



Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation

Edited by Catherine Keller and Laurel Schneider

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CHAPTER 13

God as Ground, Contingency and Relation:

Trinity, Polydoxy and Religious Diversity

John J. Thatamanil

...the one First Cause is not split and cut up into differing Godships, neither does the statement harmonize with the Jewish dogma, but *the truth passes in the mean* between these two conceptions, destroying each heresy, and yet accepting what is useful to it from each.... For it is as if the number of the triad were a remedy in the case of those who are in error as to the One, and the assertion of the unity for those whose beliefs are dispersed among a number of divinities.

--Gregory of Nyssa¹

Trinitarianism and Christianity's Others

Christian naming of divinity, even in the community's oldest baptismal formula, begins by affirming the threefold character of divine disclosure without abjuring divine unity. The one God who created the world saves that very world by way of God's Word and Breath which two cannot be collapsed into an undifferentiated simplicity of the one Father. The logic of Christian reflection which led eventually to Nicene trinitarianism was also driven by a commitment to safeguarding divine unity and transcendence while affirming God's real and gracious self-giving.

To assert that God gives something other or less than Godself in giving Word and Spirit imperils salvation which can come about only as human beings are taken into the divine life and thereby deified.

What is striking about Christian reflection about divine accessibility is that, from the first, trinitarian considerations were never far removed from reflection on religious diversity. No less a theologian than Gregory of Nyssa characterized the trinitarian conception of divinity as a mean between as well as a double refutation of the excesses of Jewish commitment to the One and a pagan commitment to the many. As the epigraph to this essay shows, Gregory did not separate the work of formulating and defending Christian trinitarianism from reflection about Christianity's others. The work of self-constitution shows itself to be through and through dialogical, at least in principle.

Intriguingly, in our time, a time also marked by robust religious variety, the association between trinitarian reflection and religious diversity has been revived.² Fortunately, contemporary conversations about trinity and religious diversity are not confined to apologetics but now hold promise for an affirmative embrace of religious difference. A variety of Christian theologians now assert that trinitarianism is the distinctively Christian way of offering a *positive* resolution to the problem of religious diversity: by acknowledging distinction within the divine life, Christians can account for substantial differences among the world's religions as varying but nonetheless legitimate expressions of an encounter with God who will be experienced diversely just because God is not an undifferentiated singularity. The abiding differences between the world religions are neither illusory nor indicative of error. Religious diversity is a natural expression of human

encounter with divine multiplicity.

Of course, a trinitarian approach to religious diversity cannot be a neat solution to questions of religious diversity. How, after all, are Christian theologians to honor the Jewish commitment to divine unity and Muslim affirmations that God is without associates? Moreover, a problematic apologetic temptation remains at the heart of some trinitarian approaches to religious diversity, the temptation to assert that whereas other traditions offer a monolithic account of divine life, Christian trinitarianism, by contrast, is encompassing and polyphonic. Christians see the whole whereas others see only in part. We are once more in the territory of hierarchical inclusivism in which Christian traditions have little to learn from dialogue with other religious traditions.³ Self-sufficiency trumps the possibility of mutual transformation.

Might it be possible for Christian theologians to envision a trinitarian engagement with religious diversity that is marked by a sense of *anticipation* that other traditions may have something to teach us about how to think even about trinity? Can we imagine the trinity as a site for interreligious exchange rather than as a prefabricated solution to the problem of religious diversity? My sense is that the trinity can indeed be an open site for interreligious dialogue and exchange but not so long as Christians bring to dialogue a finished conception of the trinity that can in no way be enriched by way of dialogue and comparative theology.

Theology has been in the midst of a trinitarian efflorescence since the work Karl Barth and Karl Rahner. This return of trinitarianism, however, is not marked by happy harmony but is instead characterized by considerable dissensus. One conviction that drives the resurgence of

trinitarianism is the notion that trinity affords a promising resource for social ontology. If to be is to be in relation, then there is no clearer paradigm for that contention than the trinity itself. But about the character of relationality within the divine life, there is no consensus. On the one side stand the social trinitarians and, on the other, are those who are adamantly persuaded that social trinitarianism is a fundamental distortion of the intentions of the ancients.⁴ Given the vigorous internal debate between Christian theologians, it is natural to ask how engagements with religious diversity might bear on such controversies.

The ongoing intra-Christian trinitarian debate reminds us that trinity is better understood as a question and a problem rather than as a transparent dogmatic dictum. Rather than treat some readymade account of the trinity as a final Christian answer to questions about theology and ontology or the problem of religious difference, an alternative and more open-ended strategy would treat the trinity as itself a locus for interreligious conversation and exchange. Put otherwise, before any particular trinitarian formulation derived from intra-Christian resources alone is made to serve as the normative basis for a Christian theology of religious pluralism, we would be better advised to begin by treating trinity as a question for comparative theology.

In what follows, I advance a trinitarian formulation that draws from a comparative reading of Hindu, Christian and Buddhist traditions. From Advaita Vedānta, I draw an account of ultimate reality as ground, from Christian resources, I offer an account of ultimate reality as contingency, and from Buddhist traditions (specifically Madhyamaka), I draw an account of ultimate reality as relation. The result is a trinitarianism of God as ground, contingency and relation derived by way of comparative theology. Although each of these concepts can be correlated with accounts of

God as Father, Son and Spirit, the task at hand is not to defend the orthodoxy of this formulation but to launch an experiment in formulating Christian doctrine in conversation with other traditions. A glance at Gregory suffices to show that something like this process of construction with an eye to religious diversity has long been a part of Christian theology. Only now such construction can take on the character of collaborative conversation rather than apologetic contestation.

What about the number three? Does this venture hinge on positing a threefold structure to reality and the divine life? And what is the relationship between the three and the *poly* of polydoxy? Is three too few for those who love the many? In what follows, trinitarianism is meant to serve as a kind of Nyssan middle between the one and the many, albeit with a difference. I appeal to trinity as a refutation of any privileging of the One that would dismiss the exuberant diversity of creation as merely epiphenomenal or otherwise unreal and likewise hold to trinity against any vision of the many as sheer, arbitrary difference without relation. The number three itself is neither arbitrary nor absolute. This speculative trinitarianism is committed to a vision of God as ground, contingency and relation. However, theologians would do well to remember the warning of the Fathers that number cannot mean in the divine life what it means in quotidian experience. Only finite realities can be enumerated; the infinite cannot. Neither one nor three can mean for the divine life what numbers mean in conventional experience. Nonetheless, I say three.

