

Ramanuja and Schleiermacher



Whichever devotee seeks to worship with faith whatever form of Mine, such as Indra, although not knowing these divinities to be My forms, I consider his faith as being directed to My bodies or manifestations, and make his faith steadfast, i.e., make it free from obstacles.¹

It would be hard to find any person in whom one would not recognize any religious state of mind and heart whatsoever as being to a certain degree similar to one's own and whom one would discern to be completely incapable of stirring or being stirred by oneself.²

INTRODUCTION

Beginnings

IN THE FALL OF 2003 I was blessed to study two theologians concurrently: Sri Ramanuja of the Srivaisnava Hindu tradition and Friedrich Schleiermacher of the Reformed Christian tradition. I studied Sri Ramanuja with Francis X. Clooney, SJ, then of Boston College, now of Harvard Divinity School and current director of the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard. I studied Schleiermacher with Michael Himes and Charles Hefling of Boston College. Ramanuja and Schleiermacher in themselves, without reference to the other, are rigorous, original, profound thinkers, worthy of disciplined attention. Both adapt tradition to changed circumstances without sacrificing the substance and beauty of tradition. Both present comprehensive, coherent

1. Ramanuja, *Gita Bhasya*, §7.21, 261.

2. Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, trans. Kelsey et al., §6.3.

theologies that thoroughly correspond to their own designated sources. And both theologians had and have a tremendous impact in the history of Hindu and Christian theology, respectively. For these reasons, study of either theologian is warranted and fruitful. Ramanuja and Schleiermacher are classics, insofar as each communicates a surplus of meaning. And the encounter of the human mind with a classic can be, at its best, a transformative experience.

But as that semester progressed and I meditated and brooded over the work of these two theologians, I increasingly noticed a striking aspect of my study. While both Ramanuja and Schleiermacher were instructive in themselves, my most productive insights into their theologies seemed to arise from comparison of both rather than solitary consideration of either. That is, I learned more from Ramanuja in relation to Schleiermacher than I did from Ramanuja alone, and I learned more from Schleiermacher in relation to Ramanuja than I did from Schleiermacher alone. Strangely, and almost mysteriously, as rigorously comprehensive as each theologian was, each became more in relation to the other.

Over the next several years I completed my coursework and comprehensive examinations and shelved my books by Ramanuja and Schleiermacher. But even as their books remained closed their influence persisted. Often, I asked myself how Ramanuja or Schleiermacher would address this question, or by what means they might reconcile this tension. And I always returned to the powerful way in which each in-formed the other. Sometimes, they debated with one another in my mind. Eventually, I resolved to better understand each theologian. But perhaps more importantly, I resolved to better understand the phenomenon of comparison that had occurred and was occurring in my education. Comparison was fruitful, but I didn't know why.

I was raised in the Presbyterian tradition, so I shared a common Calvinist heritage with Schleiermacher, who nevertheless wrote for the combined Calvinist and Lutheran traditions of the Prussian Union Church. My shared Calvinist heritage with Schleiermacher, and the transformation of my understanding of him through study of Ramanuja, caused me to ask the question: To what degree could Ramanuja change my understanding of my own tradition? Or even more pressingly, to what degree could Ramanuja change my understanding of myself? And by exactly what means does this transformation occur?

The essay that follows is an attempt to replicate and reflect upon my comparative theological experience in the fall of 2003. It will delineate the salient similarities and differences between Ramanuja and Schleiermacher on one shared theme—the doctrine of absolute dependence. The study will address where they agree, where they disagree, and why. This essay is not an attempt to juxtapose two theologians and marvel at their (often remarkable) similarities, despite their vast separation in space and time. It is not an attempt to prove a fundamental, universal human metaphysic through the similarities between these two theologians. Nor is it an attempt to establish their resonances as dependent upon a shared Indo-European culturolinguistic heritage. Such a perhaps legitimate endeavor is best left to historians of religion. This essay is most certainly not an attempt to establish the superiority of Schleiermacher to Ramanuja, or of Christianity to Hinduism.

Instead, this essay will attempt to establish the fundamental interdependence, as a constructed opportunity, of two theologians through asserting that each is better understood in light of the other. By way of consequence, we will conclude that any constructive theology executed in the tradition of either theologian is better executed comparatively. Perhaps even more consequentially, we will conclude that religions think better when they think in community rather than isolation.

Texts

The approach utilized here will be primarily textual. It will compare three of Ramanuja's works—*Vedarthasamgraha*, *Sri Bhasya*, and *Gita Bhasya*—with Schleiermacher's *Der christliche Glaube*. The three texts by Ramanuja are chosen for several reasons. First, they are undisputed in authorship. While disagreement persists among Western scholars as to the authorship of Ramanuja's nine works, there is near-universal agreement that he authored the three texts in question. (Srivaisnavas themselves accept Ramanuja's authorship of all nine works.) Second, the three texts are theological in nature. The *Vedarthasamgraha* presents all of Ramanuja's thought in concise, systematic detail. The *Sri Bhasya* is a commentary on the *Brahma-Sutras* of Badarayana, which summarize the teachings of the *Upanisads*. And the *Gita Bhasya* is a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*. (Due to Vedanta's elevated doctrine of scripture, much Vedantic theology is exegetical theology.) The three texts selected—the *Vedarthasamgraha*,

Sri Bhasya, and *Gita Bhasya*—roughly equal Schleiermacher’s tome in length and content.

Each text by Ramanuja bears some introduction. The *Vedarthasamgraha* is oft-considered to be Ramanuja’s earliest work (it is referred to several times in the *Sri Bhasya*). As an offering to Srinivasa of Tirupati, a representation of Visnu, it is both an act of worship and theological masterpiece.³ *Vedarthasamgraha* means “summary of the meaning of the Veda.” The term “Veda” can have two references in the Hindu tradition. First, it can refer to the Veda proper, which is that portion of Hindu scripture concerned with the preservation of the cosmos through ritual worship. However, Ramanuja is certainly using a more expansive meaning of Veda, inclusive of all the most authoritative Hindu scripture, or *sruti* (“that which is heard”).⁴

Indeed, when Ramanuja uses the term “Veda,” he is most often referring to the Upanisads, a collection of religious poetry that is primarily concerned with knowledge of the Supreme rather than ritual proprieties. The Upanisads generally address the relationship between Brahman and Atman. They ambiguously and paradoxically assert the identity of the two. Due to their use of ambiguity and paradox the Upanisads allow multiple legitimate interpretations. They are considered to be the last portion of the Veda, when the Veda is more expansively conceived. They, along with the *Bhagavad-Gita* and *Brahma-Sutras*, compose the *prasthana-traya* (“triple canon” or “triple foundation”) of Vedanta.

