside of time if we understand time to be a measure of change.”

At this point one of his Muslim students, who had become restless, firmly stated, “then this means there is multiplicity in God; in which case, Christianity is not a monotheistic religion like Judaism or Islam.”

“Precisely Ahmed, very good.”

Some of the Christian students were puzzled by their teacher’s answer and were visibly irritated.

“Dr. Sleiman, sir, with all due respect, I think you’re wrong. Christians believe in One God just like Jews and Muslims. Everyone knows this. What do you mean by confirming Ahmed’s statement that Christianity is not a monotheistic religion like Judaism or Islam?”

“I mean that God is not a *community* in Judaism or in Islam; in Christianity he is, that’s all. To be sure, Christians are not polytheists. They believe that the three persons each possess the *one* all-good, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-beautiful, indivisible nature. One nature, three persons! Or, if you prefer, one *what*, three *who’s*! But these three *who’s* that is to say, three persons, have relations with one another. They have a communal life.

“Can we get back to *love* sir,” said one student impatiently.

“We’ve never left it, Nadima. Just be patient and you’ll see the connection soon enough.”

The idea of diversity or multiplicity in God was so foreign to Ahmed’s mind that the strain began to show on his face. “For us Muslims, it is an outrage to say that God is more than one.”

“For Christians, too, Ahmed.” “I don’t get it, sir. Is God three or one for Christians?”

“God is one *what*, but three *whos*.”

“So, three equals one and one equals three?”

“Not at all, three persons *possess* the same numerically one nature.”

“I see, three persons make up one nature.”

“No, wrong again. This would mean they share it, which would mean that the divine nature has parts, but God has no parts and is not divisible; God is one. This is why theologians insist on the term *possess*.”

By this time, nearly half the class had lost interest, the other half had started arguing among themselves.

“Please, let’s have some *order*. And let’s go back to the original subject. Nadima has been awfully patient.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Now we were trying to get at the way in which *agape* orders and perfects all the other loves, right? Well I brought up the Trinity because there we find that love is a person. In fact, love is three persons who love one another so perfectly and completely, according to a sacred order, that they not only enjoy unity, but they are that unity, they are one; they have the same nature.”

“What do you mean by ‘according to a sacred order, sir? You aren’t suggesting that there is “hierarchy” in the Trinity are you?”

“In a way there is, but it isn’t a hierarchy of nature, it’s a hierarchy of relation.”

“Now you’ve really lost us, sir. We don’t know what you are talking about.”

“Look, in each and every meaningful relationship, there is an exchange, right? Persons exchange knowledge and love with each other. But these ex-changes take place according to some sort of order, don’t they? It’s happening right here, right now.

You listen to me, or pretend to listen, because I'm the teacher. My relation to you is primarily active and yours is primarily receptive. But sooner, or later, I must become receptive, and you must become active. If not, no real teaching or learning takes place. This accounts for a kind of order in our exchange. All relationships follow this order: parents and children, men and women, even friends take turns in activity and receptivity."

"But what does this have to do with how *agape* orders all the other loves, sir?"

"Well, the persons of the Trinity ex-change knowledge and love according to this eternal pattern, which all of the other loves somehow reflect. Now of all the human loves, it is *eros* that is most helpful here simply because it is the highest of the human loves; it is the most divine. God himself has made it thus. When true lovers embrace they enter into a realm that is outside of time. Their *ex-change* of knowledge and love can become so hot and fast that one "becomes" the other person for a moment. This surrendering of self to the beloved in *eros* finds its perfect fulfillment in *agape* for although *eros* is a love that *would be* God, it is not the love that *is* God. This is why I argue that in one respect the divine in Christianity has more in common with the divine in Hinduism than it does with the monistic understanding of the divine in Islam, or even in Judaism. For in Hinduism, there is community among the gods. And these gods sometimes make sacrifices for one another. More than this, so many of the stories about the gods in this tradition are deeply connected to *eros* love. Why think of Shiva who put Ganga on top of his head and hid her in his hair from his wife Parvati so that Ganga, who was mad with love for Shiva, would stop destroying the earth."

"Are you saying sir that you prefer an anthropomorphic paganism over the great monotheistic traditions," asked one of the brightest and most thoughtful students in class?

"All I'm saying is that I think the conception of a divine reality that is dynamic and down to earth is more commensurate with the Christian conception of the divine than one that is radically transcendent and static."