Regnant Options in Theologies of Religious Pluralism

Before turning to this particular trinitarian treatment of religious diversity, I wish to offer an

abbreviated survey of the current state of the conversation. One way of putting the core question that drives current Christian thinking about religious diversity is this: What is the meaning of my neighbor's faith for mine? In some form or other, that question has been taken up by Christian thinkers from the very beginnings of Christian tradition. But over the last five decades or so, the query has generated a distinct sub-specialty within Christian theology variously called theology of religions or more precisely theology of religious pluralism (TRP).⁵

One particular organizing metaphor has set the terms for conversation and shaped the questions taken up by theologians working within this field. The metaphor imagines religious life as akin to a venture in mountain climbing and takes the various religions to be paths up a mountain. The metaphor in turn generates a basic question that has served to set the terms for conversation and debate: Are the various world religions paths up the same mountain?

When we move from metaphor to concept, that question takes the following cast: Are the different religions independent means for arriving at the same soteriological or saving end? Put simply, do the different religions all lead to healing because they all lead to God or ultimate reality? Noted philosophers and theologians have offered a variety of answers to this question. Christian exclusivists say no—only Jesus is the way to salvation and so it follows that other religions cannot lead to God. There is only one path up the mountain. Christian inclusivists, on the other hand, offer a more nuanced answer. Persons from other religious traditions may in fact arrive at God, but only because Christ or the Holy Spirit is in some way at work in those traditions. The religions are not independent paths leading to the religious summit. Pluralists have answered the question affirmatively: the religions really are independently efficacious paths

up the mountain.

Arguably the most influential of pluralist theologians is John Hick.⁶ He contends that the various religious traditions are soteriological vehicles that lead us from self-centeredness to reality centeredness. All the major religious traditions make this transformation possible, and no tradition is so exceptional at this work that it might justifiably claim to be superior to all others. Hence, all paths lead to the summit and none more efficaciously than any other.

What then of the various understandings of ultimate reality found in the world's religious traditions? How are the sharp differences between these conceptualities to be correlated with Hick's contention that the traditions are engaged in the selfsame project? Hick claims that they are all phenomenal manifestations of a noumenal Real that always exceeds any and all concepts that we may form about that reality. The differences between these conceptions do not bear on the soteriological work that the traditions accomplish. So, for example, ultimate reality or the Real is neither personal nor impersonal.⁷ This is not to say that the religions are wrong to imagine the Real as personal or impersonal because the Real does give itself to be experienced in these ways. On their own terms, the religions are incommensurate and incompatible; traditions that claim that ultimate reality is a person really are in conflict with traditions that say that ultimate reality is impersonal. But from Hick's pluralist perspective, each is right in what it affirms about the Real and wrong when it denies the formulations of others.

We might well ask how Hick can know that the various religions are in fact oriented to one and the same ultimate reality. Hick's offers a pragmatic answer: the major religious traditions all lead

persons from narrow self-centeredness to reality-centeredness. They perform the same work. Every tradition successfully generates saints, none better than any other. Although each tradition will likely depict the specific features of this transformation in different ways, generically speaking they are all doing the same thing. Hence, on both the anthropological side and the theological side, Hick asserts that there is a deep underlying identity between traditions. There is but one mountain to climb and one summit to reach. There is but one ultimate reality.

The trouble with Hick's proposal is that he fails to offer a religiously deep motivation for interreligious dialogue. Religious traditions have nothing to learn about God, humanity or soteriology in and through dialogue. If every account of the Real is equally true and equally false because none are adequate to the nature of the *Real-an-sich*, then the only reason for dialogue is neighborliness. We are not given reason to believe that anything ultimately is at stake in the different theologies available in the world's religious traditions. It is not as though a cumulative reading of the world's religious traditions might teach us more than we know within our traditions alone.

Likewise, if the differences between the concrete accounts of human healing and well-being do not matter because they are all generically the same, we need not be religiously interested in the concrete disciplines and practices of other religious traditions. The Christian who partakes of the Eucharist is generically doing the same thing as the Buddhist who engages in vipassana meditation or Zen. Each is but a tradition specific way of moving from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness. The means differ but the end is the same. Hence, Hick fails to offer reasons for serious interest in the richly textured differences between traditional practices or between

Christian conceptions of God and Buddhist accounts of Buddha-nature. Might the concrete spiritual disciplines of another tradition offer access to dimensions of ultimate reality that are not well accessed in our home tradition? Hick does not pose such questions because he cannot. His commitment to one unknowable ultimate reality trumps the importance of diversity. There is but one ultimate reality and just one worthwhile religious end. Strangely, Hick's pluralism turns out to be not so pluralistic at all.

In a provocative argument that opens up dramatically new possibilities, the evangelical theologian S. Mark Heim argues that there is a profound point of agreement between the most conservative and most liberal of Christian theologians. Both agree that there is at most one worthwhile religious goal or end. The disagreement comes elsewhere: liberals assert that *all traditions* arrive at that single end whereas conservatives believe that *only Christianity* provides access to that end.

If two religions conflict, then at most one can be correct. Wishing to affirm Christianity, Christian exclusivists seek out conflicts and in each case affirm the error of the differing tradition. If your religion differs from mine, you must be wrong. Wishing not to attribute error to one religion against another, pluralists recognize difference but sever it from religious validity. They are convinced that where religions differ, the differences are only apparent... or are real but irrelevant in attaining the one true end of religion. If you think your religion is a real alternative to mine, you must be wrong.⁸

Neither camp takes difference seriously by entertaining the possibility that there might be multiple religious ends, many salvations. Heim shows that neither camp considers the possibility of more than one worthwhile religious end. Rather, it is a shared axiom for both camps that

there *could be* no more than one. The axiom challenges religious believers to recognize that those of other faiths actually are (in all truly important respects) seeking, being shaped by, and eventually realizing the same religious end. All paths lead to the same goal."⁹

After demonstrating that both exclusivists and pluralists are impoverished in their approach to difference, Heim offers a striking reformulation of the mountain climbing metaphor. He argues that there is no good reason to suppose that there is only one religious mountain worth climbing. He contends that we ought to understand the world religions as paths up very different mountains. The religious terrain is mountainous; each of these mountains is worth climbing and leads to a different but legitimate destination. The different religions are not merely different ways to the same goal, but different ways to different goals!