Although the *Vedarthasamgraha* is a summary of the meaning of the Veda (for Vedanta, primarily the Upanisads), it is not a commentary on them. Therefore, Ramanuja’s format is not constrained by any scriptural format, granting him more freedom in structuring his argument. For that reason, of Ramanuja’s works it is most similar to Schleiermacher’s *Glaubenslehre*. (The term *Glaubenslehre*, German for “faith-doctrine” (*doctrina fidei*), is often used to refer to Schleiermacher’s *Der christliche Glaube*.) Although the *Vedarthasamgraha* is not a commentary, it nev-

3. Raghavachar, *Introduction to the Vedarthasamgraha of Sree Ramanujacharya*, 2.

4. The Veda proper includes the *Rg Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sama Veda*, and *Atharva Veda*. This Veda is composed of *mantras* and *brahmanas*. *Mantras* are words, phrases, or hymns of sacred significance and power. They are found primarily in the *Rk-samhita* and the *Atharva-samhita*, *samhita* simply being a division of the Veda. *Brahmanas* are liturgical texts that accompany the differing Vedas. Within the *Brahmanas*, the *vidhi* provide rules for the performance of the rites, while the *arthavada* are accompanying explanatory remarks. Each Veda has its own *Brahmana*.

ertheless shares a style similar to Ramanuja's other theological writings, since it remains a highly exegetical work rife with scriptural citations.⁵

The *Sri Bhasya* is Ramanuja's longest and most influential work. It is a commentary on the *Vedanta Sutras* (also known as the *Brahma Sutras*), which are a summary of the Upanisads, claiming to capture and communicate their essence. The *Vedanta Sutras* consist of brief, cryptic aphorisms that can easily be memorized. Their brevity allows for commentarial expansion. In adopting this project, Ramanuja once again found himself in the wake of the enormously influential Sankara, whose transtheistic interpretation of the *Vedanta Sutras* had gained tremendous influence by the time Ramanuja began to propagate his theistic Vedanta. Because Ramanuja himself believed the Upanisads to be authoritative scripture and the *Sutras* to authentically summarize the Upanisads, the necessity of providing an alternative, theistic, Srivaisnava interpretation was pressing. In effect, to comment on the *Sutras* was to provide a comprehensive commentary on ultimate reality itself. Ramanuja succeeded in doing so, partly by engaging in direct polemics with Sankara's Advaita Vedanta tradition. He argued that the path of knowledge (*jnana marga*) is insufficient to salvation, for it must be actualized by devotion (*bhakti marga*), which is enhanced through ritual activity (*karma marga*). Therefore, all Vedantic *margas* (paths to salvation) are components of one practice, which is ultimately salvific by grace.⁶

The *Gita Bhasya* is Ramanuja's second longest work. S. S. Raghavachar speculates that it was written after the *Vedarthasamgraha* and *Sri Bhasya*.⁷ Carman agrees that it is probably the last major work of Ramanuja, representing some of his most mature reflection. While the aphorisms of the *Sri Bhasya* allowed for more free exegesis on Ramanuja's part, the more detailed text of the *Bhagavad Gita* often restricted Ramanuja to paraphrase and amplification. Doctrinally, the *Gita Bhasya* is strikingly similar to the *Vedarthasamgraha* and *Sri Bhasya*. At the same time, it is highly dependent on the *Gitarthasamgraha* of Yamuna, Ramanuja's predecessor in the Srivaisnava movement. Its central theological themes include the assertion that *jnana yoga* and *karma yoga* serve only as preparatory stages

5. Carman, *The Theology of Ramanuja*, 50–52.

6. Ibid., 52–56.

7. Raghavachar, *Introduction to the Vedarthasamgraha of Sree Ramanujacharya*, 2.

to *bhakti yoga*,⁸ since they can at best result in the contemplation of the *atman*. *Bhakti yoga*, on the other hand, serves as the effective means by which Visnu/Narayana can be attained. Additionally, Ramanuja insists that ritual acts are propitiations of Visnu/Narayana, that the contemplation of the *atman* is ancillary to worship of Visnu, and that devotees can be divided into three groups: *aisvaryarthins* (those who seek lordship and power), *kaivalyarthins* (those who seek unitary solitude and meditative bliss), and *jnanins* (those who seek liberating knowledge). Of these three, according to Ramanuja, only *jnanins* can attain Visnu.⁹

The choice of Schleiermacher's *Der christliche Glaube* (*Christian Faith*) in relation to Ramanuja's three works was rather obvious. To begin, it is his definitive work of dogmatic Christian theology. That is, it is his systematic explication of the Christian consciousness of Evangelical Prussians in the early nineteenth century. It is not the "speculative" theology of the Scholastics, who reasoned until they had strayed from the originary Christian impulse and found (or neglected to find) themselves in wandering mazes lost. It is not exegesis, which considers the Bible the one sure foundation of faith. Instead, Schleiermacher sought to assiduously, rationally, and systematically articulate what it felt like to be a Protestant Christian in his time and place.

Because it is comprehensive, *Der christliche Glaube* is able to stand on its own as a text. Schleiermacher himself insisted (perhaps against his own hermeneutical theory¹⁰) that the book was understandable in itself, without reference to his or anyone else's other works.¹¹ There is "theological" material in other works by Schleiermacher, including metaphysical speculation regarding God in, for example, *Dialectics: Or, the Art of Doing Philosophy*. But Schleiermacher relegated such metaphysical speculation

8. *Jnana yoga*, *karma yoga*, and *bhakti yoga* are the disciplines of knowledge, ritual activity, and devotion, respectively. These terms are used almost interchangeably with *jnana marga*, *karma marga*, and *bhakti marga*, where *marga* means "path."

9. Van Buitenen, *Ramanuja on the Bhagavadgita*, 12–17. As quoted in Carman, *The Theology of Ramanuja*, 60–61.

10. Schleiermacher, "Hermeneutics," 610–25. "One must first equate oneself with the author by objective and subjective reconstruction before applying the art [of interpretation] . . . (2) But both [objective and subjective reconstruction] can only be completely secured through a similarly complete exposition. For only from a reading of all of an author's works can one become familiar with his vocabulary, his character, and the circumstances of the language as the author used it."

11. Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 74.

to the Christian practice of apologetics and excluded it from dogmatic theology. Perhaps most importantly, according to Schleiermacher it is dogmatic theology alone that serves the heart of Christian witness: preaching. For that reason, we may consider *Der christliche Glaube* (henceforth referred to by its nickname, the *Glaubenslehre*) to be Schleiermacher's definitive, comprehensive statement of dogmatic theology.

Although we will use three of Ramanuja's works in his dialogue with Schleiermacher, our primary work of comparison will be the *Vedarthasamgraha*. Like the *Glaubenslehre*, it is not a commentary and therefore is more freely structured than the *Sri Bhasya* and *Gita Bhasya*. Therefore, of Ramanuja's works it most resembles a Western Christian "systematic" theology in terms of content as well as genre. Simply stated, it most resembles the *Glaubenslehre*. For this reason the *Vedarthasamgraha* and *Glaubenslehre* especially seem to be on speaking terms.

Ramanuja's Intellectual Context

Ramanuja is considered to be one of the greatest theologians¹² of the Hindu Vedanta tradition. Specifically, Ramanuja is considered to be the greatest exponent of Visistadvaita (Qualified Non-Dualism), ranking him with Sankara, the greatest exponent of Advaita (Non-Dualism), and Madhva, the greatest exponent of Dvaita (Dualism). Although Ramanuja considered himself a revivalist rather than an innovator, he is nonetheless often referred as the founder of the Visistadvaita tradition.

Visistadvaita (Qualified Non-Dualism) is that theistic, Vaisnavite (devoted to Visnu) sub-tradition of Vedanta which asserts that reality is both truly plural, having been granted reality through the creative/sustaining activity of Visnu, and truly unitary, being only modes of the one Visnu. The term "Visistadvaita" only came into currency after Ramanuja's death, so references to Visistadvaita during his own life are anachronistic. Visistadvaita is the intellectual flower of Srivaisnavism, one of four

12. The terms "theologian" and "theology," in reference to Ramanuja, are used advisedly but confidently. This chapter will define Hindu theology as a form of Hindu reasoning that is marked by attention to scripture and other religious authorities, received and reviewed in a critical fashion. It is to be distinguished from expressions of piety that are relatively immune to critical examination (such as devotional poetry), and Hindu reasoning that is only indirectly connected with religious truth claims or religious practices (Hindu philosophy). See Clooney, "Restoring 'Hindu Theology' as a Category in Indian Intellectual Discourse," 447–77.

major Vaisnava *sampradayas* (traditions). All forms of Vaisnavism are ultimately monotheistic and claim divine ultimacy for Visnu. Srivaisnavas are distinct in assigning soteriological importance and ultimacy to his consort Sri (Lakshmi) as well. For that reason it is sometimes referred to as Srisampradaya (“the tradition of Sri”). According to the Srivaisnavas, in this divine couple alone may salvation be found.¹³

Within Vaisnava traditions the ultimate has many names such as Brahman, Isvara (Lord), and, of course, Visnu. But there is also one auspicious Name. This Name is used efficaciously and affectively in cultic ritual. For Srivaisnavas, the supreme Name of God is Narayana. This Name refers not to an abstraction beyond name and form, but to a personal deity characterized by perfect name and form. In order to establish the ultimacy of Narayana, Ramanuja must assert Narayana’s supremacy over other personal gods such as Brahma (not to be confused with the ultimate Brahman) or Siva. He does this through the citation of scriptural evidence and linguistic reasoning.

