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Does God Have a Body?

Rāmānuja's Challenge to the Christian Tradition

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ABSTRACT: The Christian tradition's core theological assertion is the embodiment of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Yet, even while asserting God's incarnation in space and time, the tradition has usually denied embodiment unto the Godhead itself. Theologians have based this denial on Jewish iconoclasm, Greek idealism, and inferences from God's omnipresence, transcendence, and infinity. This speculative essay will argue that Hindu Śrīvaiṣṇava theologian Rāmānuja successfully addresses these concerns. He argues for the embodiment of an omnipresent, transcendent, and infinite personal God. Rāmānuja largely derives his arguments from the Hindu scriptures. Nevertheless, their rational explication and internal coherence render divine embodiment a legitimate theological option for the Christian tradition, whose scriptures present both anthropomorphic and iconoclastic concepts of God. Since Godhead embodiment is ontologically coherent and rationally defensible, Christians must accept or reject it based on axiological grounds, by evaluating the felt consequences of the doctrine in

Christian life. For embodied beings, any pastoral theology should commend embodiment within the Godhead.

Hinduism, Christianity, and Godhead Embodiment: Continuing a liberal Christian trajectory toward divine embodiment.

The Christian tradition presumes divine embodiment, founded as it is on the expression of the divine Logos in Jesus Christ (John 1). At the same time, the tradition has usually denied the possibility of Godhead embodiment—the assertion that God in Godself possesses a body. This essay will tentatively, provisionally, and speculatively assert divine embodiment within the Godhead itself. Since creation is an expression of the overflowing love of God, our created condition must be a blessing. Hence, our material existence cannot be inferior to any purely spiritual existence, nor need we subordinate body to soul.

Biblically, Genesis 1.24-27 defines humankind as made in the image of God. The Christian tradition has interpreted this text in many different ways. Athanasius defines the image of God as, at least in part, our ability to

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reason.¹ Augustine, basing his interpretation of the image of God on the Trinity, notes that psychologically we are three making a whole—memory, intellect, and will co-operating within one person.² More sympathetic to our agenda, Irenaeus insists that the image of God includes every part of a human—soul, spirit, *and* body. Hence, to invoke the divine image is to integrate all three aspects of our person into one experiential unity.³ Like Irenaeus, we are now attempting to define the image of God in this-worldly, embodied terms. Defined thus, creation in the image of God invites us to celebrate our condition as personal, local, and sentient beings. Indeed, creation in the image of God allows us to imagine God in Godself as embodied—personal, local, and sentient—although limitless with regard to this universe.

This consideration of divine embodiment continues the trajectory of liberal Christian theology which, over the past several decades, has adopted reforms that celebrate the human condition. For example, most authoritative Christian theologians, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, deem God to be *impassible*: without passions, free of appetites, and incapable of sensation.⁴ However, many theologians of late—feminist, womanist, process, open, et al—have reconsidered the doctrine of impassibility, describing it as both unbiblical and patriarchal. As unbiblical, the doctrine ignores numerous biblical texts in which God is interactive, emotional, even conversational (Exodus 33:11). The Bible ascribes qualities to God that imply passability such as compassion (Exodus 22:27). God even changes the divine mind, when presented with a convincing argument (Numbers 14:13-25, Amos 7:3, 6).⁵ As patriarchal, the doctrine of divine impassibility suggests a stoical male ideal who is personally distant and emotionally unavailable. Impassibility celebrates the

rugged, lone maverick who thrives outside of community, who is nonexpressive, unemotional, and antisocial. He needs no one.⁶

In response to this diagnosis, certain theologians, such as Thomas J. Oord, have instead argued for the passibility of God—that God feels, and feels deeply. God is sympathetic to human events, responsive to human cries, and personally active in human affairs. God is highly involved, as a full person—thinking, feeling, talking, and changing.⁷ This passible concept of God implies rejecting another traditionally ascribed quality of God, that of *immutability*. This doctrine asserts that God, being perfect, cannot change. The universe cannot affect this perfectly actual God, who transcends the vicissitudes of creatures within creation.⁸ However, as noted above, the biblical God changes often. Moreover, if God is a divine person, or a community of divine persons, and not an abstract ideal, then God must be receptive to interpersonal influence. Love demands both openness to reality and vulnerability to community, so steadfast love will produce unceasing change.⁹

The divine mutability suggests, by way of consequence, the divine *temporality*. God is not atemporal, in some timeless, transcendent state. Instead, God is temporal, participating in time, open to change to the very core of the divine being. To clarify: God as the creator and sustainer of our spacetime cannot be limited to it—God is not restricted to our temporal universe, as it were. But God is open to the succession of feelings, events, and emotions that relationality affords. God is personal and relational, which is to be timeful.¹⁰

Finally, the doctrine of the social Trinity has received increased attention over the past several decades, led by such theologians as Jurgen Moltmann, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, John D. Zizioulas, and Leonardo Boff. While the concept of God as three persons in

communion has perennial expression within Christianity, concerns regarding tritheism caused the tradition to, at times, emphasize the unity of God over the diversity within God. The theologians above, on the other hand, emphasize *interpersonality* within the Godhead. In their view, God is three always becoming one, rather than one with three different expressions. The multiplicity of God precedes the unicity of God, not temporally, but ontologically. Without community, without increase-through-relation, God would not be.¹¹

To many Christians, these three theological reforms—interpreting God as mutable, temporal, and social—are highly salutary. They re-articulate the biblical assertion that we are made in the image of God—for love, relationship, and community. And they celebrate the human condition as an expression of the divine condition. Now, let us consider how the thought of Rāmānuja might help us to continue along this liberal Christian trajectory and consider divine embodiment, even unto the Godhead. (Please note: what follows is speculative theology. I believe the position taken is worth consideration, but I do not assert that it is true.)

Cosmic embodiment: The universe as the body of Nārāyaṇa.

Rāmānuja's theology offers several modes of divine being. We must distinguish these modes of divine being in order to understand how they cohere. To begin, Rāmānuja proposes a panentheistic, emanationist account of divine embodiment, in which Nārāyaṇa supports and controls the universe of sentient and nonsentient beings. Just as our self controls and supports our body, Nārāyaṇa controls and supports the universe as his body. All souls and bodies, all spirit and matter, derive their being from Nārāyaṇa, as distinct modes of Nārāyaṇa's self-expression.