But does the argument that there are different and valid religious goals, hence many mountains, imply that there is more than one ultimate reality? Heim could have taken that option but he does not. Here, he parts company with the process theologian David Ray Griffin who does in fact posit multiple ultimate realities, a position he calls "deep pluralism." Griffin traces deep pluralism to the work of John Cobb and points to Cobb's compelling claim that, "alongside all the errors and distortions that can be found in all our traditions there are insights arising from profound thought and experience *that are diverse modes of apprehending diverse aspects of the totality of reality.*"¹⁰ Appealing to a technical distinction between creativity and God found in process metaphysics, Griffin argues that for Cobb there must be at least two religious ultimates.

The virtue of having two ultimate realities, Griffin notes is that it permits us to recognize the

difference between and the validity of both those traditions that insist upon a personal and loving ultimate reality—God, Allah, Īśvara, and Christ—and other traditions that insist that ultimate reality is *nirguṇa Brahman*, *dharmakāya* or *śūnyatā*/emptiness. Both are right because there are two ultimate realities and neither can be reduced to the other. As Griffin argues, "...the two types of experience can be taken to be equally veridical if we think of them as experiences of different ultimates."¹¹ Griffin goes on to show that there are in fact three ultimates in Cobb's vision—creativity, God and the world, each undergirding a different kind of religious experience or tradition; creativity can serve as the basis for nontheistic traditions, God serves as the basis for theistic traditions, and the world as the basis for cosmic religions.¹²

I cannot here present a comprehensive engagement with and critique of Cobb and Griffin will simply have to assert that the very idea of multiple ultimates strikes me as self-contradictory and runs contrary to the very idea of ultimacy. The virtue of a position of the sort articulated by Cobb and Griffin is this: if traditions are oriented toward different ultimates and these ultimates are real, then when traditions find themselves in disagreement, this disagreement becomes a possible resource rather than contradiction. Put otherwise, the challenge would be to find out how contradictory claims might turn out, upon further exploration, to be complementary rather than contradictory. We might be able to combine the insights of multiple religious traditions to generate a richer vision of reality than we are able to derive from one religion alone. With Cobb and Griffin, I agree that there is profound promise in the claim that the different religions enable us to get at, "diverse aspects of the totality of reality."

However, against Cobb and Griffin, I would argue—as does Mark Heim and a host of other

Christian theologians—that all we need to posit in order to allow for a real variety of religious goods is that the totality of reality has diverse aspects. We need not posit multiple ultimates. It would suffice to posit one ultimate reality with a diversity of aspects, and that is what is entailed by any trinitarian conception of ultimate reality. Mark Heim, Raimon Panikkar, Gavin D'Costa, and a variety of Christian theologians have argued that trinity is the natural way that Christian theology can take up the problem of religious diversity. Mark Heim and these others contend that the genuine differences between religions are grounded in trinitarian difference. Different soteriological trajectories engage different dimensions of the divine life. Because Christian doctrine does not regard God as a homogeneous simplicity, we should expect that different traditions are rightly oriented to genuine distinctions internal to the divine life. Beyond homogeneous singularity and irreducible diversity, there lies an alternate possibility that Christian theology finds in the trinity. The divine life is neither an undifferentiated absolute nor a plurality of more or less loosely related ultimates.

A variety of trinitarian approaches have been tried over the last two decades beginning with Panikkar's groundbreaking volume, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*.¹³ What Panikkar and others do well is to show that different spiritualities can be authentic ways of being oriented to different dimensions of God's trinitarian life. However, all extant trinitarian approaches, Mark Heim's included, are plagued by a variety of difficulties.

For the sake of brevity, I will simply enumerate six problems with most trinitarian approaches to the question of religious diversity before outlining my own approach. First, to date, most Christian theologians take up some fully formulated Christian trinitarianism and then give to

religious traditions certain preassigned slots within the trinitarian economy. Other traditions are understood entirely on Christian theological terms, terms formulated *before* dialogue. Second, in most approaches to date, there is an insufficient appreciation for diversity *within* religious traditions. The whole of Buddhism, for example, is said to approach some given dimension of God's trinitarian life. Christian theologians have not recognized the deep internal diversities within religious traditions. Third, by failing to understand internal variations within religious traditions, whole traditions are reified as oriented toward different destinations. In Mark Heim's case, these destinations are real, different, and persist even after death. Postmortem, Buddhists go to nirvana and Christians to heaven. Fourth, many theologians err in significant ways by misreading and misinterpreting other religious traditions, most especially Buddhism. Often this error is due to a desire to make traditions fit within a given trinitarian scheme that is formulated *prior to dialogue* with other religious traditions. Such a danger is most pronounced when theologians want to put all impersonal conceptions of ultimate reality into a single basket and all personal conceptions into another. What is inevitably lost to attention in such an approach are the deep, vigorous and indeed millennia long debates between Buddhists and Hindus, and even between Buddhists about their different impersonal conceptions of ultimate reality. Madhyamaka Buddhists have long insisted that *śūnyatā* (emptiness) is not the Upanishadic Brahman. Still subtler are the arguments between Buddhist schools about just how to understand emptiness. Tibetan Gelugpas, the Dalai Lama's school of Buddhism, are insistent that there is nothing at all ground like about emptiness whereas Nyingma Buddhists, who are deeply influenced by the idea that all things possess Buddha-nature, disagree. The latter insist that emptiness is not merely negative but must also be in some sense a positive reality. The subtlety of such distinctions between traditions has largely been lost on most Christian theologians.

