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# *Theōsis*: A Comparative Study of T. F. Torrance and Rāmānuja

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**THIS** essay is an imaginative conversation as I engage two religious thinkers—the prolific Reformed theologian Thomas F. Torrance (1913-2007) and the great Vedāntin Rāmānuja (traditionally, 1017–1137). I will compare Torrance’s theology<sup>1</sup> of *theōsis*<sup>2</sup> (participation in the life of God) and *theōria* (contemplation as a way of participation in the life of God) with those of Rāmānuja. Though the words themselves were likely unknown to Rāmānuja, through his works one can see a *notion* of *theōsis*.

I first probe Torrance’s theology, then move to Rāmānuja in conversation with Torrance.

Athanasius and his Eastern-tradition theology (*theōsis* included) influenced Torrance, a Patristics scholar.<sup>3</sup> Simple perusal of Torrance’s works evidences the profound impact Athanasius had on him. Athanasius was a champion of the Trinity doctrine and a powerful foe of Arius of Alexandria, who denied the full deity of Jesus. Athanasius’ theology was firmly instantiated in the Trinity, seeing all

theological events, including the Son’s *homoousion* ([of the] same essence) with the Father, dynamically within the Triune life. For Athanasius, *theōsis* stems from the Son’s reconciling work, which took place at the incarnation, continued through the cross event, and continues into the eschaton.<sup>4</sup>

Karl Barth’s theology also impacted Torrance.<sup>5</sup> Torrance often noted Barth’s Trinitarian emphasis, especially Barth’s insistence that all theological events be seen as occurring within the life of the Trinity. As such, Torrance, true to Barth, would reject a “dualism” that severed theological categories (especially the acts and attributes of God from the being of God) from Trinitarian moorings.<sup>6</sup> This dualism, according to Torrance, characterizes much of Western theology.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, under Barth’s (and Athanasius’) influence Torrance argued for a “unitary” model for doing theology.<sup>8</sup>

Torrance’s theology sits in an ontology (a discourse on God, the world and the soul, and

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their connections) of the Triune God as wholly other than creation, *creatio ex nihilo*, creation (including souls) as finite and dependent upon God, and creation (including souls) after the fall one day being reconciled to God.

We do well also to consider theological predicates for God. “God” is not a category separate from trinitological articulation. In line with Nicaea, Torrance affirms that the Triune God alone is eternal Being as three persons. Second, Torrance affirms the Chalcedonian Definition regarding the one person of Christ as fully *theos* (God) and fully man. Third, Torrance sees Christ as uniquely and everlastingly fully *theos* and fully man.

What, then, does *theōsis* look like? What is *theōria* in relation to *theōsis*?

*Theōsis* (from *theōō*, I make divine) entails “the emancipation of man from imprisonment in himself and the lifting of him up to partake of the living presence and saving acts of God the Creator and Redeemer.”<sup>9</sup> Though there are several biblical verses by which one gathers the notion of *theōsis*,<sup>10</sup> 2 Peter 1.4 is significant, where believers are exhorted to be “partakers of the divine nature” (*theias koinōnoi phuseōs*).

The word *theōsis* is not in the New Testament. Though using non-biblical terms to elucidate theology does not bother Torrance, the term for him is still an unfortunate one. It translates as “deification.” But humans, asserts Torrance, can never become God.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, humanity is a creation *contingent* upon the eternal Triune God. So there is no ontological transformation into the divine essence. Additionally, for *koinōnoi* Torrance prefers the translation “partners” to that of “partakers.”<sup>12</sup> Here the relational aspect of believers in fellowship with the Triune God is paramount. For this reason I prefer “participants.”