Nārāyaṇa unifies them through his sustenance and diversifies them with real difference.¹² They are, simultaneously, one and many.

Such panentheism has parallels within the Christian tradition, even as Christianity has usually rejected emanationism. Emanationism is found suspect on several counts. First, in the substantialist wording of the traditional creeds, only Christ is of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father. In order to preserve the uniqueness of Christ, the rest of the universe must be of a different substance from the Father. Since emanationism implies the universal sharing of one divine substance, substantialist christologies preclude emanationism.¹³

If the universe must be of a different substance from the Father and Son, but is not made of pre-existing, recalcitrant matter (as in Plato's *Timaeus*), then it must have been created from nothingness. In other words, the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, or creation from nothing, results at least partially from substantialist Christology. The universe arose by the will of God, but it does not derive from the very being of God. It derives from elsewhere, from the nihil, which God's gracious will overcomes through creative speech. So crucial was *creatio ex nihilo* to the integrity of Christian thought that The Fourth Lateran Council declared it dogma in 1215 (Constitution I), and the First Vatican Council of 1869-1870 anathematized all who asserted emanationism (Canon I.3-4).

The liberal Christian theological tradition within which we are speculating has newly celebrated vulnerability, participation, and dynamism as coordinate with love, hence integral to God. Theologians like Friedrich Schleiermacher have offered Christologies based on agapic phenomenology rather than substantialist ontology.¹⁴ Since such Christologies do not hinge on a substantialist

distinction between the Creator and creation, we no longer need reject panentheism as Christologically incoherent. Instead of being unified in substance with the Creator, Christ can become the One who is perfectly aware of the universe's source in creative, divine love. Through this awareness, Christ imbues humanity with the universal, unconditional love that is its rightful inheritance.¹⁵

Some process theologians, such as Charles Hartshorne, David Ray Griffin, and Marjorie Suchocki, have objected that classical theism divides the world (matter) from God (spirit), rendering the universe profane. As a correction, they assert the presence of God within the world through a soul-body analogy similar to Rāmānuja's. According to these theologians, the soul-body analogy allows us to sense God within the universe, while also acknowledging that God exceeds the universe. The concept articulates our experience of God as both immanent and transcendent. It ascribes the holiness of the universe to a source beyond, thereby celebrating the divinity of all reality, while avoiding pantheism and championing panentheism.¹⁶ Thus, these Christian theologians offer concepts of the God-world relationship analogous to Rāmānuja's. God's creative, sustaining power results in cosmic embodiment. The universe is the body of God, who includes and exceeds the universe, just as we include and exceed our own bodies.

Personal embodiment: The beautiful, sensible, humanlike form of God.

As we have seen, according to Rāmānuja divinity finds embodiment in the universe. Rāmānuja's doctrine of divine embodiment could certainly inform Christian panentheism. Indeed, Ankur Barua has magisterially utilized Rāmānuja to buttress Christian concepts of the cosmos as the body of God.¹⁷ However, Rāmānuja makes another move that is more

central to our argument for Godhead embodiment. In addition to *cosmic* divine embodiment, Rāmānuja also advocates *personal* divine embodiment. In other words, Rāmānuja proposes that God possesses a divine form (*divyārūpa*)—a sensible, humanlike, embodied expression of divinity that is unconditionally ultimate. Crucially, this divine form is unified with an essential form (*svarūpa*)—an invisible, omnipresent, transcendent aspect. In Rāmānuja's theistic tradition, the abstract, essential form of God begs expression in the concrete, personal form of God, just as the concrete, personal form finds it saving completion in the abstract, essential form. Humans need God to be a person who is somewhere and a presence who is everywhere, so God fulfills both needs. Below, I will explicate Rāmānuja's doctrine of the *divyārūpa* (concrete, personal form) of God as I note how it addresses traditional Christian objections to Godhead embodiment. Since most of the Christian sources in this essay are systematic theologians, for my explication of Rāmānuja I will primarily rely on the *Vedārthasaṅgraha*, his most systematic work of theology.

**A Constructed Hindu-Christian Dialogue
Christian objections to Godhead embodiment.**

Christian objections to embodiment within the Godhead have taken several forms, which we will review below. Before we begin, we must note that Rāmānuja cannot address objections based on Christian scripture. Some Christians interpret the commandment against making graven images (Exodus 20:4) as a declaration of the disembodiment of God. More compellingly, John 4:24a declares: "God is Spirit". Conversely, other passages suggest the embodiment of God. Genesis 3:8 describes God as walking in the Garden of Eden. Jacob claims to have seen God face to face (Genesis 32.30). In Exodus 33:22, God covers Moses' face

with the divine hand in order to protect Moses from seeing God. So, even though Rāmānuja cannot refute biblical arguments against Godhead embodiment, these arguments are not themselves conclusive, since the Bible offers multiple attitudes toward embodiment. In order to avoid the quicksand of scriptural polemics, this essay will present *theological* objections to Godhead embodiment, not *scriptural* objections. After presenting each theological objection, I will present Rāmānuja's implicit response to it. Cumulatively, the responses will provide a serviceable introduction to Rāmānuja's doctrine of divine, personal embodiment.

Objection: The embodied God is an anthropomorphic projection.

If thy predicates are anthropomorphisms, the subject of them is an anthropomorphism too. If love, goodness, personality, &c, are human attributes, so also is the subject which thou presupposest, the existence of God, the belief that there is a God, an anthropomorphism - a presupposition purely human...Thou believest in love as a divine attribute because thou thyself lovest; thou believest that God is a wise, benevolent being because thou knowest nothing better in thyself than benevolence and wisdom; and thou believest that God exists, and that therefore he is a subject...because thou existest, art thyself a subject. (Ludwig Feuerbach)⁸

The German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach most famously asserted that God is a projection of the highest human ideals. Feuerbach himself insisted that he was not an atheist. Nevertheless, his religious humanism has occasionally earned him a place among Paul Ricoeur's masters of suspicion: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. According to Feuerbach,

predicates constitute a subject. There is no subject without qualities. Problematically, humans cannot "think" the divine attributes as divine attributes. Due to our limited human epistemological situation, we can only "think" human attributes, then project them onto God. Therefore, God can be no more than a conglomeration of the best human attributes. Theology is epistemologically limited to anthropology. Inevitably, to worship God is to celebrate the best in humankind. Having ascribed the best of our qualities to God, we may then infer the existence of God underlying those qualities. But that is only because we are familiar with our own existence, underlying our own (more mixed) qualities. In the end, the existence of God is but a projection of our own, very human, existence.¹⁹

Rāmānuja replies: God is not anthropomorphic; humans are theomorphic.