Perhaps more importantly, because certain Upanisads assign ultimacy to Brahman, Ramanuja must establish the identity of Brahman and Narayana. He argues for this identity, once again, through scriptural and logical approaches. Henceforth, concludes Ramanuja, Srivaisnavas may confidently maintain that whenever the Upanisads assign ultimacy to Brahman, they are in fact assigning ultimacy to Narayana, for Narayana is Brahman and Brahman is Narayana. Nevertheless, the greatest soteriological efficacy is assigned to the name Narayana. When a Srivaisnava wishes to make the most precise, powerful, and effective reference to the ultimate, that Srivaisnava will refer to Narayana. A vague reference such as Brahman, or even a more specific reference such as Visnu, would lack the full, cultic specificity of the sacred name.¹⁴

Throughout this essay, I will refer to Ramanuja’s concept of the ultimate as Brahman, Visnu, and Narayana. Although the supreme Name is Narayana, the designation that will preponderate in this study will be Brahman. This preponderance reflects the preponderance in Ramanuja’s own works, which most frequently utilize the term “Brahman” due to its prevalence in Upanisadic texts. Ramanuja may also have preferred to reserve the more powerful name “Narayana” for cultic use, rather than

13. Clooney, *Seeing through Texts*, 29.

14. Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 158–66.

dilute it through extensive theological reference. In any event, the reader must keep in mind that Ramanuja's "Brahman" refers not to Sankara's impersonal absolute, but to Narayana, that personal deity who is an ocean of auspicious attributes.

As a South Indian Vaisnava (worshiper of Visnu), Ramanuja inherited a theistic and devotional religious tradition. Within his time and place, his own devotionalism was placed into conflict with the transtheistic and meditative purport of the Advaita Vedanta tradition of Sankara. This tradition had come to dominate the intellectually elite circles Ramanuja was attempting to influence. Sankara provided a comprehensive and influential analysis of the major texts of Vedanta, writing commentaries on the *Vedanta Sutras* (also known as the *Brahma Sutras*) and *Bhagavad Gita*, and consistently referring to the Upanisads throughout his works. As such, he derived authority for his interpretation from the three classics of the Vedanta tradition. Sankara concluded that Brahman, as the ground of the universe, is nondifferentiated and the sole ultimate reality. Therefore, all difference within the cosmos and among human beings is finally illusory. Indeed, the human soul, or *atman*, is in essence identical with Brahman. The great Upanisadic saying, "tat tvam asi," or "you are that," means that every individual is ultimately the perfectly existing, perfecting conscious, perfectly blissful, and perfectly unitary Brahman. To achieve release, or *moksa*, is to recognize the delusive nature of difference and accept one's own (and all others') divine, monistic essence. This recognition could be achieved through a trained intuition grounded in proper birth, proper gender, proper ethic, and proper instruction.

This meditative interpretation provided by Sankara resonated with the renunciant strand of South Asian religious sensibility. This strand distrusted corrupting material reality and posited an ultimate unity to all existence. The Advaita Vedanta of Sankara was comprehensive, grounded in the *Veda*, poetically articulated, and intuitively attractive. For those reasons, over time it came to be the dominant intellectual tradition within Vedanta.

Problematically for the Srivaisnavas, Sankara exalted meditation over devotion and contemplation over worship. He denigrated theistic Vedanta as a penultimate path for mediocre minds and inferior castes who were not yet capable of the rigorous practice and realization required for true salvation. To worship was to concede a certain spiritual inadequacy and to admit one's unreadiness for *moksa* (release). While useful,

worship was useful only at a lower level of human spiritual attainment. Most dangerously, all these claims were grounded in the Upanisads, the supremely authoritative scriptures of the Vedanta tradition. Clearly, a theistic devotionalist such as Ramanuja would have to respond to such powerful and influential claims, or else risk a crisis of confidence for his entire tradition.

In order to understand the urgency of the situation, we must first understand the extent to which Srivaisnavas were devoted to Visnu. And to understand such devotionalism we must first gain some knowledge of those devotional poets known as Alvars. Srivaisnavism was deeply influenced by the devotional poems of the Alvars (“those immersed”), twelve South Indian saints who composed songs in praise of Mal or Tirumal (“Holy Mal,” or “Mal with Tiru” [Sri]). Tirumal is a South Indian deity who eventually came to be identified with Visnu.¹⁵ Although their compositions cannot be precisely dated, the Alvars were possibly active from the eighth to the twelfth centuries CE, although it is possible their activity began earlier.¹⁶ They succeeded in establishing vernacular Tamil as an influential religious language, and their powerful devotion reinforced worship as the proper form of human religiosity. Some Alvars relied on secular love poetry to evoke the intensity of a devotee’s relationship with Mal. All wrote with a passion that was entirely and ultimately relational, and all wrote in a folk style accessible to the laity, thereby increasing their own sphere of influence. Eventually, their brand of devotionalism came to be Sanskritized in the anonymous *Bhagavata Purana*, through which they influenced much of the Hindu tradition.¹⁷

Given the devotionalism of the Alvars and their profound influence on the Srivaisnava tradition, and the transtheistic, meditative interpretation of the supremely authoritative Upanisads offered by Sankara, we may discern the tension within which Ramanuja found himself. His tradition worshiped Visnu, but Advaita Vedanta dismissed worship as inferior and penultimate. His tradition fervently sought relationship with the ultimate, but Advaita Vedanta asserted that all relationality, as predicated upon difference, was illusory. And his tradition, although well aware of Sanskrit scripture, had arisen from the Tamil vernacular. For much of Indian intel-

15. Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, 285–88.

16. Clooney, *Seeing through Texts*, 5.

17. Hardy, “Alvars,” 2079–80.

lectual society, Sanskrit was considered a far more elevated language than Tamil, possessing as it did both the Veda and Upanisads.

Discontent with this tension and unwilling to accept any penultimate status for his incomparable Visnu/Narayana, Ramanuja set himself the task of reconciling Vedism (reverence for and study of the Vedic texts, especially the Upanisads) with theism (in this case, the fervent, devoted worship of Visnu/Narayana). To accomplish this task would provide a Vedic ground for the practice of popular devotional religion, thereby granting such popular religion the sanction of antiquity. Such a move would legitimize and celebrate what had previously been denigrated as unintellectual and only provisionally effective. Moreover, the translation of Tamil devotionalism into Sanskrit would grant said devotionalism a pan-Indian audience, thereby greatly expanding its ambit. But in order to achieve these goals, Ramanuja would have to challenge and in fact overcome the dominant interpretation of the Veda provided by Sankara.¹⁸

Ramanuja found himself in relation not only with Vedantins such as Sankara, but with Mimamsakas as well. As noted above, Ramanuja is a theologian of the Vedanta tradition, which is also known as *Uttara Mimamsa*, or “Later Exegesis.” This tradition prioritizes knowledge of Brahman over (but not against) the performance of ritual, and therefore prioritizes the knowledge-conferring Upanisads over the ritual-prescribing Veda. (The title “Veda” here is used in the narrow sense as referring to the mantra portion of scripture, or *samhitas*: the *Rg Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, and *Atharva Veda*.) These Veda are augmented by *Brahmanas*, which are guidebooks for performing those *sacrificial* rites referred to but not detailed in the Veda. Together, these texts are primarily concerned with the preservation of the cosmos through ritual and sacrifice, and they are the primary scriptures of the ritualistic Vedantin tradition known as *Purva Mimamsa* (“Earlier Exegesis,” or *Mimamsa*). In order to prioritize the philosophical/theological Upanisads over (but not against) the ritualistic Veda, Ramanuja must propose an interpretation alternative to that of *Purva Mimamsa*.