Yet, Torrance is not averse to an ontological transformation of believers’ *humanity*. Here Torrance keeps with Chalcedon: Jesus is “*homoousion* with us according to the humanity.” Further, the incarnation of the Son, occurring within the life of the Trinity, undergirds the sanctifying ontological and functional transformation of humanity toward fulfillment of what Eden was intended to be. There, Adam and Eve, made in the image of God, enjoyed fellowship (*theōsis*) and contemplation (*theōria*)<sup>13</sup> through “onto-relations” with God and with each other. Thus, what made Adam and Eve *truly human* is proper image-of-God relations.<sup>14</sup>

Catastrophically, at the fall true humanity was effaced. Remedially, God the Son, the Image of the invisible God, incarnated, descending into our humanness as the image of the first Adam. Taking this humanness upon himself in order to redeem it, and being truly human in the perfect wedding of image and Image, he fulfilled what Adam was intended to be.

“Truly human” therefore entails fellowship (*theōsis*), through reconciliation, with the Triune God through the reconciling act of the incarnate Son, the understanding of which is *theōria*, sanctifying and enlightening contemplation/understanding. Torrance states that “the proper understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit takes place only within the movement of atoning propitiation whereby God draws near to us and draws us near to himself in believing response and brings us into union with himself through the gift of his Spirit.”<sup>15</sup> The relationship is reciprocally vertical: the Triune God toward believers through Christ (who is *the* Image of God the Father) in communion with the Holy Spirit; and believers toward the Triune God. It is also horizontal: human-to-human. The Eastern tradition calls this “Christification,” being

conformed to the “image of Christ.” Believers in Christ are transformed into “the image of the Image.” Christ effects this through his hypostatic union.<sup>16</sup> Christ, by virtue of the perfect, everlasting wedding of his deity with his humanity, mediates *theōsis* through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

Through the theōtic activity of God the Holy Spirit, reconciliation in part entails a *theōria* (contemplation) that enables believers both to apprehend and comprehend what the Triune God reveals of himself in Christ. In turn, functionally *theōria/theōsis* rightly fulfills humanity’s “transcendental determinism of our own being for God.”<sup>17</sup> Determinism for the Transcendent, or humanity’s innate need to reach to the Transcendent, was rightly in place in the Garden, but was marred by the fall. Today, humanity’s transcendental determinisms express in myriads of ways. Torrance holds that only by the grace and action of the Holy Spirit, who points to the incarnate Son, can humans rightly determine the Transcendent.

In comparative conversation with Rāmānuja I now explore eleven themes related to Torrance’s *theōsis*: ontology as paradigm; predicates for “God”; *theōsis*; *homoousios*; means of *theōsis*; supreme Lord Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa; *theōria*; key texts for *theōsis*; ontological transformation of humanity; true humanity; and transcendental determinism. These are not treated separately but interwoven in conversation.

Rāmānuja’s ontology is *viśiṣṭādvāita* (qualified non-dualism). Rāmānuja’s God is Lord Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, who is personal, non-dual, and all. The Lord is ultimate reality. Yet, the Lord as ultimate reality/all is “qualified” (*viśiṣṭa*) by *bheda* (difference)—there is *bheda* between Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, the universe, and *ātman*-s

(souls). Further, the universe and *ātman*-s are the body of the Lord, are real, and are ontologically equal with the Lord.

Though *bheda* exists both in the functional and the ontological—because Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa originates<sup>18</sup> *dependent* reality *ex deo* (in recurring cycles of dissolution and origination)—I focus here briefly on the functional. Since the Lord originates, one function is his transcendence over all. Gītā 7.7 reads, “There is nothing else whatsoever higher than me ... On me all this universe is strung like pearls on a thread.”<sup>19</sup> Yet, the Lord is also *antaryāmin*, “inner controller.” Sentient and non-sentient reality is therefore dependent on the Lord, who controls and sustains.<sup>20</sup> Lastly, in addition to the universe as the Lord’s body is Rāmānuja’s unique doctrine of the *divya rūpa*, Lord Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa’s personal “divine form.” Importantly, the *divya rūpa* is real but non-prakṛtic, meaning the *divya rūpa* is not karmic-tainted.<sup>21</sup>

Rāmānuja and Torrance exhibit notional similarities regarding *theōsis*, which afford comparative analyses. Yet, when ontologies figure in, differences between the two theologians arise. For example, with Rāmānuja, though we see *theōsis* as partaking of and participating in the divine nature, in contrast to Torrance all humans, not just devotees, partake of and participate in the divine nature, in part because they share originated ontological oneness with the Lord (cf. Gītā 7.4-11,19).