Rāmānuja's concept of God maintains a profound tension. Rāmānuja defines God's *svarūpa*, the proper form or essence, as infinite, pure, blissful knowledge. This definition is abstract and impersonal, in accord with the early, nontheistic Upaniṣadic tradition. At the same time, Rāmānuja also conceptualizes God as possessing a *divyārūpa*, or divine form. This divine form has a beautiful, youthful appearance. He is a person with a personal name: Nārāyaṇa. This concept of the divine accords with the highly personal devotion that characterizes Rāmānuja's own Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition.

Worried about theological literalism, the Semitic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have traditionally been chary, to varying degrees, of humanlike depictions or conceptions of deity. The academic study of religion has come to categorize such depictions as "anthropomorphic". But, from the perspective of Rāmānuja, the ascription of

a divine form (*divyarūpa*) to Nārāyaṇa is not technically anthropomorphic, since human knowledge of Nārāyaṇa's bodily form is scripturally derived rather than humanly projected.²⁰ Indeed, Rāmānuja insists on the reality of the divine form based on the authority of scripture, particularly the *Brahma Sūtras* (1.1.21), which claim that Brahman (a more generalized term for the ultimate, personal God) dwells within the Sun.²¹ Elsewhere, Rāmānuja cites theistic Upaniṣads that describe Brahman as wearing a saffron-colored garment,²² having the color of the sun, and being moon-faced.²³ Crucially, Nārāyaṇa's humanlike form ontologically (not chronologically) precedes and grounds human existence. Therefore, any interpretation of Nārāyaṇa as anthropomorphic is mistaken. Nārāyaṇa is not anthropomorphic; humans are theomorphic.

Objection: Embodiment would diminish God.

[The most ancient philosophers] all posited an infinite first principle of things, as though compelled by truth itself. Yet they did not recognize their own voice. They judged the infinity of the first principle in terms of discrete quantity, following Democritus, who posited infinite atoms as the principles of things, and also Anaxagoras, who posited infinite similar parts as the principles of things. Or they judged infinity in terms of continuous quantity, following those who posited that the first principle of all things was some element or a confused infinite body. But, since it was shown by the effort of later philosophers that there is no infinite body, given that there must be a first principle that is in some way infinite, we conclude that the infinite which is the first principle is neither a body nor a power in a body. (St. Thomas Aquinas)²⁴

Embodiment suggests finitude. A body is not infinite, it is finite. A body is not every body, it is some body, so it becomes one among many, an object among objects. This status precludes divinity. God cannot be a supreme being among beings, because then God would be exceeded by being itself. By way of consequence, God must be something more. God must be, at least, the ground of being that sustains all beings. For this reason, Christian theology has generally rejected Godhead embodiment.²⁵

Rāmānuja replies: Embodiment and infinitude are compatible; the embodied God remains transcendent.

Writing for his devotional, theistic Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, Rāmānuja seeks to preserve the majestic transcendence of Nārāyaṇa. Some religious traditions assert divine transcendence by adopting apophatic interpretations of God, denying to God all humanly knowable attributes, in an attempt to preserve the wholly other nature of the divine. Śāṅkara and his later Advaitin followers utilized this approach, arguing that Brahman is ultimately *nirguṇa*, without qualities, but may be conceptualized as *saguṇa*, with qualities, by those less advanced on the path to enlightenment.²⁶

Rāmānuja, on the other hand, categorically rejects *nirguṇa*, apophatic approaches to understanding God. Yet his *saguṇa*, cataphatic approach, which ascribes real qualities to God, risks rendering the divine comprehensible or mundane. If we use language to describe God, and assert that the language is in some way true, then the infinite God may become bound within our finite language. Thus, the transcendence of God would be lost to the linguistic description of God. We seem to be caught in a theological vise: either we can describe God (the cataphatic approach) and render God finite, or

we can leave God a contentless mystery (the apophatic approach) and preserve God's infinity.

Rāmānuja navigates this Scylla and Charybdis of theology through the practice of transcathatic theism. That is, he uses language to describe God, and asserts that his language reveals something true about God. But the positive attributes ascribed to God are themselves infinite, as befitting an infinite God. Hence, his approach unites divine transcendence with cathatic theology—it is *transcathatic*. In other words, Rāmānuja's concept of God has positive content yet exceeds human understanding. Metaphorically, Rāmānuja describes Nārāyaṇa as an ocean of auspicious qualities, possessing excellences beyond comprehension. In this way, Rāmānuja transfers the immensity of the ocean to the person of Nārāyaṇa, leaving him as unfathomable as the depths of the sea.²⁷ The sheer infinity of Nārāyaṇa's attributes, and Nārāyaṇa's capacity to bear this infinity of attributes, establishes Nārāyaṇa's eclipse of all human thought. He is always more than what we have said, so his being remains within sublime mystery. By adopting transcathatic theism, Rāmānuja preserves the beauty, personality, and transcendence of the divine, yet rejects the impersonal transcendence that characterizes Advaitin apophatic (*nirguṇa*) transtheism. Nārāyaṇa is a loving divinity rather than an indifferent absolute, a relational personality rather than pure consciousness.

Objection: Divine embodiment suggests limited locality rather than unlimited omnipresence.

On account of His greatness [God] is ranked as the All, and is the Father of the universe. Nor are any parts to be predicated of Him...For the One is indivisible; wherefore also it is infinite,

not considered with reference to inscrutability, but with reference to its being without dimensions, and not having a limit. And therefore it is without form and name. (Clement of Alexandria)²⁸

If an embodied God were everywhere, then those parts constituting God's body would mix with the parts constituting the universe. God would be divided and jumbled. In order to avoid this confusion, we could assert that God is somewhere, not everywhere. But then God would be limited in space. God would be there instead of here, or here instead of there. As sinners, we could hide from God. As sufferers, we could find ourselves outside God's grace. But scripture, tradition, reason, and experience all attest that God is uniformly and absolutely present throughout our lives, both in time and space, undiluted and undivided. God is perfectly God, everywhere. Therefore, God cannot be embodied. God must be spirit—infinite, invisible presence.²⁹

Rāmānuja replies: Embodiment and ubiquity are reconciled in Nārāyaṇa.