As stated above, *Purva Mimamsa* is the earlier school of Vedic exegesis that is primarily concerned with the proper understanding of texts and rites, so as to facilitate proper performance of said rites. According to *Mimamsa*, the cosmos is preserved by means of these sacrifices and

18. Bartley, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 1–5.

rituals. In his *Sri Bhasya*, Ramanuja interprets the *Uttara Mimamsa* (“Later Exegesis” or *Vedanta*) tradition as following directly upon, and continuous with, the *Purva Mimamsa* (“Earlier Exegesis” or *Mimamsa*) tradition. Historically, *Purva Mimamsa* arose in the late Vedic period as Brahmins struggled to systematically interpret and execute the *dharma* (here, duty or law) portions of the *Veda*. Scholars estimate that as a distinct school of thought it dates back at least to 500 BCE when the teachings of the Buddha, who rejected the authority of the *Veda*, necessitated response by traditional Vedic ritualists. The Vedic ritualist Jaimini provided the first integral text of the *Mimamsa* tradition, the *Mimamsa Sutra*, around 200 BCE, but that text’s aphoristic nature begged commentarial explication. That interpretation has traditionally been dominated by the commentary of Sabara, the *Sabara Bhasya*, written around 200 CE.¹⁹

As noted above, Ramanuja denies that *Uttara Mimamsa* supersedes or displaces *Purva Mimamsa*.²⁰ Instead, he conceptualizes the *Brahma Sutras*, which are concerned with knowledge of Brahman, as an extension of the *Mimamsa Sutras*, which are concerned with the practice of *dharma*, or Vedic ritual. Indeed, the *Purva Mimamsa Sutras* begin with the phrase, “*atha ato dharmajijnasa*,” or “Next, then, the desire to know *dharma*.” The *Uttara Mimamsa Sutras* begin with the phrase, “*atha ato brahmajijnasa*,” or “Next, then, the desire to know Brahman.”²¹ Therefore, Ramanuja insists that the study of *karma kanda*, or the ritual portion of the *Veda*, is a necessary antecedent to the study of *jnana kanda*, or the knowledge portion of the *Veda*, both of which culminate in *bhakti*, or devotion to the Supreme.²² Such an assertion stands in contrast to that of Sankara,

19. Clooney, *Thinking Ritually*, 19–20.

20. In so doing, Ramanuja anticipates modern scholarship, which retrieves *Purva* and *Uttara Mimamsa* as two branches of one Vedic system, rather than as competing doctrines: “All the above interpretations take the existence of the terms *Purvamimamsa* and *Uttaramimamsa* for granted. Yet they seem to have come to being as a result of an erroneous analysis as *PM-S* and *UM-S* respectively of the names *Purvamimamsasutra* (abbreviated *PMS*) and *Uttara mimamsasutra* (*UMS*). I suspect that originally the terms *PM* and *UM* did not occur at all outside the book titles or rather headings *PMS* and *UMS*, but have evolved from these, and that the correct analysis of the latter is *P-MS* and *U-MS*. In other words I suggest that the reference of the words *purva* and *uttara* is not the two branches of *Mimamsa* as a philosophical system, but the two portions of the one single work called *Mimamsasutra*.” Asko Parpola, “On the Formation of the *Mimamsa* and the Problems concerning Jaimini,” 147–48, as quoted in Clooney, *Thinking Ritually*, 26.

21. Clooney, *Theology after Vedanta*, 130.

22. “*Kanda*” means portion, section, or part.

for example, who sought to minimize the role of Purva Mimamsa and emphasize the distinctiveness of Uttara Mimamsa (Vedanta).²³ Ramanuja provides two justifications for the preservation of Mimamsa within the framework of Vedanta. First, the rituals of Mimamsa purify the mind, thereby preparing it for knowledge. Second, the limited and transitory rewards of Mimamsa practices convict the practitioner of the need for eternal rewards, which are only realized through Vedantic study.

The benefits of Mimamsa analysis, and its resultant ritual exactitude, are not once-for-all benefits. Indeed, when the penultimate status of Mimamsa is recognized, ritual action does not cease in favor of *jnana* (knowledge) or *bhakti* (devotion). Instead, the practice of religious ritual continues throughout the Vedantin's religious life, since sacrifices serve as the means to steady remembrance or devotion to Brahman. Ramanuja notes, "This constant remembrance, which is the same as knowing, practiced throughout life, is the only means to the realization of Brahman, and all duties prescribed for the various stages of life (*asramas*) have to be observed *only* for the origination of knowledge."²⁴ So, for the devotee of Brahman, ritual practice along with scriptural study (*jnana*) and personal devotion (*bhakti*) never cease. They are lifelong endeavors and the means by which divine grace is received.

Here, we have outlined the relationship between Mimamsa and Vedanta according to Ramanuja: Mimamsa acts as a necessary but ancillary practice to Vedanta, serving it as an ongoing precedent that is not so much displaced as subsumed. Now, in Ramanuja's interpretation, ritual practice is needful insofar as it produces knowledge; it no longer serves as an end, but only as a means to an end. This synthesis through subordination, or Ramanuja's ability to subsume *karma kanda* and *jnana kanda* into his ultimately devotional tradition, has granted Visistadvaita the (disputed) reputation of comprehensively synthesizing the various aspects of Vedanta into one doctrine and practice.²⁵

But in order to synthesize Purva and Uttara Mimamsa, while subordinating the Purva to the Uttara, Ramanuja must propose a new anthropology. That is, he must insist that human beings are characterized by consciousness and bliss to be attained rather than being mere agents

23. Clooney, *Theology after Vedanta*, 131–33.

24. Ramanuja, *Sri-Bhasya*, §1.1.1, 7 (italics added).

25. Lott, *God and the Universe in the Vedantic Theology of Ramanuja*, 51.

of rituals to be performed. Within such an anthropology, religious actions become accessories to knowledge of Brahman, who is now understood to be the supreme object of knowledge. So knowledge of Brahman/Visnu/Narayana, which for Ramanuja is attained through devotion, becomes the great human end, while rituals provide the discipline and purification necessary to reach that end.²⁶ Through this reconciliation Ramanuja became the great theologian of the Srivaisnava religion, and the great exponent of that Vedantic system that came to be called Visistadvaita. Today, he remains the most influential theistic exegete in the Hindu tradition.

Schleiermacher's Intellectual Context

Schleiermacher wrote the *Glaubenslehre* to meet the diagnosed needs of his time and place, so any understanding of the *Glaubenslehre* is contingent upon some understanding of Schleiermacher's intellectual context. At the same time, claims about Schleiermacher's own motivation and project are much debated, since he never explicitly states the overarching purpose of his dogmatic contribution or its precise relation to circumstance. An exhaustive presentation of the various motivations ascribed to him would consume a book in itself. For that reason, this presentation will be necessarily cursory and inevitably somewhat speculative.

Scholars agree that Schleiermacher addressed almost all the perennial issues of modern theology, including the relationship between history and knowledge, the relationship between science and faith, the source of religious authority, the relation of Christianity to the world's religions, and the nature of God in a culture that eschews metaphysics in favor of immediate experience and empirical observation. Because Schleiermacher was the first theologian to systematically address all these issues, he is often referred to as the "father of modern theology." However, Schleiermacher never saw himself as founding a new theological movement. Instead, he very much saw himself as a theologian of and for the Evangelical faith of his place and time. His dogmatic contribution is a local contribution, not a universal one.

