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Patanjali Lecture Series

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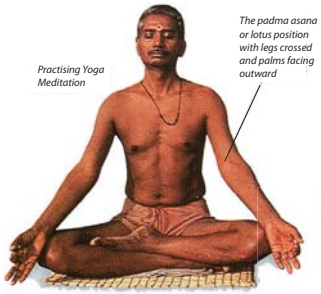

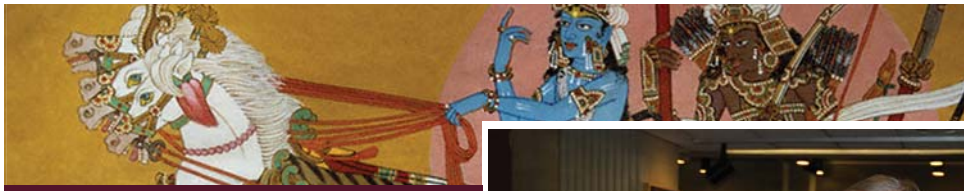

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key journals in the West, particularly the rich range of journals related to religion and theology. Or, to stay for a moment with journals dedicated to Hinduism, there are fine opportunities with the International Journal of Hindu Studies (Springer), the Journal of Hindu Studies (Oxford), and the Journal of Hinduism (Brill), and the Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies. It is not easy to publish in these journals, of course, and potential authors do well to read back issues first. Younger scholars trained in the American academic world will quickly learn what need to be done in terms of content and style, but in the mean time, for older scholars trained in India, it may be good to have summer workshops on how to write for scholarly journals.

There are already Hindu academic meetings such as WAVES (World Association of Vedic Studies) and DANAM (Dharma Association of North America), and centers such as this Center of Indic Studies at the university. Some Hindu scholars regularly attend the American Academy of Religion, the Association of Oriental Studies, and other such meetings. But in the longer term, there should also be organizations of Hindu theologians and philosophers more akin to small, explicitly religious academic organizations such as the Catholic Theological Society of America, the Catholic Biblical Association, the Society of Christian Ethics, and the philosophical analogues of these associations. Perhaps members of Hindu associations could seek to attend such conferences as guest observers.

VII

There is a lot of work to be done, I admit. As with any opening of new areas for reflection, vulnerable to new questions, a Hindu community in America that engages the intellectual life here more vigorously will have many new questions and challenges before it. The community's own self-conception is likely to change in this new intellectual climate.

But the fruits of this effort are also potentially great — for Hindus, but also for all Americans. The Hindu community can make a fuller contribution to American life, for the sake of a richer intellectual life for all of us. It can model, for the sake of Christians and others, an intelligent interreligious learning, and remind Americans who pride ourselves on a history of tolerance, of other time-honored ways of keeping personal and communal religious identity while engaging pluralism properly. As I have stressed from the perspective of my long study of Hinduism, it is because the United States is still very Christian that Hinduism, with its rich theistic theological traditions, has so very much to say all Americans. If the right education takes place and intellectual inquiry is pursued most honestly, then all of this will add up to a more learned exchange, made fresh in this American context, and that is for the sake of a deepening of the spirituality of all of us.

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The Patanjali Lecture Series

Welcome once again to the proceedings of the Patanjali Distinguished Lecture Series sponsored by the Center for Indic Studies at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. The 2008 speaker, Dr. Francis Clooney, is Parkman Professor of Divinity and Professor of Comparative Theology, at Harvard University, and is a world-renowned scholar who has taught and researched many topics related to Indian religions and philosophies, including Patanjali Yogsutras.

In his May 1, 2008 lecture, "Deepening the Hindu Contribution to American Religious Life," Dr. Clooney's basic thesis was as follows: Hinduism has in various ways been part of American life for a century and more, but it is only now that the growing Hindu population, the increasing number of temples and educational institutions, and the greater availability of Hindu wisdom and practice have combined to establish larger Hindu influence in the United States. It is all the more important, then, for Hindus in America to draw intelligently on classic texts, philosophies, devotions, and ways of life, in order to contribute to the building of American religious identity in the 21st century.

For his second lecture, May 2, entitled "Why Read Patanjali Yogsutras: Thoughts for the 21st Century," he noted that yoga has become very in the United States today, with numerous books on the practice available. To bring yoga to full maturity in America, however, it is important to refer to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and the oldest commentaries, learning from these ancient masters how to comprehend and communicate the meaning of yoga for the 21st century.