And this brings me to what strikes me as a fifth problem with trinitarian approaches to date: Christian theologians have not thought to let the insights of other traditions play a role in helping us to revise and deepen our understanding of the trinity. Christian theologians rightly affirm that we can with confidence look for traces or intimations of the trinity in the world at large but these traces when found are not permitted to inform and revise our understanding of the trinity.

The sixth and final problem with most trinitarian accounts to date—and this will come as no surprise—is the claim to Christian superiority. Only we have arrived at a trinitarian vision whereas other traditions, however legitimate, manage to access only one dimension of the divine life. It does not occur to most Christian theologians that most Christian traditions and thinkers also miss out on the plenitude of God's trinitarian life. To affirm that God is trinity is vital, but if one's conception of the trinity is constrained by a monolithic account of the divine life, then the promise of affirming that divinity is diversity in unity will be lost.

God as Ground, Contingency And Relation

To account for and overcome these limitations, I propose a provisional, speculative trinitarianism derived not just from Christian resources but also from Buddhist-Christian-Hindu dialogue. This approach does not take some fully formulated Christian account of the trinity and then try to squeeze other religious traditions into that prefabricated vision nor does it assume that Christians securely know just what is entailed in asserting that God is trinity. With other trinitarian theologians of religious pluralism, I agree that if ultimate reality is trinity, then we would do well

to expect that we would see trinitarian disclosures in human experience and the structure of reality as such. Therefore, these other religious traditions might deepen and augment what Christians have come to know about God's trinitarian life in and through the incarnation and the dispensation of the Holy Spirit.

I would like to argue for a theological threefold of *ground, contingency and relation*. This threefold names three dimensions of the divine life that I correlate with three dimensions of experience, an ontological threefold. This ontological threefold is *being, contingent being, and being in relation*; these three are fundamental mysteries that are intrawordly signals of transcendence pointing to the divine life.

In brief, being refers to the sheer mystery that there is anything at all. The sheer "isness" of every existent—that there is something rather than nothing—is a primordial source of wonderment. The theological conclusions that religious traditions draw from this wonderment are many and often incommensurable, but wonder about *the fact that there is anything at all* is a signal of transcendence that points to divinity. A second and primordial source of wonderment is contingency. Contingency speaks both to the non-necessary character of each and every item of experience but also to the fact that everything whatsoever—from atoms, to leaves, to persons, and galaxies—is utterly singular. To exist is to exist as an inimitable this, a concrete haecceity. A third and fundamental source of worldly astonishment is that nothing whatsoever exists in isolation. Not one of the concrete haecceities to be found in experience exists in isolation. It both is what it is and no other, but it is what it is precisely by being in relation with every other. To be is to be in relation.

Each of these mysteries points to a dimension of the divine life. The fact that there is anything at all rather than nothing, the sheer fact of being points to God's character as ground, as being itself. All that exists because of its participation in God who is the ground and source of being. Contingent being points to God's character as (source of) contingency. God is the creator of every particular in its very concreteness. There is something in the divine life that gives rise to a world of inexhaustible particularity and diversity. Finally, the fact that creation is characterized throughout as marked by relation—that nothing whatsoever exists apart from relation—points to God as relation and the power of relation. God does not give rise to a world of isolated particulars but rather gives rise to a world that is through and through relational.

This double threefold, worldly and divine, is richly resonant with traditional trinitarian discourse. God as Father is the ultimate ground of divinity itself and the world, God as Son/Logos is the principle of distinction within the divine life and the source of particularity in the world. To speak is to speak not language in general but to say something concrete and singular. The world is the Word's utterance, an utterance marked by a rich profusion of diversity, a play of virtually infinite variation, an inexhaustible fecundity of difference for the sake of difference. But the world is not the domain of sheer monadic difference wherein each contingent particular is locked away in splendid isolation from every other particular. Nothing whatsoever exists apart from relation least of all divinity. Spirit in the divine life is that which animates and binds the world together as a world of relation and secures the flourishing of beings.

Although the connections between this double threefold and traditional trinitarian formulations

are not hard to miss, my focus here is not to establish their proper Christian credentials but to show how this double threefold both captures something integral about the nature of the Real and points to core themes and motifs to be found within variety of religious traditions. Although for the sake of simplicity, I will associate each of these notions with particular strands from Hindu, Christian and Buddhist traditions, I believe that every religious tradition does in some fashion register all three dimensions of this trinity though not in equal and emphatic balance. Religious thinkers and traditions are most often committed to one of these three concept-intuitions and so are unlikely to appreciate what is celebrated in the remaining pair. Indeed, sharp theological tensions arise across and even within traditions because traditions and strands thereof fail to register or even deny the equal importance of all three.

By ground, I mean to refer to what Christians have typically referred to as the first person of the trinity. I derive the term from Paul Tillich's language of God as ground of being while remembering his added proviso that the ground is also as an unfathomable abyss. But rather than begin by characterizing God as ground by appeal to Christian resources, I turn to the Upanishads and the Advaita Vedānta commentarial tradition as exemplified in writing of the master teacher of that tradition, Śaṅkara. In his commentary on the famous passage from the Chāndogya Upanishad, "In the beginning all this was being (sat), One only, without a second," Śaṅkara argues that all reality is but a transformation of Brahman, understood as being.¹⁴ Just as clay pots, jars, cups and the like are ultimately nothing but modifications of one lump of clay, so too the world is ultimately nothing but Brahman. Elsewhere, the Upanishads and Śaṅkara also employ the image of sparks and flame to designate the nonduality of the world and Brahman.

Ultimately, Śaṅkara pulls back from the language of the world as a transformation of Brahman in order to assert the unchangeable immutability of Brahman as world-ground. Śaṅkara invites readers to distinguish between two intuitions that are given in any experience, namely the particular item of experience on the one hand and the intuition of being on the other. So, if one sees a pot and affirms that, "The pot is," Śaṅkara would point out that whereas the pot comes and goes, the sense of being persists. One is never without the sense of being. That sense of being which is given everywhere points to the world ground that abides whereas the particulars come and go. To return to the metaphor of clay and pots, jars, and the like, the clay is real in a way that its modifications are not. The encounter with being in and through, and ultimately, underneath particulars points to an abiding and infinite world ground, namely Brahman, that upholds but is not equivalent to those particulars.