Rāmānuja provides a coherent account of the embodiment and ubiquity of Nārāyaṇa. In his doctrine of the *ātman* (the soul; here, the personal soul), Rāmānuja asserts that the *ātman* is both *aṇu* (atomic, localizable) and *vibhū* (pervasive within the body). Just as a sandalwood object scents a room with the fragrance of sandalwood, so an atomic soul pervades a body with sentience. Similarly, we can conceptualize Nārāyaṇa as *aṇu*, localizable within his heavenly abode of Vaikuṅṭha, in the presence of his consort Śrī. At the same time, we can conceptualize Nārāyaṇa as *vibhū*, pervasive within all that exists as the ground of being. In this way, Nārāyaṇa becomes a person who is somewhere (Nārāyaṇa in Vaikuṅṭha) and a substance that is everywhere (*jñāna*, or wisdom, as the underlying substrate of reality). In this way,

Rāmānuja unites the strengths of theism and transtheism in one personal, omnipresent deity.³⁰

Objection: An omnipresent body would displace all other bodies.

How can the principle be maintained, that God permeates and fills all things, as Scripture says, “Do not I fill Heaven and Earth, saith the Lord?” [Jeremiah 23.24]. For it is impossible to permeate and be permeated by others without dividing and being divided, without being blended and contrasted, just as when a number of liquids are mixed together and blended. (St. John of Damascus)³¹

Two bodies cannot occupy the same space. They displace one another. That’s why billiard balls move other billiard balls and couples sharing a bed fight for territory. If God is omnipresent and has a body, then God would displace all other bodies. Quite simply, no other bodies could exist besides God’s. Therefore, God cannot have a body.³²

Rāmānuja replies: The Śrīvaiṣṇava doctrine of dreaming creation resolves the contest between bodies.

Rāmānuja’s tradition provides a visual reconciliation of the divine embodiedness and omnipresence, in the figure of Viṣṇu dreaming the universe into being. To this image of Viṣṇu Rāmānuja dedicates his *Vedārthasaṅgraha*: “I offer adoration to Vishnu, the all-pervading Supreme Being, who is the overlord of all sentient and non-sentient entities, *who reposes on the primordial Shesa*, who is pure and infinite and in whom abound blissful perfections.”³³ In this image, Viṣṇu is in Vaikuṅṭha where he reclines on the cosmic serpent Śeṣa, generating our own universe by the power of his imaginative dreaming. But Viṣṇu’s dreaming is not like our dreaming—it is free, aware, and purposeful, directed by

Viṣṇu. It is the means of Viṣṇu’s creation, not an accident of his subconscious. As the occupants of Viṣṇu’s magic, we occupy the mind of God, which pervades our universe even as Viṣṇu resides locally in heaven.

Our own experience of dreaming illustrates the spatial elasticity of embodiment. When we dream, our dreaming body is somewhere. But in our dream, our dreamed body is somewhere else. We are two places at once, as both dreamer and dreamed. All the other bodies in our dream exist, alongside our dreamed body, in spatial relation to our dreamed body, within our dreaming mind. That is, they are spatially related to one another in the dream, but not spatially related to the dreaming mind, being unaware of their invisible sustainer. God, like any dreamer, can be embodied and pervade bodies, just as we are embodied and our mind pervades the bodies within our dream.



Figure 1: *Viṣṇu Dreaming* (Credit: Wikicommons)

Objection: Embodiment limits to a place, hence limits our knowledge to a perspective.

Intellectual knowledge, moreover, is more certain than sensitive knowledge. In nature we find an object for the sense and therefore for the intellect as well. But the order and distinction of powers is according to the order of objects. Therefore, above all sensible things there

*is something intelligible among things. Now, every body having actual existence is sensible. Therefore, we can find something nobler above all bodies. Hence, if God is a body, He will not be the first and greatest being. (St. Thomas Aquinas)*³⁴

Aquinas argues that if God is embodied, then God would be something that we know sensibly rather than intellectually. But sensible knowledge changes; it can be distorted by perspective, lost to memory, influenced by prejudice. Intellectual knowledge, such as mathematical truth, is higher, purer, more universal, and more reliable than sensible knowledge. Hence, God must be something or someone we know intellectually; God must be disembodied like mathematics, not embodied like a landscape (Aquinas, §20, 6).

Rāmānuja is not working within Aquinas' Platonic hierarchy of being. As we saw above in our section on the cosmic embodiment of Nārāyaṇa, for Rāmānuja both material nature and intellectual truth are fully divine, since both are solely from God. One cannot be ranked over the other, as God cannot be ranked over God (Rāmānuja, §12, 15). For this reason, sensible experience is as true and real as intellectual experience. Both sensibility and intellectuality are gifts of God, sustained by God, and to be trusted—like God.

Related to the objection from locality, the possession of a body suggests limitation to a perspective. If we depend on our senses for knowledge, then our knowledge will be local. But if we rely on our intellect for knowledge, then our knowledge will be universal. Classical theism defines God as omniscient, knowing all things from everywhere. Since embodied beings can only know some things from somewhere, God cannot be embodied. In other words, God's knowing cannot be limited,

subjective, and situated. It must be transcendent, objective, and universal.³⁵

Rāmānuja replies: Nārāyaṇa is an embodied person who knows, but Nārāyaṇa is also knowledge itself.

The proper form (*svarūpa*) of Brahman/Nārāyaṇa, consisting of infinite, pure, blissful knowledge, is not an abstraction that one can solely meditate upon, nor is it a mode of being with which one attempts to achieve identity. In other words, it is not the *nirguṇa* Brahman of monistic Advaita.³⁶ In the end, perfectly blissful knowledge is the proper form of Nārāyaṇa, the Supreme Person (*Puruṣottama*) and the sole object of Śrīvaiṣṇava devotion.³⁷ Of the *svarūpa*'s attributes, two are defining: knowledge in the form of bliss (*ānandarūpajñānam*), and opposition to all impurity (*malapratyanika*). These defining attributes (*dharmas*) are fundamental to all auspicious attributes (*kalyāṇaguṇas*). Indeed, *dharma* suggests establishing or supporting,³⁸ implying that the defining attributes serve as a ground for the auspicious attributes. Nevertheless, even these defining attributes are but attributes (*guṇas*). They characterize the proper form of Brahman, but are not that proper form (*svarūpa*).³⁹ Nārāyaṇa, then, presents with form and without form, and offers all the benefits of Personalist devotion as well as Idealist meditation. According to Rāmānuja, we don't have to choose. Nārāyaṇa is an ocean of auspicious attributes, even those that our limited logic might define as opposing.