The two, well-attended lectures by Professor Clooney evoked many questions and considerable discussion. The Center for Indic Studies feels fortunate to have scholars of Dr. Clooney's stature and knowledge at UMass Dartmouth.

In the lecture "Deepening the Hindu Contribution to American Religious Life," Clooney's subject was more topical and relevant currently, given the substantive presence of Indian Americans, and continued immigration of Indians to the American continent. While India is a multi-religious and multicultural society, the large percentage of Indians—and Indian Americans—are considered Hindus, including all those who belong to Indic traditions, Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and others.

One of the most comprehensive surveys by Pew Research of Americans' religious identity has provided further focus on Hindus and their traditions, including religious practices, income levels, family stability, and education. Hindus rank high in terms of maintaining high-income levels, postgraduate education, married life, retention of religious affiliation,

etc. These are Western paradigms and parameters in which Hindus do well.

Professor Clooney, however, enlists a very different paradigm of Hindu traditions for contribution to the American life. He notes how the very long Hindu tradition of rational thinking and analysis of subjects such as God and spirituality can teach much to American culture where "ideas and faith have often diverged." He thinks, "the combination of religious sentiment and uncompromised rational inquiry is an ideal that Hindus can bring to the fore in our country today." This is a powerful statement from a scholar who is a member of the Society of Jesus. Professor Clooney is stalwart in his field of study, and has genuine desire to engage Hindu scholars in developing American religious culture. His words should be marked with full attention and carried forward in truest sense of service to the humanity.

— Bal Ram Singh, director, Center for Indic Studies

Deepening the Hindu Contribution to American Religious Life

Francis X. Clooney, SJ

I

I begin with thanks to Dr. Bal Ram Singh and the members of the Indic Studies Center at the University of Massachusetts, South Dartmouth. I am honored that you have invited me to speak, and thanks for coming here this evening to listen to my reflections on the theme, "Deepening the Hindu Contribution to American Religious Life."

In discussing the contribution the Hindu community can make in our current religious situation, here in the United States, I take it for granted that all of us here — Hindu or Christian or of other faith traditions or on personal paths—are Americans who care about this country and its religious future. I am not venturing to pontificate on Hinduism in its essence, or on how Hindus should think or act in India, and I am certainly not trying to instruct you as a wise man from the West. We are in the West, after all, and you too are wise. Rather, having accepted your invitation to be here, I am simply highlighting "what I would do if I were you," how the Hindu contribution to the intellectual and spiritual lives of Americans might be enhanced, in a time when it will be particularly useful. I hope that you will see some wisdom in the suggestions that follow.

Two other cautions: First, even though this audience tonight is a complex one, I address my remarks to the Hindu community. But I hope this will not be interpreted as suggesting that the contributions of the Muslim, Sikh, Parsi, Jain, Christian, and other communities are unimportant. I have simply narrowed my focus for this lecture. Second, I admit to using the word "Hinduism" loosely in the pages to follow, even when other terms might work better

and the religious in academic settings, and for the Hindu community to show how this meeting of the academic and religious can benefit both. Education must therefore be at the forefront of every conversation on the future of Hinduism in the United States.

The community would do well to find a path from pandit-learning to broader academic disciplinary learning related to religion — Sanskrit erudition plus current models of learning. It would be interesting to discuss what might the new pandit be like: a person expert in Hindu traditional religious texts and practices, but also conversant with religious literature and practices of Christians, Jews, and others. The formation of a learned clergy is essential. Temple priests must be educated and articulate — in English. Even if the temple priest does not hold the place of the rabbi in Judaism or the parish priest in Catholicism, in this country I would think that Hindus should rightly be looking to temples and their priests for wisdom. If American Hinduism needs to be expressed eloquently in "American English," the temple priests need to be capable of this translation and renewed speech. Yes, there are other teachers and leaders who can speak for the community, but there is an important wisdom intrinsic to the work temple priests do: doing rituals, while also explaining them; reciting Sanskrit slokas, but also translating them for today's audience. Can you imagine having a rigorous academic center for the training of temple priests, here in the United States?