Torrance also shares with Rāmānuja the notion of emancipation and partaking of presence. Torrance describes *theōsis* as “the emancipation of man from imprisonment in himself and the lifting of him up to partake of the living presence and saving acts of God the Creator and Redeemer.” Rāmānuja claims the saving act of emancipation from imprisonment,

specifically karmic-embodied imprisonments of everlasting individual *ātman*-s. Emancipation occurs by the grace of Lord Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa when he descends into human form as Kṛṣṇa and offers himself to devotees (Gītā 4.6-8; 9.11; 18.62). Further, there is partaking of presence at least in two ways, both involving *bheda*. First, human individuality provides context for the indwelling presence of the Lord as *antaryāmin*<sup>22</sup>; second, the Lord is the supreme transcendent one.

With Kṛṣṇa as *avatāra* (descent [of God in human form]), Rāmānuja's ontology lends to a "god-man" doctrine. Since the material universe is real, Kṛṣṇa is Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa in real "human form" (*mānuṣī tanu*, Gītā 9.11) descending by grace to bring ignorant<sup>23</sup> humanity to communion, *theōsis*, with himself.<sup>24</sup> Here is a type of hypostatic union notionally similar to Christ's, though there is a major difference. I argue elsewhere that even intra-Rāmānuja, Kṛṣṇa's *mānuṣī tanu* does not identify with humanity, due largely to the *divya rūpa* as material cause for Kṛṣṇa's *mānuṣī tanu*.<sup>25</sup> Torrance posits Christ's humanity *ex nihilo* (by way of Adam and Eve), so intra-Christianity there is identification. Interestingly, Kṛṣṇa as *avatāra* is *homoousios* with Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, but there is no subject-object *homoousion*, for Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa is Kṛṣṇa ontologically both by way of personal identity as the essence of Brahman and the material of the *divya rūpic mānuṣī tanu*.

By way of origination *ex deo*, Rāmānuja's *theōsis* is in the functional sense instantiated at the origination of embodiments; yet, since the *prakṛti* (matter) of embodiments is contingent upon the Lord's actual being, we also have *theōsis* in the ontological sense. As for individual *ātman*-s, they are everlasting modes of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa (Gītā 15.7) and everlastingly contingent upon his

actual being—thus the functional and ontological also apply here, in contrast to Torrance.

Though sharing with Rāmānuja the notion of personalism, Torrance does not advocate mono-personalism.<sup>26</sup> Torrance's triune personalism and unqualified deity-creation dualism affected his notion of *theōsis* where the believer does not possess the ontological nature of God because God is wholly other.<sup>27</sup> Thus, *theōsis* entails *coming into* a partaking of the living presence of God by the indwelling of the Spirit. Rāmānuja's *theōsis* views all humanity partaking ontologically and functionally of the divine essence by way of God as material cause and indwelling presence, the latter by way of *antaryāmin*. Thus, if there is with Rāmānuja a *coming into*, it is by way of realization of something already in place.

Rāmānuja shares with Torrance the notion of all theological events taking place within the life of God. Predicates for "God" are important, and play into ontology that highlights differences. An example of this is incarnation and *avatāra*. With Torrance's orthodoxy we find God the Father sending God the Son (the *logos*) to incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the agency of God the Holy Spirit. Further, "fullness of time" is one cause for the incarnate Son's reconciling atoning work through the Holy Spirit (Galatians 4.4-6). With Rāmānuja, when licentiousness peaks ("fullness of time"), the Lord descends to human form with no other than himself as supreme agent: "I come into being *in material forms* by my own power ... I send forth myself" (Gītā 4.6-7<sup>28</sup>). Additionally, just as Torrance argues that the ontological Trinity "is essentially and intrinsically evangelical"<sup>29</sup> and expresses itself in God's economy through the incarnation (though the ontological and the economic cannot be radically dualized due to

“the Being of God in his acts and the acts of God in his Being”), Rāmānuja likewise could argue the same regarding his mono-personalism—inherent in Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa’s being (ontological) is desire to send forth himself (economy). Economy, then, finds its ground in ontology.