Objection: Embodiment subordinates God to time.

Our God did not begin to be in time: He alone is without beginning, and He is the beginning of all things. God is a Spirit, not pervading matter, but the Maker of material spirits; and of the forms that are

*in matter; He is invisible, impalpable, being Himself the Father of both sensible and invisible things. (Tatian the Syrian)*⁴⁰

Divine embodiment suggests temporality rather than eternality, timefulness instead of timelessness. As noted above, for classical Christian theologians, God's perfection—God's perfect actuality, devoid of any potentiality—precludes change. But a body that does not change, a body outside of time, would be a statue, and a lifeless statue cannot symbolize a living God. The ascription of timelessness to God necessitates the disembodiment of God, or else God becomes frozen.⁴¹ (The liberal theological trajectory within which we are speculating is much less suspicious of divine participation in time and/or divine change. Nevertheless, we include this objection and response for the sake of thoroughness.)

Rāmānuja replies: Nārāyaṇa is not subject to time as we know it.

For Rāmānuja, Nārāyaṇa as embodied is also Nārāyaṇa as eternal, transcending our entropic temporality. Hence, divine embodiment, and its connotation of change through relation, need not limit God to time *as we know it*. Rāmānuja explicitly states that Nārāyaṇa is beyond the changes (*pariṇāma*) that occur within time (*kāla*).⁴² More explicitly, time is dependent upon Nārāyaṇa for its existence, as is all that exists that is not Nārāyaṇa. Therefore, he is not under the dominion of time. Rather, time is under the dominion of Nārāyaṇa.⁴³ Nārāyaṇa, who is perfectly free of all impurity, does not know decay, or karma, or vice, or suffering, or any of the other negative qualities that pervade our temporal universe.

Since Nārāyaṇa is beyond the changes (*pariṇāma*) inherent in time, Nārāyaṇa is also beyond the cause and effect experienced within *samsāra*. So, he is not subject to the reciprocal interactions of everyday existence.

Instead, he grounds that cause and effect as the substantial and efficient cause of all that is. He is both the marble and the sculptor, as it were. For this reason, Nārāyaṇa is denoted as the *śeṣa* (Preserver, Sustainer, Principal) of the *śeṣin* (Preserved, Sustained, Accessory), or the *prakārin* (mode-possessor) of the *prakāra* (mode).

Objection: The incarnation of God in Christ renders Godhead embodiment redundant.

*The Lord did not come to make a display. He came to heal and to teach suffering men. For one who wanted to make a display the thing would have been just to appear and dazzle the beholders. But for Him Who came to heal and to teach the way was not merely to dwell here, but to put Himself at the disposal of those who needed Him, and to be manifested according as they could bear it. (Athanasius of Alexandria)*⁴⁴

The Christian tradition asserts the embodiment of God in Jesus of Nazareth. This divine embodiment ratifies creation as the good handiwork of the Creator. Materiality and temporality are the twin blessings of our divinely intended life, a life that God celebrates through participation. Because Christian theology already asserts the divine embodiment in Jesus Christ, we need not assert embodiment within the Godhead itself. Such an assertion provides no added value and creates unnecessary theological problems.

Rāmānuja replies: This-worldly incarnation and heavenly incarnation are both necessary.

Rāmānuja powerfully addresses the above criticism by drawing clear distinctions between human and divine embodiment in relation to time. As noted above, the divine form (*divyarūpa*) is not subject to the vicissitudes of time (*kāla* or *muhūrta*).⁴⁵ Time,

conceptualized as a substance devoid of *guṇas* (qualities) and coordinate with *prakṛti*,⁴⁶ does not affect Nārāyaṇa who, even as form, is unchanging.⁴⁷ Because Nārāyaṇa is beyond the influence of time, Nārāyaṇa's divine form is eternal. That is, Nārāyaṇa does not temporarily assume form within time for the benefit of worshippers, nor is Nārāyaṇa's form a mere illusion created for their devotional meditations. Instead, any temporal manifestation of Nārāyaṇa is a manifestation of the real, eternal form of Nārāyaṇa.⁴⁸ The divine form may be individualized specifically for the meditative benefit of devotees, but that individualization remains a projection of the real, eternal form that exists prior to any devotional need.⁴⁹

The form that Nārāyaṇa assumes explicitly for the benefit of the world is the form of the *avatāra* (descent), earthly manifestations of Viṣṇu that increase his accessibility to earthly devotees and restore the earthly *dharma*.⁵⁰ But the *avatāra* is not the divine form *per se*. It is instead a temporal descent of the eternal divine form for expressly temporal purposes. The divine form itself remains in Vaikuṅṭha, the heavenly abode, transcendent of entropic, *prakṛtic* time as we know it.

Objection: Assertion of divine embodiment reduces divinity to materiality.

Matter is in potentiality. But we have shown (I: 2:3) that God is pure act, without any potentiality. Hence it is impossible that God should be composed of matter and form. (St. Thomas Aquinas)⁵¹

In the classical world, Greco-Roman Idealism—Platonism, Plotinianism, Stoicism, etc.—rejected anthropomorphic gods and their accompanying imagery as illiterate superstition. Fearing that material gods produced materialistic worshipers, they

substituted such abstract concepts as the Good, the One, or the Logos for the personal gods of the masses.⁵² Articulating Christian faith within Hellenistic culture, Christian intellectual elites frequently endorsed iconoclasm (the rejection of divine imagery), even while the popular tradition remained iconodulic (enthusiastically utilizing divine imagery). The elites suspected that embodiment connoted entanglement with matter. God, as the perfectly actual creator of matter and the natural laws that govern it, could not be limited by or subject to His own potential-laden creation. God must be spirit.

Rāmānuja replies: Nārāyaṇa's body is not constituted by the same matter that constitutes us.

Nārāyaṇa's divine form is *aprakṛtic*, or free of any taint by that profane psychokarmic complex that Śrīvaiṣṇavas call *prakṛti*. While it has an appearance, it is supersensory and visible only to the inner eye of the mind.⁵³ This is a body, but it is not a material body. Here, Rāmānuja is influenced by Muṇḍāka Upaniṣad 3.1.8, which he quotes in part and we supply in whole:

Not by sight, not by speech, nor by any other sense;

nor by austerities or rites is he grasped.