It is crucial also to encourage young people to study in the Humanities — and not just in the sciences and commerce. The Hindu community is well able to afford this encourage ment, and it would serve everyone well to have many more Hindus educated in the fields of history and literature, philosophy, and theology. Yes, these fields need to be corrected and expanded, lest they remain preoccupied with the West. But that will be much less likely to happen until young people who are religious and intellectually concerned enter the fields in much great numbers. Yes, many more Indians know much more Western literature than Westerners know about Indian literature; many more Hindus have read at least part of the New Testament than Christians have read the Bhagavad Gita.

But while a good number of Westerners use Indian languages for research purposes, there are almost no Hindus who know Latin or Green and use these languages in the study of religion. But if we are concerned about the future of religion and intelligent reflection on it in the United States context, we need to hear from many more educated — American-educated — Hindus who are trained as theologians and scholars of religion.

So too, it is important for academically trained Hindus, who know the styles and expectations of Western academic literature, to write for

which they defend or attack.

Fifth, there is also a need for balanced discussions of sexuality and gender issues. Many Hindus have been rightly incensed at exaggerated portrayals of the sexual nuances of Indian art or myth, and at what are regarded as the ill-informed and distorted representa tion of revered figures of the Hindu tradition. It is justified and important to be critical at moments of displeasure. But it is also important to look at the evidence, to pay attention to why well-intentioned scholars who are not Indian and not Hindu (though quite friendly to both) might see sexual implications in text and art and biography. It will be necessary then to talk about the sexual elements in a calm, rational way, neither denying it nor denigrating the texts, images, and holy persons seemingly connected with sexual themes. Certainly, the growing and influential Hindu community in the United States can do better in talking frankly about issues of sexuality such as I have mentioned, and by extension about gender roles in Hindu society here and in India both.

Sixth, it would be good to have constructive, articulate views on hot issues that are not specific to Hinduism — abortion, human engineering, death penalty, policies all debated in this country today, and America needs intelligent and fresh input on these vexed issues that have both religious and ethical dimensions. What we need is serious input from the Hindu community to issues that are not about Hinduism or India.

The preceding paragraphs point to a single theme, the need for the development of a contemporary Hindu ethics that is rooted explicitly in the best works of the tradition, while yet too cognizant of the styles of modern Western ethics and its ethical concerns. Hard work is required, but the payoff will be great, as Hindus become full conversation partners in facing the ethical problems that vex American life today.

VI

There are longer-term positive things that also need to be done to facilitate the cultivation of a more religiously, philosophically, and theologically educated community. First, I am happy to acknowledge the Hindu community's obvious and evident commit ment to education. Some models for catechesis are already in place, with many education programs at temples and community centers, and summer study programs. But there is need for still wider religious education. In the absence of Hindu primary and secondary schools, or a network of Hindu universities analogous to the networks Catholics built up in the 19th and 20th centuries, it is all the more important to insure solid and respectable learning across the wider Hindu community in the United States. Currently, it seems that the precious heritage of traditional learning is rather cut off from what happens in the university context, even in India.

Here in the United States, it is possible and necessary to put back together the academic

in one or another context, and I hope that listeners will make allowances for the shorthand expressions that are needed in the course of a lecture of this kind.

I am not a Hindu, but I speak with some 35 years of experience in studying and writing about Hinduism and thinking about the contribution of Hinduism to Christian learning and identity. I am a scholar, but I do not speak as a sociologist or specialist in religion in the United States, and I do not have anything authoritative to say about trends in American religious life. Perhaps just as relevant, at a remove, is that I am Irish and Catholic, and we Catholics still tend to remember ourselves as immigrants who had to learn how to be Americans, and how to keep religious identity in a non-Catholic culture. Even if the times have changed, and the experience of the Irish Catholic immigrants a century ago cannot be used to predict the experience of the Hindu and Indian communities today, my guess is that your challenges in being Indian, Hindu, and religious in America are not entirely unprecedented or novel. My hope is that I can empathize with you, and give some possibly good advice as the Hindu community finds its surer voice in the American context.

II

The United States needs the wisdom of the Hindu community today. We are passing through a time of religious ferment, and we need to reflect on the state of religion in America today, on where we are religiously today. We are still strongly religious, but our relationships to our religious traditions are changing. Investigations such as Harvard Professor Diana Eck's Pluralism Project and the recent U.S. Religious Landscape Survey (2008), published by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, highlight interesting features of the changing religious scene: declining institutional membership, shifting loyalties, a preference for spirituality, not religion, patterns of crisis and renewal among Christians, the tendency of religious people, in all traditions, toward tolerance of others.