As just mentioned, with Rāmānuja there is a “fullness of time” context for *avatāra*. Gītā 4.7 points to the decline of righteousness (*dharma*) and the rise of unrighteousness (*adhama*). There is also a reconciling to and communion with the Lord,<sup>30</sup> i.e., a *theōsis*, though there is no substitutionary atonement as ground. Notionally similar to Christianity, reconciliation is personal, reciprocated devotional service to God, in this case *bhakti* (devotion) to Nārāyaṇa-Kṛṣṇa. Adding the dynamic of the horizontal (devotees to devotees to all beings) to this *theōsis*, we have a fully orbited onto-relations whereby devotees become “truly human” in the here and now (see the three points at the end of this essay).

In Rāmānuja’s Vedānta, *theōria* as contemplation of the divine is a way toward (and *is*) participation in the divine life (*theōsis*), both here and now and in the eschaton. As is the case with Torrance, important is the preposition: *in* the divine life. Torrance understands it as believers’ contemplation “in union with” the Triune God and in union with one another by way of relationship, with no ontological sharing of the divine essence. Here, transformed and wholly-other *humanity* continues everlastingly in the eschatological age. With Rāmānuja the eschatological age (here defined as escape from *saṃsāra* [the cycle of death and rebirth]) involves everlasting, embodied<sup>31</sup> relational unity with Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa and relational unity with other

released devotees as both deity and devotees share in the ontological divine essence.

Gītā 11.54-55 provides a basis for Rāmānuja’s *theōsis* (participation) and *theōria* (contemplation) and parallels Torrance’s use of 2 Peter 1.4. Gītā 11.54-55 reads, “By devotion not directed to another am I able truly to be known in such a manner, O Arjuna, and to be beheld and truly be entered, O scorcher of foes. He who is performing action for my sake, has me as the highest object, is devoted to me, who has abandoned all other attachment and is free from animosity toward all beings, he goes to me, O son of Pāṇḍu.” This evidences participation and contemplation in and toward the divine. “By devotion”<sup>32</sup> directed to no other is the Lord “known”<sup>33</sup> and “beheld.”<sup>34</sup> The fruit of this *theōria*, which we may say is *jñāna marga* (the path of knowledge), is realized *theōsis*, where the Lord is “entered,”<sup>35</sup> which is realization of an already-instantiated ontological oneness and coming into a reciprocated *bhakti* relationship with the Lord. With this ontological sharing of essence is the functional: devotees participate in the divine life by performing action “not directed to another”; “performing action for my sake” with “me as the highest object.” Harmoniously, the fruit of the vertical is the horizontal: “free from animosity toward all beings.”<sup>36</sup>

Finally, to see in Rāmānuja the teaching of “truly human” takes some creative thinking. Below are three points. The first two are foundational to a comparison of Rāmānuja with Torrance, though they bring to light some differences between them amidst notional similarities. The third point argues for a “truly human” doctrine in Rāmānuja.

First, Rāmānuja’s view of matter and its cause, function, and ultimate worth lends to radical

differentiation between his eschatology and Torrance's eschatology. Though Rāmānuja's *viśiṣṭādvāita* posits a real universe, a future reconciling reordering of a "once was" singular created universe and humanity is not the goal. As opposed to Christianity's linear view of a single-occurring history, *samsāric* yugic cycles<sup>37</sup> occur eternally<sup>38</sup> with Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa both as material cause and dissolution (Gītā 7.6). In this sense there is no consummating event for material humanity in order to bring it fully to what it was intended to be.

Second, in light of materiality ultimately being a secondary concern,<sup>39</sup> and matter coming into being and dissolution in eternal cycles, Rāmānuja's notion of the liberated *ātman* lends to the conclusion that there is no emphasis on preserving a material humanness and personality that "once was" in a singular

creation event.<sup>40</sup> This differs radically with Torrance.