In his commentary on the Great Utterance (*mahāvākya*) found in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad, "In the beginning, all this was Brahman indeed. It knew itself as, "I am Brahman, (*ahambrahmāsmi*)," Śaṅkara argues that this world ground is not merely being but also the true and innermost Self (*atman*).¹⁵ The self is understood as eternal luminous consciousness and not merely as the contingent psychophysical formations that make up quotidian identity. The latter formations are too passing to be mistaken as the true abiding Self. When one sees that the light of consciousness (*cit*) that shines in the mind is the true Self, then one stops living a life driven by compulsions. The result of understanding one's true identity is liberation from the cycle of rebirth. The transethical consequence of such knowledge is compassion rooted in knowledge of the nonduality of Brahman and self as well as nonduality between self and other. The true Self is one in all.

The human predicament as understood by Śaṅkara's reading of the Upanishads is understood to be bondage to the fundamental ignorance of this nonduality. When human beings take themselves to be exhausted by their conventional finite identities as composed of caste, gender, stage of life and the like, they inevitably feel themselves to be vulnerable. From and out of that vulnerability, human beings become captive to craving, hatred and delusion, the three great poisons in the Advaita tradition. They crave and are addicted to what promises to complete them, and they are averse to what threatens them. The cumulative force of this competing push and pull generates the profound disorientation called delusion. Captive to these forces, human beings perpetuate incalculable personal and social harm and are captive to cycle of transmigration. Liberation from this cycle comes from knowledge provided by the scripture that the self (atman) is the ultimate (Brahman). That is the point made in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* Upanishad:

Ahambrahmāsmi. I am Brahman.

Ultimately, the Upanishads as read by Śaṅkara contend that Brahman is ineffable and beyond language and thought. It is immanent as ground but transcendent as mystery. One can know that one is Brahman but Brahman itself cannot be known. Though designated provisionally as being, it exceeds all name and form. It is the ground for all that has name and form, but it exceeds all name and form even as it grounds them. Human beings are thus understood to be the ultimate luminous and unknowable mystery that no words can reach—not even the words "ground" or "being" or even "consciousness." Crucial here for the Advaitin is that the sheer being of the world is mystery, but what draws the Advaitin's attention is not the particular being of things qua particular. What captivates is that the world of name and form—though name and form are

themselves utterly evanescent—nevertheless points to and speaks of being as such. Being which shines in everything whatsoever—actually for the Advaitin *underneath* everything—is holy mystery.

By contingency, I refer to the Jewish and Christian appreciation not just for the wonder that anything is at all but rather the *irreducibly singular and distinctive* character of all that is. "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." Contrary to the Advaita impulse to look past and underneath name and form, contingency speaks to the conviction that each and every particular is what it is and has an intensity and singularity of value: just this arch of an eyebrow, just this particular curve of the face, just this chin and no other, just this Jewish carpenter who makes all the difference. Contingency also names the Jewish and Christian conviction that God plus world is more than God alone.

Without diminishing or dismissing the divine plenitude, to celebrate contingency is to assert the worth and value of every element in creation as intrinsically good just in its very evanescent particularity. By creating the world, God generates singular and concrete instantiations of value. To insist on the otherness of the world from God is to celebrate the worth of creaturely life. The worth of contingent being cannot be affirmed in philosophical or theological accounts in which intrinsic worth and value of creaturely lives is said somehow to be already (pre)contained in the divine life and only made manifest in creation. The attempt to praise the glory and fullness of divinity at the expense of the rich world of concrete particulars is to miss the meaning of the doctrine of creation. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is not so much meant to stipulate that God, by way of an exercise of sheer unilateral power, makes creatures to be out of sheer absolute

nothingness (*ouk on*) as it is meant to affirm that the divine life is enriched by the life of the world in a way that most Neoplatonic accounts of creation as an overflowing of the divine life cannot do. The world is more than the exteriorization of what is already contained in the divine life. Speaking as a father of a lovely and utterly singular daughter, I want to affirm that the meaning of the doctrine of creation is that her concrete and singular being enriches God's very life—that my Katie adds a measure of richness to the divine life by virtue of her contingent and lovely being, however evanescent. It seems entirely right to say, as a host of theologians have, that the divine life is not diminished by creation, but what is needed also is a robust affirmation that divine life is enriched by creaturely life precisely because the latter is not a mere manifestation of the former.

Those who orient themselves to the mystery of being, and hence to the mystery of ultimate reality as ground, tend to dismiss particularity as fleeting. Their focus rests on the sheer fact of being and not contingent being. By contrast, those who celebrate contingency insist that every particularity is a communicative expression of a good beyond being. Creation comes about through the Logos of God and is itself an expression of that Logos. The God whose Logos gives rise to the lovely world can be experienced as a lover who loves the lovely world into being. To acknowledge and celebrate contingency is to experience the ground not just as an impersonal or transpersonal absolute but as a personal, creative and communicative source—as the Father and Mother of the Logos. God speaks the world into being and sustains the world in being. The world itself is a logos of God, the speech of God, and the gift of God. God gives Godself to the world by speaking the world into being and giving to the world concrete, lovely and contingent

(need not have been but now is) being. The world's being is not simply and without remainder God's being.

The human predicament when seen in light of contingency is the failure of particular persons and communities to love and reverence God's lovely world and the giver of that world. Whereas ignorance of the nonduality of self and absolute ground is the shape of the human predicament in Advaita, the human predicament under the sign of contingency is a failure to love widely as well as particularly. The shape of this failure can be variegated, but we can speak of a constricted selfhood that does not love widely and with sufficient passionate intensity. Love is of insufficient breadth should it love only what is one's own—one's family alone, one's nation alone. Even the hypocrites do that. Under the sign of contingency, there can be no mandate to renounce particular loves. Apart from contingency, there is no possibility of the erotic, of a genuine, inexhaustible and generous desire for the other in all his or her concrete loveliness. Where there is no otherness, divine or human, there can be no eros for the other.