Specifically, Schleiermacher was a theologian of the Church of the Prussian Union, a congregation of Lutheran and Reformed denominations. This union occurred in 1817 at the instigation of Friedrich Wilhelm III, who sought to bring all areas of Prussian life under his control.

26. Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 149–50.

Although Schleiermacher supported the union, he was also wary of the state's increasing attempts to control the church. Schleiermacher resisted such attempts at the risk of his career, and was one of the "Twelve Apostles," church leaders in Berlin who refused to accept the King's royally-imposed liturgy, which included making the sign of the cross, reciting the Apostles' Creed, and praying with back turned to the congregation. However, after seven years of politically and vocationally dangerous opposition, Schleiermacher and the other resisters gave in to the king's demands.²⁷

Theologically, Schleiermacher's role as a Union theologian involved reconciling the Lutheran and Reformed traditions into one coherent, comprehensive Evangelical consciousness. Although his own Reformed heritage is discernible, he cites both Lutheran and Reformed creeds to provide authority for his work. By all accounts he was truly committed to forming one unified Evangelical faith, both administratively and theologically. *Christian Faith* is, in many respects, his great contribution to that union.

Schleiermacher was also very much a product of the German Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*), and he sought to preserve a role for faith within that Enlightenment. In this respect, at least, he is the inheritor of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), whose work he read and was undoubtedly influenced by. Kant eschewed metaphysics, arguing that reason was effective only in the analysis of sensory knowledge. Without empirical input, reason will simply spin its own wheels, generating contradictions and fictions disguised as "truth." Perhaps more importantly, Kant insisted that the mind is incapable of immediate, uninterpreted perception. Instead, it processes empirical experience within its own *a priori* categories of understanding. By way of consequence, Kant inferred an inevitably "subjective" element to human knowledge and disallowed "objective" knowledge of "things-in-themselves." In so doing, he shook the foundations of Western epistemology. Since Kant, human awareness, subjectivity, and feeling have played central roles in Western thought.²⁸

Running countercurrent to the cool rationality of the Enlightenment was 18th century German Pietism, which protested arid Protestant orthodoxy more than it did hyper-rational Deism. Pietism advocated replacing irrelevant sermons with Biblical preaching, dull worship with fervent

27. Brandt, "Schleiermacher's Social Witness," 88–90.

28. Clements, *Friedrich Schleiermacher*, 8. This presentation of Schleiermacher's intellectual context is largely drawn from pages 7–15 of this source.

expression of faith, social convention with Christian distinctiveness, and dissembled materialism with an explicit concern for the poor. Pietism was strongly communal in practice, expressed a profound devotion to Jesus Christ, and evinced a fervent faith in the atoning blood of the Lamb. Living in warm, close-knit communities, they founded schools, orphanages, and other charities. Their emphasis on inward personal experience over (but not against) their conservative theology challenged the dry intellectualism of their skeptical contemporaries.

Finally, in Schleiermacher's time there was an ascendant Romanticism in the air. The Romanticists found themselves bored with the relentless practicality of the rationalists and pursued intensity of feeling rather than prudence of conduct. This intensity was primarily sought through an inward turn toward the individual's feelings and passions, which were understood to constitute the soul itself. The infinite was found within the finitude of the individual soul. And through the discovery of the infinite, God could come to be seen in everything. Thus Romanticism acquired a mystical or religious air, while it concurrently rejected all doctrinal orthodoxy as symptomatic of lifeless external control. Romanticism vied with and eventually displaced Enlightenment rationality as the prevailing intellectual mood of Europe.

Dogmatic orthodoxy persisted throughout these challenges, but waned under incessant intellectual assault. Claims of biblical or ecclesiastical authority proved insufficient to the modern mind. Historical situatedness challenged the traditional trust in absolute truth. Talk of miracles provoked skepticism rather than awe. The Pietists responded to these challenges largely by insulating themselves within sectarian communities. Traditional Christians could appease rationalism through the adoption of Deism, a watered-down set of theological claims: God exists at a distance, we worship God through reasonable, virtuous conduct, and this conduct is rewarded in an afterlife. But such a capitulation would in all likelihood have cost Christianity its very identity.

Schleiermacher chose a markedly different response. Along with the Enlightenment rationalists and freethinking Romantics, he rejected dogmatism, obscurantism, and the concept of a God whose primary function is to limit human freedom and creativity. He wholeheartedly agreed with his humanistic contemporaries that human flourishing is humanity's vocation, and that obstructions to human flourishing should be eliminated. His material contribution to the discussion lies in asserting that God is

essential to human flourishing. Religion thus becomes the unique source of human development, lying at the core of every human being. At the same time, God is transformed from the puppeteer of nature and history to the bounteous ground of human consciousness. In making these theological moves Schleiermacher moved Christianity into a new realm of possibilities. He wrote, "This is my vocation, to represent more clearly that which dwells in all true human beings, and to bring it home to their consciences."²⁹

Purpose

In this essay I will place in relationship Ramanuja's *Vedarthasamgraha*, *Sri Bhasya*, and *Gita Bhasya* with Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre*, in the hope that Ramanuja will be better understood through Schleiermacher, and Schleiermacher better understood through Ramanuja. Stylistically, this essay will attempt to speculatively construct a dialogue between Ramanuja and Schleiermacher, across space and across time. In other words, a conversation is about to take place. I hope that this presentation will produce the same transformed understanding for the reader that it produced for me, although transformation, like the Spirit, blows where it will. However, if transformation does in fact occur, then this essay will provide one more legitimation of comparative theology, that discipline which seeks to better construct the same through comparison with the other. For, if we best know ourselves through the other, and if we only know the other through our own deepest selves, then a true community of difference not only can but must be established.

As mentioned above, the primary focus of this study will be the doctrines of absolute dependence as found in Ramanuja and Schleiermacher. Ramanuja and Schleiermacher share a common agenda of reform. In their own way, both seek to indicate humanity's status as absolutely dependent upon the divine, whether as ontology (Ramanuja) or feeling (Schleiermacher). For these theists, absolute dependence is the key to theological reform. It is the concept which, articulated through the most crystalline reason, best communicates divine grace.

As we shall see, both theologians believe humans to be utterly reliant on Brahman/God for their being. And for both theologians, the felt

29. Schleiermacher, *Life of Schleiermacher*, vol. II, 125, as quoted in Clements, *Friedrich Schleiermacher*, 14.

recognition of this reliance is a necessary though insufficient aspect of salvation. Nevertheless, Ramanuja and Schleiermacher work out their doctrines of absolute dependence in markedly different systems of thought. For one, Ramanuja is primarily ontological; Schleiermacher is primarily phenomenological. That is, for reasons of historical context, Ramanuja's primary concern is the description of ultimate reality as one in which devotion is the most auspicious religious practice available to humankind. Schleiermacher, on the other hand, for reasons of historical context is most concerned with a rigorous, empirical description of religious experience itself.

The application of the term “phenomenology” to Schleiermacher is somewhat anachronistic. Although the term “phenomenology” was utilized and precisely defined by Kant and Hegel, it was not considered descriptive of a movement until Husserl (1859–1938), who post-dates Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Nevertheless, taken in its broadest definition as an analysis and description of consciousness, the term certainly applies to Schleiermacher's work. He clearly states that dogmatic theology is concerned with “human states of mind” (*menschlicher Gemütszustände*) and “the realm of inner experience” (*Gebiet der inner Erfahrung*). He fundamentally conceptualizes dogmatic theology as a description of the correlation between God and the world as immediately given in religious consciousness. And his methodological prioritization of feeling over knowing, in which religious experience provides the ground of religious knowledge, suggests a phenomenological reduction anticipatory of Husserl.³⁰ For these reasons, this work shall conceptualize Schleiermacher's theology as a phenomenological theology, despite the anachronism of this reference.³¹

Besides the varying ontological and phenomenological emphases, other differences arise between Ramanuja and Schleiermacher. Ramanuja primarily quotes scripture; Schleiermacher primarily quotes Evangelical confessions. Ramanuja engages in polemics as necessary; Schleiermacher struggles to be irenic unless dispute is unavoidable. While noting these differences, this essay will attempt to present the doctrines of absolute dependence in Ramanuja and Schleiermacher so that each can be better understood in light of the other. Their respective doctrines of Brahman/God, matter, the world, and humanity will all be presented so as to un-

30. Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, trans. Mackintosh and Stewart, §30.2, 126.