"But the ancient mythologies that depict the gods getting all tangled up in sexual love seem so silly," a few of the students said giggling.

"That's only because in your immaturity you're still somewhat silly," Dr. Sleiman said with a straight face. "At any rate," he continued, "the point again is that the ancient Greeks and Hindus

understood well that although *eros* is a love that *would be* God, *it is* not. And in the Christian tradition, the word *agape* is alone reserved for this. I think this is what St. John meant when he wrote in the Bible that ‘God is Love and anyone who lives in love lives in God and God lives in him.’”

Only a few of his students had managed to follow him to the end of this mini-course on love; when he realized this he surrendered and dismissed them. Before they could get out class, however, he informed them that their weekend assignment was to go through the epic and pick out passages referring to the different kinds of love. Then they were to write a one-page essay on how these different kinds of love were related to one another. A few students complained politely, but the Assistant Professor acted as if he didn’t hear them and went back to his office.

A few of the more inquisitive students followed him to his office to ask about Hinduism. “Look, if you really want to get a good idea of what I’m talking about here, I would suggest you read the novels of R. K. Narayan.”

“Who, sir?”

“Narayan. Here, borrow this one, *The Vendor of Sweets*. I’ll be interested in learning what you think about it.”

“Thank you, sir, but do you have any standard introduction, something more scholarly?”

“Yes, but they’re all so misleading when they’re disconnected from the ordinary lives of ordinary people struggling with ordinary problems.”

“Is that what you meant in class by dynamic and down to earth?”

“Yes, in a way. Listen, do you have a moment?”

“Sure.” He grabbed Narayan’s *The Dark Room* off his shelf and read to them a passage describing a platform that a young boy and his two sisters had set up in their home for the Hindu festival of Navaratri:

““In an hour a fantastic world was raised: a world inhabited by all God’s creations that the human mind had counted; creatures in all gay colors and absurd proportions and grotesque companies. There were green parrots which stood taller than the elephants beside them; there were horses of yellow and white and green colors dwarfed beside painted brinjals; there was a finger-sized Turkish soldier with not a bit of equipment missing; the

fat, round-bellied merchant, wearing a coat on his bare body, squatted there, a picture of contentment, gazing at his cereals before him, unmindful of the company of a curly-tailed dog of porcelain on one side and a grimacing tiger on the other. Here and there out of the company of animals and vegetables and mortals emerged the gods - the great indigo-blue Rama, holding his mighty bow in one hand, and with his spouse, Sita, by his side, their serenity unaffected by the company about them, consisting of a lacquered wooden spoon, a very tiny celluloid doll clothed in a pink sari, a sly fox with a stolen goose in its mouth, and a balancing acrobat in leaf-green breeches; there stood the great Krishna trampling to death the demon serpent Kalinga, undistracted by the leer of a teddy bear which could beat a drum. Mortals and immortals, animals and vegetables, gods and sly foxes, acrobats and bears, warriors and cooking utensils, were all the same here, in this fantastic universe conjured out of colored paper, wood, and doll-maker's clay.'"

Admittedly, this is a round about way of making my point, but I'm convinced that such a methodology is part of the point. I am more and more convinced that the kind of literature I highlight in the above fiction is crucial for those Christian scholars and non-scholars alike who take the Pope's admonition seriously. To be sure, the Pope is addressing particularly scholars of philosophy and theology in that section, but he is also addressing all Christians. If Christians are to allow the rich heritage of Indian thought to enrich their own, they must begin exposing themselves to that heritage. I am suggesting one way, to be sure there are others, but what is most essential for any way, is that the Christian's deepest disposition be that of Christ's: *receptivity!*

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NOTES

¹This says nothing of the very convincing claim that absolute monotheism is tautological, a claim that has been defended aptly by philosophers such as Wilhelm Wundt and Fernando Rielo.

²The thought of Cornelio Fabro especially goes a long way in

showing how a new and more intense sense of being emerged in the early Christian ages.

³Rabbi Akiba of the second century A.D. stands out here among the Jewish rabbis. With respect to Christianity, see Origen, *Homélie sur le Cantique des cantiques*_(cf. SC 37 bis), Homily I:2 (Paris: Cerf, 1966).

⁴See Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *In Canticum Cantorum*.

⁵See Crisogono de Jésus, *Jean de la Croix, sa vie* (Paris: Cerf, 1982), p. 383.