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## Editor's Introduction

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## Editor's Introduction

THE main theme of this year's issue, "Canons and Contemplations," examines the ways in which contemporary comparativists, writing on spiritual texts, can contribute to a contemplative re-reading of ancient Hindu and Christian literary traditions. Today's scholar might opt not only to report *about* the spiritual writings of the past in a purely academic fashion, but may also choose – through an engaged reading of the texts – to make her own contribution to these ongoing traditions of contemplation and wisdom. Academic writing can itself become contemplative practice.

In the first essay on this theme Francis X. Clooney develops the theme of comparative scholarly writing as an example of contemplative practice. The task of the comparativist today can be constructive, contemplative, and communal. He speaks of "the interplay of scripture and contemplation, Hindu and Christian together," which can promote scholarly community across religious boundaries. As an example of such comparative scholarship, he reflects on his own recent book, *His Hiding Place is Darkness* (2013), which brings into conversation the biblical *Song of Songs* and the Hindu *Holy Word of Mouth* (*Tiruvaymoli*) as well as some of their traditional commentaries. What these texts share is a sense of divine absence and a deep longing for the presence of the divine beloved. Despite some obvious convergences in regard to absence and longing across Hindu-Christian borders each textual tradition presents its perspective on these key themes in its own unique way. The purpose of the contemporary comparativist is to read these texts in tandem while allowing herself to

be impacted by them and, in turn, to articulate her own particular insights for other readers. The modern scholar will not write as an innocent bystander, but rather as one who, through engaged and comparative reading, comes away with an intensified awareness and appreciation of divine absence that is mysteriously also a kind of presence.

The second essay, written by Graham Schweig and significantly longer than the other three contributions to this discussion, focuses on divine love as articulated by two sixteenth-century poet-theologians, Saint John of the Cross and Krishnadāsa Kaviraja Goswami. Schweig reflects on the ways each of these two mystical writers drew from a variety of core and peripheral canonical sources to articulate his particular understanding of loving intimacy with the divine. Though each of these two men presents a markedly distinct portrait of union and divine intimacy, it is possible for contemporary readers from both Hindu and Christian worlds to benefit from an engaged reading of both literary traditions in a spirit of attentive receptivity, learning, and desire for God. Through such inter-religious reading and dialogue new perspectives and insights into divine love become manifest, an "intensification of divine intimacy" emerges in the heart, and a greater sense of community between Hindu and Christian is forged.

The theme of love and longing for the divine reappears in the essay by Holly Hillgardner, who compares the sixteenth-century Mirabai with the thirteenth-century Hadewijch. Hillgardner points out that "yearning's transformative, broadening

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powers” apply to both women as they stretch the traditional understanding of canon and self-identity. Hadewijch, in her written work designed to offer guidance to others on the path of love, combined scripture-inspired bridal mysticism with contemporary secular images of courtly love, thereby allowing her to complexify and deepen her teachings about the path of love and longing. Mirabai’s songs likewise were intended for the benefit of others seeking to know the love of God, but unlike the outpourings of Hadewijch, her canon is open-ended and ongoing, as others have articulated their own love poetry in her name. Remarkably akin in spirit, both women “participated in different countercultural religious movements that valued ordinary, outsider voices, including the voices of women.” Hillgardner additionally notes that the interpenetration of individual and community in the self-understanding of Mirabai and Hadewijch can be fruitfully extended in our own time to embrace both Hindu and Christian lovers of God, as each draws on the insights of the other.

Brad Bannon’s essay, “Thou, That, and An/Other,” examines canons and contemplations by distinguishing between the role of scripture in the embodied pedagogical context of teacher and student, and the role of scripture in individual, isolated contemplation. His essay begins with a discussion of the embodied encounter of Uddālaka and his son

Śvetaketu in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, culminating in the great sentence (*mahāvākya*), “Thou art that, O Śvetaketu.” Emphasizing the particular way in which the word “thou” points to its hearer, Bannon analyzes two examples employed by Śaṅkara in Chapter I.18 of his *Thousand Teachings*. The first is a scene from the Rāmāyaṇa wherein Brahmā reveals to Rāma, “Thou art Nārāyaṇa.” The second is Śaṅkara’s allegory of the tenth man, which concludes, “Thou art the tenth.” According to Bannon, Śaṅkara insists that the meaning of the word “thou” cannot be grasped in contemplation, but only in the embodied context of trusted teacher and attentive student. The final portion of Bannon’s essay examines Nicholas of Cusa’s contemplation of the word *Theos* in Acts 17. Although Cusa’s meditation, *On Seeking God*, explicitly advocates isolation and introspection, it climaxes when *Theos*, the God for Whom one seeks, is encountered as *Theos*, the God Who seeks. Sometimes sharpening and sometimes blurring the lines between canon and contemplation, Bannon’s essay concludes that theo←logy, as the personal striving towards God or Brahman, must eventually abandon all agency and effort in order receive the divine revelation, theo→logy, from “an/Other” in a moment of grace.

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