Yet, third, one could still conclude that in a profoundly Hindu sense, Rāmānuja captures the thought that to be truly human in the here and now is to recognize that "human" is *prakṛtic* and "not-*ātman*" while the *ātman* is eternal and not subject to change.<sup>41</sup> On the heels of this are *theōria* and *theōsis*. To be truly human is to contemplate the true nature of the eternal individual *ātman* (Gītā 2.20), "which is of the nature of meditation" and is "the supreme consummation."<sup>42</sup> That is *theōria*. To be truly human is to fulfill one's *dharma* (duty [according to caste]) in both the vertical and the horizontal in the real, *prakṛtic* world and in participation with the divine.<sup>43</sup> That is *theōsis*.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Myk Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance* (New York: Routledge, 2016). Habets notes that Torrance in his academic career rarely employed the word *theōsis* and devoted little space to it (due to a general dislike of the notion in Western theology [though it is gradually becoming popular], including Torrance's Reformed tradition). "His theology is, however, profoundly compatible with, and shaped by, the central themes associated with doctrines of *theosis*" (2). As a result, one must glean from writings and lectures by Torrance and employ "creative imagination in a manner that is tested and controlled by Torrance's own concerns" (ibid.). In this essay I do the same with Rāmānuja.

<sup>2</sup> "The closest English equivalent of the *theōsis* is 'deification'" (Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, "Introduction," in Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*. Two vols. [Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006], 1:1). Finlan and Kharlamov note

that though Gregory of Nazianzus (AD 329-390) coined the term, Christian theologians have understood the term differently (1:1). Further, despite the early Church theologians' fascination with *theōsis*, "the fathers do not develop a 'doctrine' of *theōsis*. Nor do the doctrinal controversies of the Church Councils deal with the subject" (1:4).

<sup>3</sup> Torrance did not accept all the theology of the East. He rejected some points (Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 8). Yet, *theōsis* was not entirely shunned by the Western tradition. Habets mentions Augustine and Aquinas being aware of *theōsis* as "partakers of the divine nature by grace" (*Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 9). Also, some have detected *theōsis* in the theology of John Wesley, particularly Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification (or Christian perfection). See Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 9-10; and Edmund J. Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation: Eastern Orthodoxy and Classical Pentecostalism*

on *Becoming Like Christ* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2004), 9-15.

<sup>4</sup> See Athanasius' *De Incarnatione* and *Apologia Contra Arianos*. See also Basil Studer, "Divinization," in Angelo Di Berardino, *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*. Two vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1:242. The incarnation is at the heart of the theology of *theōsis* (cf. Finlan and Kharlamov, "Introduction," in *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 1:4).

<sup>5</sup> As did John Calvin. See Myk Habets, "Reforming Theōsis," in Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 1:152.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 32-34.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard Publishers, 1992), 99-100; Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 3-4.

<sup>8</sup> Further, due in part to Einsteinian relativity theory and quantum mechanics, Torrance argued for a unitary model of science as it relates contingently to the Triune God. See Man Kei Ho, *A Critical Study on T. F. Torrance's Theology of Incarnation* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2008), 54-57.

<sup>9</sup> Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 1-2, quoting Torrance's *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 243.

<sup>10</sup> Among others, John 10.34-35 and 17.20-23; Acts 17.28; Genesis 1.26-27; "sonship" in Galatians 4.5-7 and Romans 8.15; and Matthew 5.48. Finlan and Kharlamov ("Introduction," in *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 1:2) note Christian theological themes to which the term may apply: imitation of God (Ephesians 5.1); taking on God's nature (John 10.34); indwelt by God (John 14.7); being reformed by God (Ephesians 4.24); and being con-formed to Christ (2 Corinthians 3.18).

<sup>11</sup> Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 95. He calls "deification" as a translation of *theōsis* "misleading," "Platonising," and agrees with Florovsky's "embarrassing" when it comes to the word *theōsis* itself (Georges Florovsky, "St Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers," in Georges

Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View* [Belmont, 1972]. Two vols. Collected works, 2:115). Finlan and Kharlamov mention other translations of the term: union; participation; partaking; communion/partnership; divine filiation; adoption; recreation; intertwined with the divine; similitude with God; transformation; elevation; transmutation; commingling; assimilation; intermingling; rebirth; regeneration; and transfiguration ("Introduction," in *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 1:6). *Theopoiēsis*, "making divine," is a related term.