Rather the partless one is seen by a man, as he meditates, when his being has become pure, through the lucidity of knowledge.⁵⁴

We must note that just as Nārāyaṇa's body is *aprakṛtic* it is also free from *karma* and voluntarily chosen. *Jīvas* (individual souls), on the other hand, involuntarily receive bodies (human or otherwise) appropriate to their *karmic* destiny. They then live out their lives within that body subject to the bonds of *karma* and bound to the pleasures and pains of *saṃsāric* existence. So, Nārāyaṇa's *aprakṛtic*

body is necessarily an *akarmic* body. Nārāyaṇa is embodied because he is omnipotent and has chosen to become embodied.⁵⁵

Nārāyaṇa's omnipotence; Nārāyaṇa's transcendence.

While reconciling Nārāyaṇa's role as both material and efficient cause of the universe, Rāmānuja notes that reason cannot restrict the power of God. By mundane standards, material and efficient causality are mutually exclusive—the marble does not carve itself into a statue. But by divine standards material and efficient causality are reconcilable within one entity. Indeed, Nārāyaṇa unites material and efficient causality through the divine omnipotence (*sarvaśakti*)—creating, sustaining, and forming the universe and all beings within it.⁵⁶

Throughout Rāmānuja's arguments above is an underlying conviction that exclusivist logic does not bind Nārāyaṇa. We humans cannot be here and there, located body and omnipresent spirit, but Nārāyaṇa can. For Rāmānuja, Nārāyaṇa is so exalted that the accusation of divine contradiction is incomprehensible. Rational law, created and sustained by Nārāyaṇa, cannot restrict the overflowing grace of Nārāyaṇa, who chooses to be both embodied and omnipresent, *for us*. By way of consequence, we should dismiss the charge of divine contradiction as a human attempt to limit the divine freedom.

God is equally embodied and formless, accessible and transcendent. That is, according to Rāmānuja as he interprets Śrīvaiṣṇava scripture, God is characterized by both form (a located aspect that is somewhere) and formlessness (an omnipresent aspect that is everywhere). Yet, neither of these aspects is subordinate or ancillary to the other. Rather, they are equally real, equally legitimate, and equally proper to Nārāyaṇa. In fact, when introducing the divine, embodied form

(*divyarūpa*) in relationship to the divine formlessness (*svarūpa*), Rāmānuja states that it is *tadvad eva*, or “just like that”. Rāmānuja then goes on to state that “this divine form is of Brahman's essential way of being” [*divyarūpam api svabhāvikam asti*]. In other words, Nārāyaṇa with form is not penultimate to Nārāyaṇa without form; they are two manifestations of one, ultimate unity.⁵⁷

Nārāyaṇa's beauty attracts, while Nārāyaṇa's pure, blissful knowledge provides a goal of human spiritual becoming. Nārāyaṇa's personality begets love, while Nārāyaṇa's *svarūpa* engenders meditation. The devotee thus seeks both the transcendent (insofar as Nārāyaṇa retains a humanlike form in Vaikuṅṭha), and the immanent (insofar as Nārāyaṇa's pure, blissful *jñāna* (wisdom) remains the infinite ground of the finite *jīva*'s [individual soul's] being). Through worshiping Nārāyaṇa who is in Vaikuṅṭha, the devotee become paradoxically aware of the omnipresence of divinity. Through reception of Nārāyaṇa's grace, the devotee is purified into his or her true self. According to Rāmānuja, for the devotees of Nārāyaṇa the transcendent is immanent, ecstasis is enstasis, love is wisdom, and beauty is bliss. There is no longer any need to choose between devotion and meditation. All has been reconciled in the divine person, Nārāyaṇa, who offers all manner of salvation.

Godhead embodiment and the Christian tradition: A metaphor too far?

Proposing the embodiment of God, unto the Godhead, may draw criticism as an excessive anthropomorphism. Some theologians, insisting that God is wholly other, might complain that embodiment risks too much and brings God too low. Ideally, theological metaphors point to a reality they cannot reach. The metaphors of personhood, vulnerability, and participation may suggest

an involved God, but do not necessitate embodiment. Instead, our critics might argue, the concept of embodiment unnecessarily lowers God into our analogies, reducing the divine to human comprehension and eradicating any sense of mystery.

For these reasons, the Christian theological tradition has generally rejected Godhead embodiment. However, in the thought of Rāmānuja we find a highly sophisticated theology that enthusiastically endorses embodiment. Indeed, Rāmānuja anticipates and responds to Christian *theological* (not biblical) arguments against embodiment. The rationality of his theology challenges these Christian arguments, even as they derive from the sources and methods of the Hindu Vedānta tradition. Given Rāmānuja's success in addressing theological arguments against embodiment, constructive theologians must evaluate embodiment on axiological, not ontological, grounds. In other words, we must consider the consequences of the doctrine, its resonance with felt human existence, how it would play out in communitarian life, the ethics it would commend, and the future it would hope for. Below, I will argue (speculatively) for Godhead embodiment in the Christian tradition. These arguments will utilize and adapt the theology of Rāmānuja for the Christian tradition.

Embodiment fulfills the tripersonal Godhead.

Recent doctrines of divine vulnerability, affectivity, relationality, and mutability beg completion through divine embodiment. Embodiment dovetails with personality. In the Latin etymology of the word "person," a "person" was a dramatic mask, that which an actor would "sound through" (*personare*). The mask was a concrete expression of the character's abstract values, dispositions, and habits—of their personality. Personality suggests relatedness, and relatedness suggests

embodiment. Certainly, God's embodiment differs from our embodiment. Nevertheless, to be truly distinct, to truly experience increase-through-relation, the divine persons would benefit from bodies through which their selves sound. If the Trinitarian Godhead is a tripersonal community of joy, then it requires differentiated centers of identity through which that joy can flow. It requires bodies, because bodies facilitate locatedness and difference, everything that makes relatedness meaningful.

Idealism is not more sophisticated than personalism.

In the history of religious interactions, Idealist religions frequently condescend to Personalist religions. In the West, for example, contemplative Platonism, Plotinianism, and Stoicism looked down on popular theism. Likewise, Rāmānuja's primary opponents were the transtheistic, meditative Advaitins, who prioritized *nirguṇa* (attributeless) Brahman over *saguṇa* (attributed) Brahman. Indeed, Rāmānuja's theological vocation was to inspire devotional, Śrīvaiṣṇava Tamils as they confronted meditative, Advaitin elitism.