31. Williams, *Schleiermacher the Theologian*, 6–11.

derstand the role that each plays in the theologians' final understanding of absolute dependence. I hope that the presentation of each doctrine in itself and in comparison will shed light on the comprehensive systems of each theologian, potentially allowing for the reconstruction of both.

Method

Although the substance of this study will be the *constructive* theologies of both Ramanuja and Schleiermacher, neither Ramanuja nor Schleiermacher can be understood without some discussion of the method of each. As we encounter our two theologians practicing theology, we must know what they understand theology to be and what they understand the practice of theology to entail. In other words, the substance of their theologies cannot be understood without some discussion of how they determined and presented that substance. For example, as we read Ramanuja we will note his frequent reference to scripture. Indeed, as noted above, two of our works by Ramanuja are commentaries. Why must Ramanuja quote scripture in order to establish the absolute dependence of the universe and humankind upon Visnu? Simply because (as noted above) Ramanuja's doctrine of absolute dependence is one part of a much larger project: the reconciliation of Vedantism with theism. If Ramanuja can establish through Upanisadic argumentation that humans are eternally dependent upon the one ultimate, absolute Visnu, and that Visnu therefore deserves worship, then his project has (at least in part) succeeded. Here, the line between methodology and theology is thin indeed.

Schleiermacher, on the other hand, has a different project. He understands Christian faith as developing progressively from the original, authoritative yet inchoate impulse of the early church into an increasingly crystalline and systematic expression, unchanging in substance though progressing in form. Because Schleiermacher sees an increasing rationalization of Christian dogma over the ages, methodologically it would not profit him to return to the powerful yet embryonic consciousness of the biblical era. Nor would it profit to return to the more developed creeds of the patristic era, since they represent but the next stage in the ongoing development of Christian consciousness.

Instead, Schleiermacher turns to the confessions of the Evangelical church in order to support his arguments. These confessions represent the most developed stage of Christian consciousness available to him as

he articulates what is quite possibly the next stage. As the most developed stage prior to Schleiermacher's own *Glaubenslehre*, the Evangelical confessions do not surpass scripture or creeds, but rather include them (much as Ramanuja included the Mimamsa tradition and his Vaisnava predecessors). In other words, the Evangelical confessions elaborate the scriptures and creeds of the Church rather than eclipse them. Indeed, the previous stages remain authoritative and later stages may not conflict with them, including Schleiermacher's own contribution.

RAMANUJA AND SCHLEIERMACHER: BIOGRAPHIES

Ramanuja

When studying such a venerated saint such as Ramanuja, it is difficult to separate hagiography from biography for several reasons. First, the Srivaisnava tradition makes no distinction between hagiography and biography, and considers the received accounts of Ramanuja's life to be wholly authoritative. The "historical Ramanuja," like the historical Jesus, is of interest primarily to Western scholars. Srivaisnava devotees accept the accounts of Ramanuja's life at face value. Second, even those Western scholars who would like to draw such a distinction between biography and hagiography face tremendous difficulties. Ramanuja lived centuries ago and is primarily known through his tradition. Therefore, reconstructing his "historical" life is nearly impossible. John Carman offers some speculative reconstruction, suggesting for example that Ramanuja's actual life span may have run from 1077 to 1157 CE, rather than the traditional 1017–1137 CE.³² Nevertheless, such reconstructions, although well-reasoned, remain highly speculative and ultimately unverifiable. Therefore, as this biography is read, its sources and traditional nature should be kept in mind. It is, basically, the Srivaisnava biography of the Srivaisnavas' greatest theologian.

32. Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 27. For another example, see Carman's commentary on the traditional assertion that the corpse of Yamuna miraculously declared Ramanuja the new leader of the sect: "Both this account and the more elaborate stories in the later biographies present certain difficulties to a historian concerned with chronology and with historical probabilities, but it is clear in all the accounts that while Ramanuja considered himself the disciple and the successor of Yamuna, the link between them was spiritual rather than physical and temporal; they shared a community of purpose. The influence of Yamuna was mediated through a number of Yamuna's disciples" (*ibid.*, 30).

Although he was the foremost exponent of Visistadvaita and Sri Vaisnavism, Ramanuja followed two other great teachers, Nathamuni and his grandson, Yamunacarya. Nathamuni (823–923) was the first to attempt a thoroughgoing expression of Vaisnava theology through an interpretation of the Sanskrit scriptures. Perhaps more importantly, he collected the devotional hymns of the Alvars (the Tamil, Vaisnavite poet-saints mentioned above) into the *Divya Prabandham* and arranged for them to be sung at the most important temple for Visnu in South India, Srirangam. Nathamuni's inclusion of the Alvar hymns in temple worship provided a definitive legitimization of both Vaisnavite devotionalism and Tamil as a language of worship. At the same time, this inclusion created tremendous intellectual challenges for later Srivaisnavas, who sought to reconcile the intensely theistic devotionalism of the Alvars with the Vedantic tradition that included ritualistic, meditative, nontheistic, and theistic expressions.

The next great theologian of the Srivaisnava tradition was Yamuna (916–1036), who wrote in Sanskrit but continued the use of Tamil hymns in worship and lectured on the interpretation of those Tamil hymns collected by Nathamuni (the *Divya Prabandham*). Yamuna did not grant Tamil texts the same explicit authority that he granted Sanskrit texts, although tradition claims that he did lecture on the Tamil hymns to Lord Visnu. Moreover, his own Sanskrit hymns, especially the *Stotra Ratna*, are clearly influenced by Alvar hymnody.³³

Ramanuja (1017–1137) belonged to the Vadama subcaste of Brahmins, which had a strong tradition of Vedic scholarship. He became the leader of the Srivaisnava community, to the probable consternation of his non-Vaisnava family, through miraculous circumstances. Yamuna, the ailing leader of the Srivaisnava community, heard that Ramanuja had left his Advaitin teacher, Yadava Prakasa. Yamuna sent a disciple to summon Ramanuja who, seeking greater knowledge and enlightenment, responded. Sadly, Yamuna died before Ramanuja was able to visit him. Standing beside Yamuna's corpse on the riverbank, Ramanuja asked why three fingers of his hand were closed, and if Yamuna had expressed any final teachings or wishes prior to his death. Yamuna's disciples replied, "We don't know anything except that he used often to express his gratitude toward Vyasa and Parasara, his great affection for Nammalvar, and his ambition to write a commentary on the *Vyasa Sutras* according to

33. Ibid., 26.

Visistadvaita.”³⁴ Ramanuja immediately promised to fulfill these three wishes, with divine help, and the three fingers straightened out. The disciples present proclaimed him Yamuna’s successor.

However, Ramanuja could not assume the leadership position until he received the proper induction and instruction. These he received from his assigned *acarya* (instructor, teacher), Periya Nambi. Periya Nambi and his wife lived with Ramanuja and his wife for six months, until Ramanuja’s wife, a rather uptight high-caste Brahmin, insulted the wife of Periya Nambi, a lower-ranking Brahmin. Due to this incident Periya Nambi and his wife left Ramanuja’s household, while Ramanuja proceeded to dismiss his wife and become a *sannyasi* (renunciant, ascetic).