<sup>12</sup> *Koinōsis*—"sharing," "fellowship," "participation"—rather than *theōsis*, might be a better theological term around which to build the doctrine.

<sup>13</sup> From *theōreō*, "I contemplate."

<sup>14</sup> I will not here delve into Torrance's distinction between "being" and "person." Readers may consult Myk Habets, "Reforming Theōsis," 153-58.

<sup>15</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 110.

<sup>16</sup> See Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 8. The influence of Athanasius upon Torrance is evident. Habets recalls Athanasius' theology: "it is clear that ... *theosis* is the means of salvation whereby the human person is incorporated, not into the divine essence, but into the person of Christ who, by virtue of the hypostatic union, is the mediator of divinity" (7).

<sup>17</sup> Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 151.

<sup>18</sup> Following Sheridan I employ "originates." Daniel P. Sheridan, "The Asymmetry of 'Origination' and 'Creation': Contrasts within Comparative Theology." *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, 2015 (no. 28): 76-87. See *Gītā* 7.6.

<sup>19</sup> See also *Gītā* 7.13 and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.6; 3.7.1; 3.8.6-8. All translations of the *Gītā* are from Steven Tsoukalas, *Bhagavad Gītā: Exegetical and Comparative Commentary with Sanskrit Text, Translation, Interlinear Transliteration with Parsing, Mini Lexicon, and Text-Critical Notes*. Six vols. (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007, 2008, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> For more on Rāmānuja's epistemology and ontology see my *Kṛṣṇa and Christ: Body-Divine Relation*

in *the Thought of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Classical Christian Orthodoxy* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2006), 56-70, 91-116. For extended treatments of Rāmānuja's theology see John B. Carman, *The Theology of Rāmānuja: An Essay in Interreligious Understanding*. Reprint 1974 (Bombay: Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute, 1981); and Julius J. Lipner, *The Face of Truth: A Study of Meaning and Metaphysics in the Vedāntic Theology of Rāmānuja* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

<sup>21</sup> See J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans., *Rāmānuja's Vedārthasaṃgraha* (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute, 1956), 282-83. RVed from here on.

<sup>22</sup> Which some have seen as similar to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Ninian Smart, "The Inner Controller: Learning from Ramanuja," in David C. Scott and Israel Selvanayagam, eds., *Re-Visioning India's Religious Traditions: Essays in Honour of Eric Lott* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996), 145; Carman *The Theology of Rāmānuja*, 256.

<sup>23</sup> Due to *karma*, ignorance includes not seeing Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa as the Self of individual selves.

<sup>24</sup> Carman states, "the Supreme Person ... who is completely self-sufficient and independent ... takes our mortal form upon Himself in order to benefit the world" (*The Theology of Rāmānuja*, 258).

<sup>25</sup> Tsoukalas, *Kṛṣṇa and Christ*, 244.

<sup>26</sup> I proceed with the notion of a supremely ultimate mono-personalism where Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa alone possesses eternal *supreme* existence and attributes and alone is the Highest. Carman advances that Rāmānuja saw Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa's eternal consort Śrī (Lakṣmī) sharing "a close likeness in nature," yet "a clear subordination to Him" (*The Theology of Rāmānuja*, 239; see Carman's brief remarks on two later divisions of Viśiṣṭādvāita: Vaḍagalais and Tēngalais [238]). For extended treatment see 238-48. Lipner, however, in the context of his discussion on means of salvation, states, "we have said little or nothing about the role of Śrī, the divine consort, in Rāmānuja's theology. This is because there is little or nothing to say" (*The Face of Truth*, 115). Yet, Lipner notes that Śrī played more than a small part in