In other words, America is religiously in transition. There are many positive features to our current situation, but we seem also to be losing our grounding and our sense of traditional loyalties. Despite the exciting nature of some of the religious developments, there is danger of disorientation, a loss of direction and depth. So too, then, there is a need for some new thinking about our religious possibilities, more imaginative resources for thinking about religion and theism today, and how to achieve a new and appropriate sense of tradition, commitment, and religious practice for our time. There is a for a conversation on tradition and openness, commitment within pluralism—how to manage being American and religious, and with a particular interest in theistic commit- ments. Hinduism has much to offer to this conversation. We need the wisdom and intellectual acuity of the Hindu traditions as we shape religious life and identity in the next several generations.

Even if, particularly if, the United States remains a primarily Christian country, there is

much common ground shared by Hinduism and Christianity, ground that is still largely unexplored. It is because this country is largely Christian, I suggest, that Hinduism can make particular, signal contributions on the whole range of theological and practical spiritual issues that concern us here. And now is a good moment for this: with the vigorous immigration of Hindus to America since the 1960s and in more recent years, the Hindu community in the United States is growing and reaching new levels of maturity as a real intellectual and religious presence.

III

Yet, to many people, my confidence about the role of Hinduism in America is not obvious. Today, the Jewish and Christian traditions remain at the center of religious practice and reflection on religion in the United States, even if "being Christian" and "being Jewish" today signal diverse traditions in complex relationships with secular alternatives and competitors. Buddhism is highly popular, with many converts, and most Americans are highly benevolent toward it. Islam is now acutely fixed in people's consciousness, and while people are rarely well informed about it, a great deal of learning is going on. But what about Hinduism? Its profile in American is not sharply enough highlighted.

It is not that we are only at the beginning of the Hindu contribution to American life. The New England transcendentalists learned from India, from the Gita. Theosophists, American and European, saw in India a font of wisdom.

A variety of authors, including unexpected figures like Mark Twain, were deeply impressed by his visit to India. When Indian teachers started coming to the West, from Vivekananda and Yogananda to Maharishi and Prabhupada, Krishnamurti, in small and large ways they had great influence on Americans who were seeking to make sense of life spiritually. Yoga and its teachers have had a vast influence on Americans of all religious and spiritual backgrounds (though my impression is that many Americans, including promoters of yoga, distinguish yoga from Hinduism, as if a simpler, purer alternative to Hinduism with its myriad deities and arcane practices and images).

Even today, many see India in light of myriad unhealthy images: fantastic diversity, peculiar religious practices, terrible poverty, the worship of cows, extreme mysticism, otherworldliness — and these images seem to be accompanying Hindus who arrive in the United States. Hinduism still appears in the media in odd ways — just think of how Hollywood portrays Hinduism and India. Hinduism, the good and the bad, is certainly present in American life, the good and the bad, and the task is

learn from the Upanisad if it is properly explained, with a critical eye. Until that explanation is in place, it is important to refrain from merely quoting words here and there. So too, the Ramayana seems, to most modern readers, to highlight some ethical questions about Rama—in relation to Valin, or in relation to Sita in the latter part of the epic, for instance—that need to be dealt with in terms of clear-minded ethical analysis. The questions can be answered, but all of this takes hard work.

Second, everyone connects themes such as tolerance, non-violence, rebirth with Hindu India, and this may be taken as quite legitimate. But these are topics that require careful historical study, and some true ethical grappling to make sense of them in the modern context; you need to grasp and make substantive explanations. You need also to take serious the evidence for and meaning of change, without denying the value of change, or seeing change merely as a kind of decay. But those who take change seriously need to speak of ethical issues. Yoga, as a best example, is widely popular in the West, a contribution Indians can rightly be proud of. But even if modern teachers have been wonderful exponents of the yoga tradition, yoga should be studied with a sharper intellectual edge, such that more Hindus have more genuine familiarity with Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and with the classic commentarial tradition. In this way, you can make clearer the intellectual, theological grounding of the rewarding and appealing yogic practices.

