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## Book Review: *Against Dogmatism: Dwelling in Faith and Doubt*

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through this theological terrain, indicating to us several trajectories that can be fruitfully explored by scholars in the field of Hindu-Christian studies as they seek to learn from

Hindu and Christian texts about ways of speaking about the divine.

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***Against Dogmatism: Dwelling in Faith and Doubt.* Madhuri M. Yadlapati. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013, 204 pp.**

IN her first book-length work, philosopher of religion Madhuri Yadlapati injects an important and well-argued message into popular debates about religion. She takes on two sets of opinions that, though opposed on the question of religion's value, share a common reduction of religion to belief. On one side sit dogmatic fundamentalists; on the other, religion's atheist critics, who delight in exposing the absurdity and violence of religious belief.

The book's ideal readers roam somewhere in the middle: people who may have a benign attitude toward religion but unreflectively define it in terms of intellectual assent. One need not look far to find examples of this kind of thinking. After this summer's attack in Nice, for example, Newt Gingrich proposed that Muslims be given a religious test, and that anyone professing "belief in Sharia" be deported. The theory developed in this book elucidates the common category mistake in Gingrich's rhetoric, which conflates faith as a way of being in the world with belief in propositional statements.

Drawing examples from Christianity and India's other religions, *Against Dogmatism* launches interventions from three primary directions. Yadlapati first focuses on definitions of faith, then shifts to theological treatments of doubt, and finally considers how to relate the two.

Part One puts flesh on the currently-emaciated bones of faith as a category. Chapter 1 refutes an understanding of faith as knowledge. Yadlapati points to Christian "mystics" and each of the five pillars of Islam to emphasize the importance of humility in relation to knowledge of God. Faith, here, is a posture of trust. Friedrich Schleiermacher formalizes this posture as the consciousness of absolute dependence. Yadlapati also finds an expression of trust in Hindu puja, which evokes a sense of "belonging to a larger world" (32). Chapter 2 contests faith as knowledge from another angle, this time highlighting faith as a sense of responsibility in the world. Hindu dharma, Muslim notions of the human being as God's caliph on earth, Jewish views of covenant, and the ethics of C. S. Lewis in the Narnia tales each manifest this variation on a life of faith.

Part Two takes aim at the word often treated as faith's opposite: doubt. Chapter three introduces the "Protestant principle," which relativizes all human discourse in view of divine revelation, as found in Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, and Paul Tillich. Amid their differing stances toward human culture and knowledge, each finds a way to affirm faith alongside lack of certitude. Chapter four turns to Hindu traditions of transcendence through reaching the limits of understanding. This rich survey deftly traces its theme through the intuitive realization of the

82 Book Reviews

Upanisads, devotional surrender in the Bhagavad Gita, various treatments of *maya*'s obscuring power, and the paradoxes and ambiguity of Saiva worship.

Part Three brings the two terms, faith and doubt, back together. Chapter five redefines religion in light of several historical partnerships between faith and doubt: first, a "humanist" critique of dogmatism stretching from Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx to John A. T. Robinson and Sam Harris; and second, a stance of unknowing in "mystics" like Meister Eckhart and the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*. Following the pattern established in the earlier two parts, Yadlapati draws in an Indian tradition. Here, it is Buddhist teachings on emptiness that refuse to reify any particular teaching. The final chapter, chapter six, turns to three postmodern approaches to the relation between faith and doubt. Jürgen Moltmann positions faith as hope within an eschatology that relies on God's promises, despite evidence that the very worst things do happen. Raimon Panikkar takes a pluralistic approach. Dialogue between Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism puts each tradition's concepts to the test, finds their limits, and refines them. Finally, John Caputo's postmodern, deconstructionist work posits religion as a love that searches and questions amid uncertainty.

The objective tone of this philosophy of religion leaves the reader wondering about the author's positioning vis-à-vis the traditions treated in the book. A textual manner of authority, available to anyone who reads primary and secondary sources with care, permeates most of the book. However, an experiential tone in sections of Part I implies

that the author's own religious or ethnographic experiences may also be at play. In the first pages, Yadlapati describes the book as navigating its themes of faith and doubt "faithfully but nonconfessionally" (2), raising the question: which particular variety of faithfulness, treated with such care in the book, is its center of gravity? After all, the nondogmatic faith of the Satyanarayana puja does not boil down to the nondogmatic faith of Søren Kierkegaard. The answer may come in the middle of the last chapter: by reading so many sources side-by-side but ostensibly favoring none of them, the book's approach resembles that of Raimon Panikkar: it probes a plurality of traditions, relativizing the categories of each, with the result of a mystical unknowing that keeps faith vibrant.

Accessibly written, with numerous, easily digested examples, this is the kind of book religious studies majors and seminarians long to bring home. It addresses the worries of friends skeptical of religion's integrity by showing how faith dwells alongside uncertainty and other kinds of knowledge. By positioning faith in terms of a stable religious disposition that can survive serious inquiry, it also allays co-religionists' fears that academic study will draw the protégé astray.

*Against Dogmatism* advances upon other works with similar aims because it does not solely rely on Christian sources. It demonstrates parallel dynamics in multiple traditions, even as it takes seriously the particular contexts and ideas that develop them.

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