As an ascetic, Ramanuja established his own small monastic house near the temple precincts in Kanci. But when Yamuna’s disciples heard that Ramanuja had become an ascetic and founded his own monastic house, they sent a message from Lord Ranga (an incarnation of Visnu) to Lord Varada (the incarnation of Visnu whom Ramanuja was then worshiping) that Ramanuja be freed to preside over Lord Ranga’s temple. The request succeeded after some extra effort on the part of Ranga’s devotees, and Ramanuja was eventually installed as *acarya* and *srikaryam* (general manager) of Visnu’s temple in Srirangam. At Srirangam Ramanuja was soon instructed in Yamuna’s teaching by five of Yamuna’s direct disciples. Of particular import was instruction in the Alvar hymns, which Ramanuja had little understanding of. In each case, Ramanuja quickly established his own superior, apparently intuitive understanding of the subject matter.

Ramanuja also evinced a liberal, generous spirit during his theological training. For example, after swearing Ramanuja to strict secrecy, Tirukottiyur Nambi revealed to him the secret meaning of the eight syllable mantra, “*Om Namo Narayanaya*.” The next day, Ramanuja climbed a temple tower and revealed the secret doctrine to a number of Srivaisnavas. When Tirukottiyur Nambi heard about this betrayal, he summoned Ramanuja and demanded an explanation. Ramanuja acknowledge that the consequence of disobeying one’s guru was condemnation to hell (*naraka*), but he asserted that his own condemnation was worthwhile if it resulted in the salvation of others. Nambi then recognized Ramanuja’s spiritual superiority and addressed him as *Emberumanar* (Our Lord).³⁵

34. Ibid., 30. Visistadvaita is here used anachronistically.

35. Ibid., 40.

After his period of instruction, Ramanuja traveled about India debating opponents of Srivaisnavism, particularly Advaitins and Saivites. This argumentation served to sharpen Ramanuja's own exegetical and reasoning skills, while acquainting him with the thought of non-theistic Vedanta. Perhaps more importantly, he was also able to study various theistic traditions of Vedanta, thereby expanding and deepening his own Vedantic Srivaisnavism. Additionally, the visitation of other temples enabled him to distinguish between Vaisnava and non-Vaisnava temple rites, so that when he returned to Srirangam he could purge his temple of all alien rituals.

Later in life, Ramanuja was forced to flee the Cola kingdom when King Kulottunga, a Saivite sectarian, demanded that leading Vaisnavites confess the supremacy of Siva. Ramanuja fled west to the Hoysala kingdom in the Deccan plateau. While there he converted King Bittideva from Jainism to Srivaisnavism and established temples to Visnu throughout the kingdom, often on the grounds of former Jain temples.

Once the sectarian Saivite king died, Ramanuja was able to return to Cola and live out his final years in peace, in the community of his disciples. According to Srivaisnava accounts, he died at the age of 120. By the time of his death, Ramanuja had greatly expanded Srivaisnava influence in south India and had expounded (what later came to be called) Visistadvaita so profoundly that his thought became known throughout India. The influx of his Vadama Brahmin family into the Srivaisnava community may have initiated Brahmin control of Srivaisnavism. But more importantly, the influx of these Brahmins, along with their connections to the greater Brahmin community, introduced this synthesized Sanskritic and Tamil Vaisnava theism (*Ubhaya Vedanta*) to all educated Hindu society.³⁶

Of all Ramanuja's accomplishments, perhaps the greatest was his definitive synthesis of theism with Vedism in a cognitively sound and exegetically valid system. Through his work, Vaisnavas with an inclination to devotion and prayer could worship confidently, for Ramanuja had provided theistic Hindus with a comprehensive ontology and exegetical practice. This intellectual production thoroughly reconciled the

36. Ibid., 24–48. All biographical information has been drawn exclusively from this source, which is a revision of Carman's dissertation at Yale University. Carman culled biographical information from a number of traditional and modern biographies of Ramanuja in order to provide one synthetic biography. Naturally, this biography becomes his creation rather than an authoritative production of the tradition itself.

myriad teachings of the Veda with the intense devotionalism of south Indian Srivaisnavas such as the Alvars. Through this accomplishment, Ramanuja granted a renewed self-confidence to those Srivaisnava theists who felt intellectually or spiritually inferior to Advaitin transtheists. Now, all Srivaisnavas could worship in confidence. By the time of Ramanuja's death, they believed that their worship was as Vedic, coherent, and ultimate as that of any meditator on Brahman, precisely because they *were* meditating on Brahman. Only now, Brahman had come to be identified with Narayana. Through this identification, according to Ramanuja and his Visistadvaita followers, Srivaisnava practice rightfully claimed its status as more Vedic, coherent, and ultimate than any other.

Schleiermacher

Friedrich Schleiermacher was born on November 21, 1768, in Breslau, Prussia, now Wroclaw, Poland. He was third in a line of Reformed preachers on his mother's side. His father, Gottlieb Schleiermacher, was an oft-absent Reformed army chaplain. His mother, Katharina-Maria Stubenrauch, was an intelligent, devout Christian and superb caretaker of her three children: Charlotte, Friedrich, and Carl. Schleiermacher's parents soon recognized his exceptional brilliance and provided him with an excellent education, both at home and in boarding school.

In the spring of 1778 Schleiermacher's father experienced a conversion to the left-wing Reformation Herrnhuter Brethren faith, although he never officially joined the movement. He intended all his children to become Herrnhuters. He began by confirming his daughter, Lotte, with Herrnhuter material, and enrolling all three children in Brethren boarding schools in 1783. None of the children ever saw their parents again.

The Herrnhuters were a small group of Brethren who were expelled from Moravia by the Hapsburgs during the Thirty Years' War, and then settled at Herrnhut, a small village on the estates of Count Zinzendorf, who later became their bishop. These Brethren were characterized by a warm, enthusiastic, and communal piety that also demanded separation from the surrounding culture. Their religious life included a lyrical theology that emphasized communion with their "Friend" and "Savior," discipleship, the singing and composing of songs, devotional exercise and hard work. When Schleiermacher lived among them, belief in physical blood atonement was a test of membership. They worshipped three or four times a day, up to seven times on festival days. Their narrow ortho-

doxy was accompanied by a joyful, celebratory life together, including dressing in bright colors and worship with musical instruments. It was to this Brethren community that Schleiermacher attributed the awakening of his “higher life,” or “the consciousness of the relation of human beings to a higher world.”³⁷

At the Brethren schools in Niesky and Barby, Schleiermacher studied Hebrew and English as well as the required Greek, Latin, and French. The school was rigorous, highly international, and included many members of the aristocracy. Teachers were friends and pastors foremost. At Barby, a school focused on training Brethren pastors and school masters, Schleiermacher and several friends formed a clandestine philosophical club that eventually caused Schleiermacher to question, then reject, the stringent orthodoxy of the Brethren. This rejection caused his dismissal from the school and repudiation by his father, a repudiation that was only rescinded shortly before his father died in 1794. At the age of eighteen, Schleiermacher was rejected by many whom he loved. Still, he remained convicted of the soundness of his own faith, as well as the destructive effects of doctrinal rigorism.

In April 1787 Schleiermacher went on to study classics and philosophy at the University of Halle, while preparing for his theological examinations. While there he lived with his uncle, Samuel Ernst Timotheus Stubenrauch, who was a professor of church history at the University. Although the heyday of Halle pietism was over, the faculty retained an experiential, practical bent that resonated with Schleiermacher. Although preparing for the pastorate, Schleiermacher’s coursework focused on the classics and philosophy, particularly that of Immanuel Kant. After Halle, Schleiermacher followed his uncle to Drossen, where he spent a lonely year studying for his examinations.