Third, if karma and rebirth are taken seriously with respect to their power to explain human experience, then much more needs be said to explain karma's meaning and value to the wider audience of Americans who are open to religious truth, but brought up in the Christian tradition. Here too, it is not enough to state eternal verities in general terms. Rather, it is necessary also to offer philosophical and theological explanations that compellingly "translate" karma theory into terms intelligible to people growing up with a Biblically and Western informed worldview. Much more needs to be said about the implications of karma theory in the American context, particularly with respect to American attitudes toward individual identity, the meaning of birth and death, and even notions of material and spiritual progress that are in some way rooted in Christian understandings of history. Only then can we be clearer about whether karma is a complementary belief, or something radically different.

Fourth, it is important to be able to talk openly about caste. There is no point in demonizing caste, which need not be deemed inherently evil; nor is it credible to deny the cruelties connected with the caste mentality for millennia, and the oppressive situations that even today are connected with it. If it be objected that the evils that seem to accompany caste are incidental and not inherent in the system, this needs to be shown in plausible terms that non-Hindus can follow. Of course, for such a conversation to have credibility in the American context, it will be necessary to include Dalits as equal partners in an honest conversation in which all participants have done their homework and know the tradition

seeing matters of faith from a reasoned non-faith perspective, and translation into new cultural and linguistic forms.

The "Enlightenment critique" put under great scrutiny religious sources and authorities; historical inquiry has problematized the origins of traditions and changes in them; the respected views of elite theorists and practitioners have been questioned; the sheer fact of religious pluralism changes how we value any particular religion; some trends in science call into question the value of belief in God. All these factors have posed tough challenges to Christianity, I admit. But I am one of those who think that Christian theology, trans formed and damaged in the process, is nonetheless better off because it has been critiqued and compelled to respond to the issues of modernity — even if refusing to accede to many of the issues raised.

Hindus too need an educated exposition, for self and others, of the Hindu tradition/s. While the academic study of religion and theology in America has achieved many wonder - ful things, it has also fostered a split between believers and practitioners, and those who study about religion. It is not enough to leave the study and presentation of Hinduism as an observable religion to scholars (myself included) who are not Hindu and who are univer - sity academics. Indeed, it will really be fortunate if more Hindus become comfortable with the notion that the same tools applied to the study of the Bible and Christianity for centuries, to good as well as bad effect, are rightly and fruitfully applicable to the study of Hinduism. If Hinduism is to flourish intellectually in the West, it needs to take into account and be vulnerable to the same analyses. So here, for a start, are six points for discussion.

First, it is not a good idea merely to speak of "Vedic" in a vague sense, as if everything Indian is somehow "Vedic." So much generality is not helpful, and gives the impression that "Vedic" is an infinitely elastic term that can include just about anything. Whatever the vaidika has meant in traditional India, there is a need for a forthright and robust explana - tion of what the term does and doesn't explain, what is and isn't in some meaningful way rooted in "the Vedic." Whoever appeals to the Vedic heritage must be precise, much more precise than is generally the case, about what "Vedic" means in this context. There is of course a good body of literature about "Veda/Vaidika/Vedic" by Western and Indian scholars, but it is necessary to update this literature in the American context. If by chance anyone means actually to refer to the Samhitas themselves, this intention raises the difficult question of how to read and interpret such a large body of difficult texts. (My impression is that very few Hindus actually read the Rg Veda, at all.) For example, one must read common, key texts with greater attention: e.g., the famous verse in Rg I.164, "What is one, sages call by many names," is just one verse out of 52. Whoever would quote the famous verse should do so only after reading the entire hymn, and having something interesting to say about it.

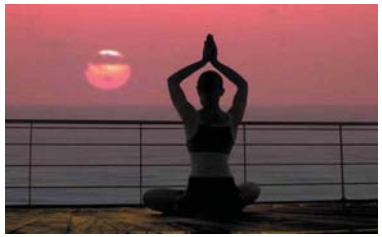
We could make the same point—read the whole text, do not quote out of context—regarding many other classic texts. Take for example Chandogya 6. This is a subtle text much discussed in the Vedanta commentarial tradition, and one that potentially has great relevance to modern discussions of God and creation, the religion-science debate, etc. But the entire chapter has to be studied carefully and explained so as to make sense in American English, for the sake of interested, intelligent people here who are willing to

to sort things out so as to accentuate Hinduism's positive contribution and make sure people who care about religious matters can learn clearly and directly from Hinduism, freed from cultural stereo types. My point is that there are intellectual issues to be faced if that presence is to be accentuated and become truly helpful to Americans of this generation. But one key reason why Hinduism has not yet found its rightful place in American consciousness and discourse still necessary to face up to the history of colonialism, and I can easily see why Hindus in America may still have to sort out ambivalent attitudes toward the West. But now that so many Indians and many Hindus are Americans — even born here — it is also time to move on, to see America's crises as "our crises," regarding which Hindus can have a loud and clear role to play.