Rāmānuja's theological outlook and in Śrī-Vaiṣṇavite devotion (116). Carman admits to the brief nature of Rāmānuja's comments in RVed regarding Śrī (238). For example, Rāmānuja in paragraph 127 briefly mentions (through quoting scriptures) Śrī in the context of describing the *divya rūpa*. Readers should note, though, that Rāmānuja in RVed paragraph 133 quotes Viṣṇu Purāṇa: "Śrī, Viṣṇu's faithful consort ... is eternal herself, and she is omnipresent even as Viṣṇu Himself is. When He is god, she assumes a divine body, when He is man she assumes a human body" (Van Buitenen's translation). Carman calls this Śrī's "inseparability from Viṣṇu" (*The Theology of Rāmānuja*, 240). Yet, he also notes that in Rāmānuja's theology Śrī is given no distinct function; she merely accompanies the Lord (243, 247). See also Śrīnivāsādāsa (17<sup>th</sup> century), *Yatīndramatadīpikā* (Svāmī Ādidevānanda, trans., Mylapore: Sri Ramakrishna Math, n.d.). At the end of a section on Īśvara and his attributes (9.29)—which evidences my view that Śrī is a personified eternal attribute of the Lord—Śrīnivāsādāsa briefly mentions Śrī's ever-presence with the Lord. Further, Śrīnivāsādāsa confesses the Lord as "the sole Reality, one without a second" (1.1). Where one lands on this discussion affects the comparative venture. For example, who is present when Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa descends to take human form? Agreeing with Carman could lead to seeing similarity with the Christian doctrine of the Father sending the Son.

<sup>27</sup> By virtue of the *divya rūpa* there is with Rāmānuja a qualified sense of the originated universe as other (see Carman, *The Theology of Rāmānuja*, 256).

<sup>28</sup> *saṁbhavāmyātmanāyayā ... ātmānaṁ sṛjāmyaham.*

<sup>29</sup> *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 109.

<sup>30</sup> See also Carman, *The Theology of Rāmānuja*, 61. This is through what Carman calls supremacy and accessibility. See 190-98 for Carman's extensive treatment of God's "special relationship" with devotees. This special relationship is in part "attaining Brahman" (221). Also, see "he goes to me" (Gītā 11.55).

<sup>31</sup> In Rāmānuja's eschatology the liberated *ātman* can acquire bodies (not affected by *prakṛti* or *karma*) at will. Lipner states, "Rāmānuja allows for the liberated *ātman* to assume at will, in furtherance of its power and enjoyment, non-*prakṛtic*, apparently anthropomorphic, bodies" (*The Face of Truth*, 119).

<sup>32</sup> *bhaktyā*.

<sup>33</sup> *√jñā*, from which comes *jñāna* (knowledge), vital as a means of liberation.

<sup>34</sup> *√dṛś*.

<sup>35</sup> *pra√viś*.

<sup>36</sup> See Rāmānuja's commentary on 11.55 in Svāmī Ādidevānanda, trans., *Śrī Rāmānuja Gītā Bhāṣya* (Mylapore: Sri Ramakrishna Math, n.d.), 394. P. N. Srinivasachari states that *bhakti* and *prapatti* (surrender and spirituality) "go together as the vertical and horizontal ways of expressing love" (Preface to Śrīnivāsadāsa's *Yatīndramatadīpikā*).

<sup>37</sup> The cycles of time, from purest to most impure: Satya or Kṛta, Treta, Dvāpara and Kali.

<sup>38</sup> However, since yugic cycles occur eternally, the cycles themselves can be seen as occurring in eternal, linear fashion.

<sup>39</sup> See Gītā 2.18 in the context of Gītā 2.12-25.

<sup>40</sup> "Not all religions take it so far as to develop a concept of theōsis while still preserving human personal identity, as Christianity does" (Finlan and Kharlamov, "Introduction," in *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 1:4).

<sup>41</sup> Ādidevānanda, *Śrī Rāmānuja Gītā Bhāṣya*, 604.

<sup>42</sup> Ādidevānanda, *Śrī Rāmānuja Gītā Bhāṣya*, 585.

<sup>43</sup> For example, Gītā 18.46 speaks of performing one's *dharma* in worship of the Lord. With this, "man attains perfection" (Ādidevānanda, *Śrī Rāmānuja Gītā Bhāṣya*, 582).