Śāṅkara and the Advaita tradition urge human beings to renounce particular and contingent loves for the sake of realizing nonduality. The focus of our attention is called away from our particular and contingent being to the sheer fact of being. When one has realized the nonduality of self and Brahman and so is no longer captive to the narrow and constricted ego, a universal compassion takes its place. The calling of contingency is otherwise. True, it too is a calling to move beyond constricted and egoistic selfhood, but the calling of contingency is for a deeper and, yes, erotic appreciation for the loveliness of the world and loveliness of the world's giver. The vocation is not to give up on particular loves but to expand one's range of particular loves without

surrendering the call toward intensity which can only be fulfilled when we limit ourselves for the sake of reverence and piety to loving just this particular person or partner.

But is contingency also rooted in the divine life? Is the divine life itself marked by contingency, and if so, in what sense? On the one hand, the very idea of contingency as presented herein is meant to affirm the real ontological status of the world and the world's particulars as irreducible to divinity. The world both is the scene of difference and is itself a difference that makes it *not God* or at least not reducible to God. God gives rise to what is not merely Godself. That said, questions remain: Is the divine life enriched by the world God creates? Is there something in the divine life that impels and receives the luxuriant prolixity of worldly particularity? Is God changed by the loving labor of creativity? Does the world birthed by divine labor remain merely *ad extra*, outside the divine life?

A Christian scriptural resource for thinking these questions can be found in Paul's letter to the Colossians wherein the apostle describes the Christ as

...the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and *for him*. He is before all things and in him all things hold together. (Col 1:15-17; NRSV; emphasis added)

St. Paul portrays the Christ as the principle of contingency within the divine life. The Christ is the one in and through whom the world is created. Still more, the world is created *for him*.

What is the meaning of this *for him*? Perhaps it means that the reality within the divine life which gives rise to contingency is also enriched by that very contingency. The world is made *for* the Christ and it is sustained *in* the Christ who holds the world together. The divine life is enriched by the worldly life to which it gives rise. The principle of contingency within the divine life is "before all things" and is not itself one of those things. Those things, however, can enrich the Christ precisely because they are not what He is, and He is not what they are. He is enriched by what he is not—at least not at first. Insofar as the Christ holds them together, they now become part of his very life. In this sense, the divine life is really enriched by the distinct but not separate life of the world.¹⁶

Relation names the truth that nothing *whatsoever* is what it is apart from its relation. To be is to be in relation. This truth finds exemplary expression in the Madhyamaka truth of emptiness. To be more specific still, it is the Gelukpa reading of emptiness and is most resolutely insistent on the truth of relationality. Gelukpa Mādhyamikas insist that to speak of emptiness is not to posit some impersonal world-ground or ground of consciousness that is empty. To say that everything is empty is to say that no thing whatsoever has self-existence or own-being. Indeed, to be is to be no thing at all, if to be a thing, is to have some own-being or self-existence (*svabhāva*) that an entity possesses apart from relationship. Nothing whatsoever exists outside of relation. More rigorously still, no being whatsoever has an essence or core that it is non-relationally derived, not even God. On this reading, emptiness is just another way of designating that all of reality is *pratītyasamutpāda*, dependent co-arising.¹⁷

The human predicament is understood under the sign of relation as craving, craving generated by

the false idea that one is a disconnected and non-relational self. The ignorant notion that one is a self apart from relation generates a constricted and narrow ego that imagines the world to be made up of things that the self can then grasp. There is something tragicomic about the human predicament so understood: when human beings take themselves to be disconnected and reified entities and take the world to be likewise composed of such things, they are impelled toward grasping just those realities with which they are already intimately bound in and through relation. I seek to own you as a thing when I could discover that you and I are already bound up in utter intimacy if I come to see that neither you nor I am a thing that grasps or a thing to be grasped. Buddhists share with Advaitins the sense that the ego is driven by craving, hatred and delusion, but they differ radically about the cure to this ailment. The cure is not to discover the true Self that is the world's ground, but to discover that there is no self whatsoever apart from relation. There is no transworldly absolute according to Mādhyamika thinkers.¹⁸ Posting such an absolute behind the world is to risk losing the world of relation. After all, the absolute is by definition that which withdraws from relation—that which is without relation.

Speaking here in my own stead rather than as a Mādhyamika thinker, I would argue that when the truth of relationality is obscured, then the coherence of reality is lost. Nothing holds together. Even our theologies are radically compromised. As a consequence, we risk accounts of God as an unrelated and immutable ultimate, a God who is being God when there is no world for which God can be God for. We make the mistake of supposing that the world is other than God in some non-relational sense and so suppose that God and world are marked not by internal relation but external relation. God is understood to be what the world is not and the world what God is not. As a result, an irresolvable dualism emerges. The profound temptation that lies

within every theology that forgets relation is that it might so personalize God that God becomes a being, a person who loves us from without. Against this dualistic vision stands a depiction of God as Spirit-relation who is the Love with which I love God, the one who prays within me with sighs and groans too deep for words.

The fundamental tension between a theological account that resolutely insists on relation and one that insists with equal vigor on contingency-singularity is hard to miss. Speak only of relation and one risks losing a world of value that is, *in some sense*, other than and irreducible to the divine life. Without positing such otherness, it is hard to know how worldly existents can have a particularity that is distinct enough *from* the divine life to *enrich* the divine life. But to speak only of otherness is to fall into dualism in which God becomes a being among beings—an infinite being—which as Tillich and others have demonstrated is a contradiction in terms.