In 1790 Schleiermacher spent six months in Berlin, passed his first round of examinations, and hobnobbed with the city’s cultural elite. He then received an appointment to tutor in Schlobitten, East Prussia, at the country estate of Count von Dohna. From 1790 to 1793 Schleiermacher lived with the aristocratic, pious, gracious, and energetic Dohna family, tutoring the children, playing chess with the count, and preaching every other Sunday. He returned to Berlin in the spring of 1793 and taught in various odd jobs throughout the city. He passed his second round of

37. Tice, *Schleiermacher*, 1–18. Schleiermacher’s biography, in this essay, is entirely derived from this source.

examinations in March 1794 and moved to an assistant pastor position in Landsberg in April 1794 where he quickly began fulfilling multiple pastoral responsibilities in order to assist the ailing pastor. By all accounts, his ministry was very well received.

Schleiermacher returned to Berlin in the fall of 1796 to serve as chaplain at the Charity Hospital in Berlin. While there he fully participated in the city's cultural life, frequented intellectual salons, translated sermons and travel books from English into German, wrote *On Religion* and *Soliloquies*, published essays arguing for full civil rights for women and Jews, and fell into unrequited love, all the while faithfully fulfilling his chaplain duties at the hospital.

In 1802 Schleiermacher was sent by his bishop to a small parish in Stolpe, on the far distant northern coast of Prussia. There, with little to do pastorally, he wrote a 350 page volume, *Foundations for a Critique of Previous Ethical Theory*, which examined the logical difficulties of ethical theories without offering Schleiermacher's response. He also began translating Plato into German, a translation still in use today. In 1804 he wrote a 200-page examination of church-state relations and the prospects for church union in Prussia.

In 1804 Schleiermacher returned to the University of Halle as University Preacher, the lonely Reformed pastor in a sea of suspicious Lutherans. He struggled to offer worship services and attract students, focusing on New Testament studies. He also continued his translations of Plato. In the fall of 1806 Napoleon invaded, conscripted students and shut down the University. Schleiermacher wrote the *Christmas Eve* dialogues and began preaching the virtues of German nationhood in response to the Napoleonic juggernaut. By 1807, largely in response to his advocacy of a free German nation, he was a recognized religious and political leader.

In the winter of 1807 Schleiermacher, out of work, returned to Berlin. There he would spend the rest of his life. In 1808 he was already teaching in the theology department of the still-forming University of Berlin, and in the spring of 1808 he was appointed pastor of the Reformed congregation at the Dreifaltigkeitskirche (Church of the Triune God) by the King of Prussia. The church was a union church, with parallel Reformed and Lutheran congregations, so Schleiermacher effectively served as co-pastor with a Lutheran. He was also made secretary of the University of Berlin's founding committee. In 1809, at age forty, Schleiermacher married the widow of his friend Ehrenfried von Willich, Henriette Sophie Elizabeth

von Willich. She entered the marriage with two children, Ehrenfried and Henriette von Willich, and together they had four more: Clara Elizabeth (1810–1881), Hanna Gertrud (1812–1839), Hildegard Marie (1817–1889), and Nathanael Hermann (1820–1829). Family life was, for Schleiermacher, a long-sought solace after his years of solitary, hard work. The household was, by all accounts, warm and loving, and Schleiermacher was able to fulfill his professional and familial duties largely through exceptionally abbreviated sleep, at four to five hours per night.

Records show that Schleiermacher was fully engaged in his pastoral duties to the Reformed congregation at the Church of the Triune God, preaching 30 to 45 minutes every Sunday, caring for widows, orphans, and the poor, arranging to repair the building, maintaining the organ, instruction for confirmation, etc. He was involved in church governance, and (as mentioned above) resisted royal interference in church affairs, sometimes at the risk of his career.

Schleiermacher was effectively cofounder, with Wilhelm von Humboldt, of the University of Berlin. In 1808 he had published *Occasional Thought on Universities*, which provided an influential model for liberal higher education. He also established the theology faculty at the University and served as its dean multiple years. It should be noted that, over the 26 years he taught at Berlin, over half of his courses were in New Testament exegesis. As he taught and preached, he continued to write books, including such influential works as *Brief Outline*, a critical study of *Luke*, a collection of sermons on *The Christian Household*, and most influentially, two editions of *Christian Faith*.

Assessing the influence of Schleiermacher is difficult. His range of interests were vast, his involvements were multiple, and his volume of writing almost overwhelming. He provided a comprehensive Christian theology that reconciled faith and science into one cognitive, devotional disposition. He asserted that piety is a feeling more than a doing or a knowing, and explicated his theology of feeling, thereby anticipating phenomenology by seventy years. He denied any foundation to Christianity other than its own Christ-granted consciousness, thereby anticipating postmodernism by one hundred years. His criticism and reconstruction of Chalcedon remain seminal, his reconciliation of faith and science only grows in relevance, and his resolution of naturalism and supernaturalism provides a stimulating prod to contemporary theologians wary of both expansionist empiricism and subrational mysticism.

As the twenty-first century matures, it appears that his influence will only grow. More of Schleiermacher's works are being translated into English, and a new translation of *Christian Faith* will soon appear. His hermeneutical theory continues to attract interest, while his philosophical works gain increasing notice. Although Schleiermacher theologized specifically for his place and time, his thought has proved surprisingly relevant to our place and time. Schleiermacher, who so understood himself as a nineteenth century, Prussian, Evangelical theologian, has turned out to be a theologian for the ages.

Comparison

We may note several similarities between the biographies of Ramanuja and Schleiermacher. Both were born into religiously prominent families, and both had, at some point in their lives, strained relations with their families over the matter of religion (these strains are inferred in the case of Ramanuja). This tension suggests, on the part of both Ramanuja and Schleiermacher, a religious zeal that is prioritized over all other loyalties. Just as Ramanuja's conversion to Srivaisnavism surely disrupted his prominent family, so Schleiermacher's rejection of doctrinal rigorism and embrace of academic openness strained relations with his father, most importantly, as well as Brethren colleagues. But neither figure was willing to subordinate their relationship with God to their this-worldly relationships.

Similarly, both Ramanuja and Schleiermacher saw themselves as working within a tradition rather than founding a new one. Ramanuja, for example, saw himself very much within a lineage of previous Srivaisnava teachers, particularly that of Nathamuni and Yamuna. His synthesis of Sanskritic Vedism and Tamil theism, a synthesis that later came to be called Visistadvaita (Qualified Non-dualism), he in all likelihood understood to be a timeless mode of thought. At the same time, he recognized that he wrote within an ongoing tradition of scriptural commentary, and he recognized that this tradition would continue after him. Likewise, Schleiermacher understood himself to be one stage in the ongoing explication of Christian consciousness, particularly the Evangelical consciousness of 19th century Prussia. In effect, Ramanuja and Schleiermacher are both traditionalists and reformers, honoring the past but critically receiv-

ing it, in order to generate a more faithful and effective articulation of the relationship between humankind and the divine.

Both Schleiermacher and Ramanuja faced political difficulties due to their faith. Ramanuja was effectively a Srivaisnava refugee, fleeing from Srirangam which was under the rule of a Saivite (worshiper of Siva) king. That king demanded that the Srivaisnava leadership testify that “There is no god higher than Siva.” Ramanuja fled to the Hoysala Kingdom (now near Mysore), and the two Srivaisnavas who stood before the Saivite king in his place had their eyes put out when they refused to make the demanded testimony.³⁸ Schleiermacher chafed under the royally imposed liturgy and resisted for seven years before acceding to the king’s demands, possibly under the threat of banishment or imprisonment. So, political circumstances were not easy for either Ramanuja or Schleiermacher, but neither sacrificed the fundamental tenets of their faith to the transient political demands of their day.

What we see, in both Ramanuja and Schleiermacher, are religious leaders who were willing to suffer for their beliefs. Whether they suffered due to disrupted family relations, or tension with political power, or a reforming instinct that refused intellectual compromise, no impediment could shake these theologians’ vocation. They were worshipers, and leaders of worshipers, and they had a strong call to worship better and more faithfully, and to lead others in that undertaking. According to the court of history, both succeeded.

38. Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja*, 44.