A powerful Advaitin condemnation of devotional theology may be found in Śaṅkara's commentary on the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad: He, one who is not a knower of Brahman, who worships another god, a god different from himself, approaches him in a subordinate position, offering him praises, salutations, sacrifices, presents, devotion, meditation, etc., thinking, "He is one, non-self, different from me, and I am another, qualified for rites, and I must serve him like a debtor"—worships him with such ideas, does not know the truth. He, this ignorant man, has not only the evil of ignorance, but is also like an animal to the gods. As a cow or other animals are utilized through their services such as

carrying loads or yielding milk, so is this man of use to every one of the gods and others on account of his many services such as the performance of sacrifices. That is to say, he is therefore engaged to do all kinds of services for them.⁵⁸

Śaṅkara then goes on to assert that these gods, being pleased by the service of their devotees, would not want the devotees to achieve mokṣa (realization, release), since this release would end the devotees' service toward the gods. Just as a human becomes distressed at losing a valued animal, so the gods become distressed at losing a valued servant. Therefore, the gods attempt to keep many humans in bondage by convincing them of the difference between gods and humans when in fact, all that is, is Brahman.

Advancing his own theistic Śrīvaiṣṇavism, Rāmānuja counters the Advaitins by insisting that Brahman as Nārāyaṇa (the personal name of God) is an ocean of auspicious attributes even as his proper form is pure, blissful knowledge. In this way Rāmānuja reconciles Tamil devotionalism with the Upaniṣadic emphasis on the ultimacy of wisdom (*jñāna*). But in achieving this reconciliation, Rāmānuja makes the weighty decision to emphasize Nārāyaṇa's differentiation over against his unity. This emphasis establishes as real and ultimate *all* attributes associated with Nārāyaṇa, including those more closely associated with the embodied, highly personal divine form (*divyarūpa*).

Pastoral benefits of the both/and God.

Rāmānuja's reconciliation of divine transcendence and divine embodiment has important ecclesiastical implications. By adopting and adapting Rāmānuja's theology, Christians can marry personal attributes to transcendent attributes in a seamless synthesis who is intimately accessible yet utterly majestic. And this marriage need not

be forced—form and formlessness are not competing aspects of the divine person; they are complementary qualities that manifest God's superabundance. Biblically, based on the doctrine of *imago dei* in Genesis One, Christians can propose divine embodiment, confident that they are not projecting human identity onto God, but respecting God's own gracious creation of humankind in the divine, personal image. Rāmānuja's triumph can inspire Christians, empowering them to celebrate the human situation through the doctrine of Godhead embodiment.

In the end, the most important fact regarding the *svarūpa* and *divyarūpa* of Nārāyaṇa is the simultaneous existence of each within Rāmānuja's Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. His ascription of two distinct manifestations to one ultimate Nārāyaṇa grants the tradition both spiritual comprehensiveness and cultic elasticity. With regard to spiritual comprehensiveness, in Nārāyaṇa the Śrīvaiṣṇava devotee finds the Infinite Absolute of Upaniṣadic meditation married to the personal God of Śrīvaiṣṇava devotionalism. With regard to cultic elasticity, the Śrīvaiṣṇavas are now justified in practicing both the ecstatic, relational worship of their own saints (the Alvars), as well as the enstatic, nondual meditation suggested by the early Upaniṣads. In other words, the *divyarūpa* and *svarūpa* of Nārāyaṇa represent a synthesis of traditions generally considered exclusive, creating a spacious tradition within which different religious personalities could find a home.

Christians considering Godhead embodiment should experience the idea as opportunity, not threat. We all of us are embodied souls or ensouled bodies. We are both qualified (bearing difference, *viśiṣṭa*) and nondual (perfectly unified, *advaita*). We are *viśiṣṭādvaita*, synthesizing spirit and matter

into diversified, unified experience. To privilege spirit over matter or matter over spirit rejects the interwoven, inseparable nature of reality *as God intended it*. Out of love, God has joined our souls to bodies, so that spirit might experience differentiation and perspective. This differentiation and perspective grants uniqueness to each member of the community, allowing them to make a singular contribution, rendering their uniqueness vital. Collectively, each individual's difference helps the group. By opening ourselves up to the vision of all members, we can achieve a dynamic interplay of viewpoints that quickens our knowing. We can know more as individuals uniting than we ever could as individuals separated, or even as one universal mind. To paraphrase Paul, we can know more as an *ecclesia* (1 Corinthians 12:12-20).

We should not separate what God has joined. God invites us to celebrate our dual

Notes

¹ Athanasius. *Contra Gentes*. Edited and translated by Robert W. Thomson. Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 85.

² Augustine. *The Trinity*. Translated by Stephen McKenna in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 45. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963. 464.

³ Irenaeus. *Against Heresies*. Translated by Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut. From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. Web: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103506.htm>. Accessed July 21, 2018.

⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas. *The Summa Contra Gentiles, or On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*. Translated by Anton C. Pegis, James F. Anderson, Vernon J. Bourke, and Charles J. O'Neil (New York: Hanover House, 1955-57). 1.89.3. Online.

nature as perfectly unified, or *nondual*. Yet, if embodiment is a blessing, then embodiment may not only be *from* God; it may also be *of* God. Since embodiment and transcendence are not logically exclusive, we can have both and the synergistic concept of God that they offer. Rāmānuja has shown that reason does not demand the disembodiment of God, and that embodiment does not lower God into the limits of our metaphorical language. Hence, our decision to accept divine embodiment or not is an axiological decision, not an ontological decision. It is plausible, but is it good? According to Rāmānuja, divine embodiment is salvific. If he is right, then our acceptance of divine embodiment will help us to celebrate our own embodiment, and the rich relation to God, others, and the cosmos that this embodiment allows.

<http://dhspriority.org/thomas/ContraGentiles1.htm#20>. Accessed April 2, 2018.

⁵ Clark Pinnock et al. *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*. Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1994.

⁶ Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow. *Goddess and God in the World: Conversations in Embodied Theology*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2016. 61-63.

⁷ Thomas J. Oord. *The Uncontrolling Love of God: an open and relational account of providence*. Illinois: IVP Academic, 2015. 147-148.

⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947. 1.1.9. Online: <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/summa>. Accessed March 2, 2018.

⁹ Jurgen Moltmann. *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1981. 16-20.

¹⁰ Brunner, Emil. *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Dogmatics: Volume 1). Translated by Olive Wyon, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950). 266-271.

¹¹ Ian G. Barbour. *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues*, (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997). 234.

¹² Rāmānuja. *Vedarthasamgraha*. Translated by S.S. Raghavachar. Mysore, India: Sri Rama-krishna Ashrama, 1956. §95, 76.

¹³ C.A. Dubray. "Emanationism." In *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1909). Online: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05397b.htm>.

¹⁴ Friedrich Schleiermacher. *Christian Faith*. Translated by Terrence N. Tice, Catherine L. Kelsey, and Edwina Lawler. Edited by Terrence N. Tice and Catherine L. Kelsey. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016. §100.1.

¹⁵ Schleiermacher. *Christian Faith*. §157.2, 697-98.

¹⁶ Joseph A. Bracken. "Creation Ex Nihilo: A Field-Oriented Approach." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 44:3:246-249 (Fall 2005). 247.

¹⁷ Ankur Barua. "God's Body at Work: Rāmānuja and Panentheism." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 14:1:2010 (1-30).

¹⁸ Ludwig Feuerbach. *The Essence of Christianity*. Translated by G. Elliot. (New York: Harper and Row, 1957). 18. As quoted in Stephen P. Thornton. "Facing up to Feuerbach." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 39:2:103-120 (April 1996). 111.

¹⁹ Stephen P. Thornton. "Facing up to Feuerbach." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 39:2:103-120 (April 1996). 112.

²⁰ Julius Lipner. *The Face of Truth: A Study of Meaning and Metaphysics in the Vedantic Theology of Ramanuja*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986. 97.

²¹ Rāmānuja. *Vedartha-Samgraha*. Translated by Raghavachar, §226, 177.

²² Brhadaranyaka Upaniṣad, §2.3.6: "The form of this Person [Brahman] is like a saffron-colored robe." *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads Translated from the Sanskrit*. Translated by Hume, 97. Cited in Rāmānuja. *Vedartha-Samgraha*. Translated by Raghavachar, §223, 175.

²³ Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad. §3.8. Cited in Rāmānuja. *Vedartha-Samgraha*. Translated by Raghavachar, §224, 175.

²⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Chapter 43, No. 17. Accessed April 4, 2018.

²⁵ William J. Wainwright. "God's Body." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. 42:3:1974 (470-481.) 471. Citing St. Thomas Aquinas. *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*. Chapter 20, No. 5.

²⁶ Francis X. Clooney. *Theology After Vedānta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1993. 80-85.

²⁷ Jon Paul Sydnor. "Rāmānuja's Philosophy of Divinity: From Brahman to Narayana." *Journal of Vaishnava Studies*. 16:2:2008 (3-26). 20-21.

²⁸ Clement of Alexandria. *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*. Volume 5, Chapter 12. Translated by William Wilson. From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0210.htm>. Accessed February 7, 2018.

²⁹ Wainwright. "God's Body." 471. Citing Saint John of Damascus. *Writings*. Translated by Frederick J. Chase. (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1958). 171.

³⁰ Jon Paul Sydnor. "What is a Person? Rāmānuja's Vedāntic Anthropology." *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 25:1:2016 (85-98). 92.

³¹ Saint John of Damascus. *Writings*. Translated by Frederick Chase, Jr. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1958. 171. Online. <https://books.google.com>. Accessed March 12, 2018.

³² *Ibid.* As cited by Wainwright, "God's Body," 471.

³³ Rāmānuja, *Vedartha-Samgraha*. Dedication, page 1. Italics added.

³⁴ Aquinas. *Summa Contra Gentiles, or On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*. Chapter 20, No. 6.

³⁵ Wainwright. "God's Body." 475.

³⁶ Rāmānuja. *Vedartha-Samgraha*. Translated by Raghavachar, §6, 6-7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Grimes, John. "Dharma." *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy: Sanskrit Terms Defined in English*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1996. See also Monier-Williams, "Dharman," 512.

³⁹ Rāmānuja. *Vedartha-Samgraha*. Translated by Raghavachar, §116, 89.

⁴⁰ Tatian the Syrian. *Address to the Greeks*. Chapter 4, page 9. Translated by Rev. B. P. Pratten. *In Ante-Nicene Christian Library*. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Volume III: Tatian, Theophilus, and the Clementine Recognitions. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867. Online: <https://books.google.com>. Accessed February 26, 2018.

⁴¹ Wainwright. "God's Body." 472-473. Citing St. Thomas Aquinas. *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, chap. 20, No. 4.

⁴² Rāmānuja. *Vedartha-Samgraha*. Translated by Raghavachar, §41, §47.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, §157, 126-127.

⁴⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria. *On the Incarnation*. Translated by John Behr. New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011. 48.

⁴⁵ Rāmānuja. *Vedartha-Samgraha*. Translated by Raghavachar, §217, 171.

⁴⁶ Grimes, "Kala," 156.

⁴⁷ Ramanuja, *Vedartha-Samgraha*, transl. by Raghavachar, §218, 171.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, §222, 174-175.

⁴⁹ Ramanuja, *Vedanta-Sutras*, transl. by Thibaut, §1.1.21.

⁵⁰ Ramanuja, *Vedartha-Samgraha*, transl. by Raghavachar, §162, 130.

⁵¹ Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. I.3.2. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1003.htm#article2>. Accessed March 4, 2018.

⁵² Wainwright. "God's Body." 474.

⁵³ Rāmānuja. *Vedartha-Samgraha*. §222, 223, 174-175.

⁵⁴ *Mundaka Upanisad*. Translated by Patrick Olivelle. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. As cited in Rāmānuja. *Vedartha-Samgraha* §3.1.8, 275.

⁵⁵ Jon Paul Sydnor. *Rāmānuja and Schleiermacher: Toward a Constructive Comparative Theology*. Oregon: Wipf and Stock

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⁵⁶ Ramanuja, *Vedartha-Samgraha*, transl. by Raghavachar, §35, 32.

⁵⁷ Rāmānuja. *Vedanta-Sutras*. Translated by Thibaut. §1.1.21, 240.

⁵⁸ Śaṅkara. *The Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya*. Translated by Swami Madhavananda. Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2004. §1.4.10, 117.

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