To speak of God as contingency and relation without affirming God as ground/abyss is to run still other risks. Against the Gelukpa Mādyamikas stand other Buddhists who want to preserve some account of Buddha-nature as non-reified ground; these Buddhists rightly fear that an account of ultimate reality as emptiness alone might risk a nihilism that denies the very ground of the human capacity for transformation. To affirm that there is in the real an infinite fund for wisdom and compassion—that is the reason for insisting that emptiness is not merely a negation of own-being or self-existence (*svabhāva*). Of course, such Buddhists are (too) anxious to affirm that to posit such a ground is in no way tantamount to advancing a vision of ultimate reality as non-relational Being-Itself, the putative sin of Advaita.¹⁹

This brief treatment of the tension between depictions of ultimate reality as ground, contingency and relation demonstrates that a trinitarian problem remains: just how does one formulate a theological vision that does not privilege one of these dimensions at the expense of others? Comparative theology is a necessary discipline precisely because traditions tend to settle such questions about the nature of ultimate reality in a dominant inflection or style leaving other options inadequately considered, at best. At worst, minority voices are dismissed as heretics for refusing the dominant account. Christian traditions in their logos-centrism offer rich resources for celebrating contingency, but under the dominance of contingency, God is too often reduced to personhood, the sovereign person, or in social trinitarianism, three persons who are somehow also one. Driven by a singular focus on the category of contingency, some go so far as to subscribe to a vision of each person in the trinity as itself a center of will and consciousness. Personal otherness is inscribed into the heart of the divine life but in a way that effectively erases the character of God as ground and relation.

Comparative theology can shed rich light on these questions even as they play out in intra-Christian debates about the character of the divine life. How are we rightly to speak of God as inexhaustible (re)source and abyss, God as one who speaks and so gives rise to a world that is not identical to or a mere overflow of the divine life, and speak also about ultimate reality as relation?²⁰ That Spirit has throughout the history of Christian theology shaken off personal attributions—that from the first Christian theology was unable to fix the character of the Spirit—speaks to the nature of ultimate reality as relation, as the energy of the between and so not itself reducible either to abyssal depth or source of personal address.

By contrast, the forms of Hinduism and Buddhism described herein were formulated by renunciants and monastics who posit visions of ultimate reality that call for detachment from particularity. The shape of these particular strands of Buddhism and Hinduism are markedly suspicious of the erotic if by the erotic we mean not just sexual love but intense desire for the loveliness of singular realities, most especially, of course, the female body.

Because of these differences in orientation, the texture and fruits of healing transformation in these different traditions are non-identical and may generate sharp tensions in persons who take up the practices of more than one tradition. But tension need not amount to contradiction. Theological differences between ground, contingency and relation and the way in which human beings are oriented distinctively to these dimensions of ultimate reality can generate positive resources for interreligious collaboration.

I do not want to downplay the tensions between these spiritual trajectories. As already noted, those who are dedicated the mystery of relation worry that orientation to the mystery of ground might lead to world loss. Spiritual practitioners who are dedicated to a vision of the world of name and form as unreal and so become caught up in a sense of the hyperreality of the transpersonal ground-abyss may deny the realm of relation and encounter and so fall prey to world-negation.

This danger is one that those oriented toward contingency can appreciate, albeit in a different key. Those who celebrate the mystery of contingency worry that lovers of relation can miss the inexhaustible singularity of lovely particulars because the latter are so intent on denying that

particulars can come to be apart from relation. Might not an exclusive orientation toward relationality jeopardize attention to the particular and hence the possibility of the erotic, of love for the particular not because I am incomplete without it, but because the loveliness of the singular has its own inviolable beauty to which I owe the piety of desire?

The tension between these three mysteries notwithstanding, spiritual life lived in relation to these three mysteries need not result in outright contradiction or incommensurability. This assertion is made in the key of faith and not ratiocination which must come later. By way of that latter work of reflection, theologians can and must give an account of the *perichoresis* of these three mysteries. If reality and divinity bear this trinitarian structure—if ground, contingency, and relation—are distinct but not separate, then one would expect that any robust and historically deep tradition can find resources to orient persons to these three dimensions of the Real even if any given strand of a religious tradition is typically errs in one direction or the other. So, as noted, we find in a variety of Tibetan Buddhist traditions, thinkers who are worried that the Gelukpa understanding of emptiness is too negative and cannot give an adequate account of our innate Buddha-nature as a positive reality. These traditions argue that while it is true that Buddha-nature cannot be a non-relational entity, Buddha-nature must be understood also as a positive and luminous ground of wisdom and compassion. This internal difference *within Tibetan Buddhism* accounts for the longstanding debates between proponents of “self-emptiness” and proponents of “other-emptiness.” In the tension, debate and ultimately in efforts to synthesize these different commitments, one can find in Buddhist traditions the motifs of ground and relation together with an appreciation for the suchness of each particular.

Christian traditions are, by and large, deeply committed to a vision of contingency and so tend to configure the ground not just as creativity but as a personal creator who loves. Under the pressure of contingency, the ground is personalized and is experienced as Lover. But there are many Christian theologians, mystics in particular, who desire a unitive or nondual experience of God. In such thinkers, the experience of God as ground and relation complements a vision of God as loving creator of a contingent and lovely world. Figures like Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart come readily to mind.

In both Jewish and Christian thinkers, we also find theologians of the Spirit who experience and encounter God primarily not as ground or even as contingency but under the sign of relation. The Jewish philosopher of relation par excellence is Martin Buber, the thinker of I-Thou relation, the thinker of the event of meeting. Many contemporary Christian theologians, most especially process and feminist thinkers, are attempting to articulate a theology of God as relation and reality as relatedness precisely in order to correct for personalist visions in which relatedness is obscured.

In sum, this account of ultimate reality as ground, contingency and relation suggests that religious traditions—and even strands and thinkers within them—are likely to be oriented toward one or the other of these mysteries at the expense of others. Rare is the theologian who manages to see how these three are one and yet also three. Thinkers and traditions have their particular genius and will customarily resonate with one of these mysteries at the expense of the others. Christians can take no consolation in nor assert religious superiority by appealing to trinity. Despite that commitment, Christian traditions have a long history of erring on the side of

personalism under the weight of contingency, so much so that they have burned mystics like Porete who have given voice to a unitive experience of divinity best captured in visions of God as ground and relation. The characteristic spiritual distortion that comes from too narrow a focus on God as contingency, uncorrected by understandings of God as ground and relation, has been to figure God as a transcendent person (or worse still, three such persons). For those who hold to such personalist visions, the radical quest for an abyssal experience of nonduality in which the self discovers that her true depth just is the divine ground or that the self can plunge directly into that abyss is *verboten*.

By appealing to a trinitarianism of ground, contingency and relation, I argue that differences between *and within* religious traditions are vital and not merely phenomenal cultural variations. Religious differences are rooted in genuine distinctions within the divine life. The work of interreligious dialogue is religiously important because it is a way of gathering up differences for the sake of integral vision. If we are to understand how these mysteries might be marked by mutual interpenetration, we must take up interreligious dialogue. Interreligious dialogue cannot be motivated by the proximate work of peacemaking alone but must be seen as vital to the quest for right orientation. We cannot move fully into the life of the trinitarian God apart from a deeper movement into communion with our non-Christian neighbors.

John Hick argues that the Real is ultimately neither personal nor impersonal and that all ways of experiencing the Real fail to tell us anything about what Ultimate Reality is in itself. There is a sharp and irrevocable dualism between the One Real and its various manifestations. All are equally true and equally false which can mean that they are equally a matter of indifference. For

Hick, the texture of human lives as they move from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness is not a matter of deep interest. What matters is that all traditions make a generic turn to reality-centeredness possible.

By contrast, in this trinitarian vision, the particular texture of soteriological transformation matters. Christian *agape* is not the same as Buddhist *karunā*, which is not to say that one is superior to the other. We may need both. If this trinitarian account is on the mark, then there are particular forms of healing and virtue that can come about only by engaging in the concrete practices of particular traditions. But these differences need not lead to mutual indifference. This trinitarian vision provides grounds for a certain holy envy for the particular excellences accomplished by Buddhist and Hindu forms of practice. Also ruled out is any eschatological vision in which different religious communities arrive at entirely different post-mortem destinations, some of which are nicer than others or at least more complete. Such a vision is problematic not least because traditions are marked by deep internal variegations. Religious goods do not sort themselves out one per tradition. Moreover, any theological vision risks incompleteness, if not outright error, if it fails to become properly attuned to each of these three dimensions of the divine life. The religious quest of our time cannot be imagined as one in which each religious community engages in the work of climbing its own mountain in relative isolation from other religious communities. Only by more deeply appreciating the distinctive goods of other religious traditions can we move more deeply into the divine life. There is no movement into depth of divine life without a movement toward our neighbors, and that is why religious diversity is not a problem but is instead a source of profound promise for our collective well being.

What then of the poly of polydoxy? Does the trinitarian vision sketched herein mean that divine self-showing can take only and at most three manifestations? Much depends on what is meant by this particular threefold. To affirm that God is world-ground, that God is contingency, and that God is relation in no way diminishes the worth of multiplicity. Quite to the contrary! To turn one's gaze anywhere in the world is to see God as Being-Itself, to see God as one who gives rise to and receives the world of contingent particulars, and to see God as one who binds these particulars together in relation. This trinitarian vision is neither a monistic rejection of diversity as unreal and trivial nor a celebration of sheer profusion wherein each thing is just another monadic one, and then another, and then another. Inasmuch as polydoxy is a vision of the many-in-relation (multiplicity), a many that does not negate the one, this speculative trinitarianism is most assuredly polydoxic.

This commitment to polydoxy finds expression in the theology of religious diversity articulated herein. Against Hick, this account refuses a Kantian privileging of the numinous one in which the value of religious difference is imperiled. Nor does this account uncritically embrace the promising work of Griffin and Heim. While their commitment to diversity is embraced, left behind is any account of multiple religious ultimates or multiple salvations that might privilege diversity at the expense of relation. Hence, this account does not envision religions as unrelated homogeneities, each on parallel tracks that will not meet, each heading to an independent *sui generis* postmortem destination. This speculative trinitarianism, by contrast, celebrates and cherishes differences within and between traditions for the sake of mutual transformation. This hope for mutuality and transformation rests at the very heart of polydoxic vision.

¹ Gregory of Nyssa, "The Great Catechism," *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, Volume V, Tr. W. Moore and H. A. Wilson, New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1893, p. 477, emphasis added.

² For a helpful book that summarizes and assesses a number of trinitarian approaches to religious diversity, see V-M. Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions*, Burlington, VT: Ashgate Press, 2004.

³ On hierarchical inclusivism, see W. Halbfass's important essay, "'Inclusivism and 'Tolerance' in the Encounter Between India and the West," *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1998, p. 411.

⁴ The literature on recent trinitarian disputes is now considerable. For an important collection of essays in which the question of social versus anti-social trinitarianism is engaged, see S. T. Davis, D. Kendall, S.J. and G. O'Collins, S.J. (eds) *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. In that volume, see especially B. Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," pp. 203-49. On the important question of how to read Gregory of Nyssa on this question - as he is claimed by partisans on both sides - see the many compelling essays in S. Coakley (ed.) *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003.

⁵ For a masterful and fair-minded critical survey of this material, see P. Knitter, *Introducing Theology of Religions*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

⁶ The most comprehensive articulation of J. Hick's philosophy of religion can be found in the published version of his Gifford Lectures, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

⁷ J. Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, pp. 61-63.

⁸ M. Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001, pp. 2-3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰ John Cobb quoted in D. R. Griffin, "John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism," in D. R. Griffin (ed.) *Deep Religious Pluralism*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, p. 47. Emphasis added.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹³ R. Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973.

¹⁴ Śaṅkara, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad with the Commentary of Śri Śaṅkarācārya*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983, p. 413.

¹⁵ Śaṅkara, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad with the Commentary of Śri Śaṅkarācārya*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983, p. 100. The translation is mine.

¹⁶ This account of contingency is, of course, congruent with the Whiteheadian consequent nature of nature of God which receives the created world into the divine life.

¹⁷ The authoritative philosophical articulation of this understanding of emptiness as dependent co-arising is to found in Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. See J. L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

¹⁸ Jay Garfield quite concisely characterizes Nāgārjuna, the founding master of the Madhyamaka school, as holding that, "emptiness itself is empty. It is not a self-existent void standing behind a veil of illusion comprising conventional reality, but merely a characteristic of conventional reality." *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁹ On these internal Buddhist debates, see John Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied: Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.

²⁰ This question is, strictly speaking, not taken up here as it lies beyond the scope of this paper. One would have to construct a complete tradition specific trinitarian vision, a vision that would aim to do equal justice to God as ground, contingency and relation. This chapter is a prolegomena to that larger task.