IV

And what then is the Hinduism I think has something to offer to Americans? Again, I am not a sociologist or anthropologist — nor an Indian, nor a Hindu — and I will not attempt to describe Hinduism "on the ground," the specific lived varieties of Hinduism in the USA. I am thinking of the great intellectual traditions, and realize that there is necessarily a gap between that conceptual realm and the world of lived religion. But it was no different with the Catholic immigrants who came to the United States 100 years ago. Hardly any of these immigrants had read Augustine, Aquinas, papal documents, and other intellectual literature of the tradition. Yet the classics still deserved full attention, as undergirding Catholic life in America. This need to return to the sources is true for Hinduism too, just as for other traditions.

I have in mind first of all the Vedic-Upanisadic-Brahminical heritage. This can still offer to Americans a model of a whole religion, that is a set of beliefs and doctrines, yet too a way of practice. The Vedic tradition offers a rich context of practice and culture; serious, disciplined rituals — often quite beautiful and attractive — for individuals and the community; working temples, festivals; the arts, music out of the Sanskrit tradition; yoga, ayurveda — health, exercise, body and spirit. Religion is woven in with family and teaching traditions in ways that should be recognized as valuable by Christians as well.



There is of course respect for the sacred word, as classic texts are preserved orally and in writing. The integral Vedic model offers a vision of how to be religious and human today, even if, as with any tradition, very many details must be adapted to the new context. Whether the Vedic heritage is unchanging or not is another issue — but at stake here is concern for how it is translated, commun -

- icated, and received by Americans. If we shift to a still more refined intellectual level, the great tradition of Hinduism obviously and famously has much to offer. The Hindu traditions are spiritual, of course, but they are also deeply committed to analysis, logic, debate, rigorous exposition of any and all claims to truth. The darshanas offer models for careful analysis of nature and experience, ritual and language, and more broadly solid grounds for the thinking through religious issues intelligently. These intellectual disciplines are rich sources of knowledge, doctrinally and conceptually demanding, but they are also spiritual disciplines. The darshanas also in many ways harmonize with contemporary interests and instincts. In Vedanta, we find a famous introspective turn to the self; Panini's grammar regularizes and opens a deep and subtle appreciate of how language works. The Nyaya logicians explore every detail of the meaning of "God" and the ways in which knowledge of God can become certain knowledge, while Mimamsa ritualists show us how to find meaning in ritual word and practice, without unnecessary overlays of unrelated doctrine and theory. In an America where ideas and faith have often diverged, these disciplines show how believing and thinking can remain together. While there will be few audiences in the United States ready for the details of these disciplines, and few Hindus who can master even one of them, the combination of religious sentiment and uncompromised rational inquiry is an ideal that Hindus can bring to the fore in our country today.

It is also important in a predominantly Christian American context to appreciate the obvious point that Hinduism is richly theistic, offering multiple images of the divine that are in many ways like those found in Christianity, and yet with interesting differences. It offers a rich variety of deities, stories, images, and theologies. Particularly through attention to Goddesses, it offers fresh perceptions of how gender and the divine may be imagined together. In the devotional traditions, Hinduism shows us that devotion and intelligent reflection go together. Both reason and devotion are essential to the spiritual life. And yet even theism is reimagined, since non-dualism offers grounds on which to remain spiritually and intellectually alive without commitment to a particular personal deity.

Moreover: when the word "Vedic" is used, this must not be allowed to exclude what to the Western observer must appear, whatever its root as "post-Vedic" religion. I am thinking for instance of much of what happens in a temple today, also beautiful and evocative, including even the worship of particular deities whose names are barely found in the Vedic texts. Hinduism as a religion with a long and interesting history must be honored in its specificity and diversity; it is unnecessary to claim that everything goes back to time immemorial. Nor can a determination to honor the Vedic be allowed to exclude the vernacular and regional literatures and religious sentiments.

The Saiva and Vaisnava and Devi traditions are rich sources for religious insight, and it is important too to respect the differences among religious communities and their religious self-awareness, in Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Bengal, etc. (I cannot help but add: I wonder

sometimes if there is enough interreligious conversation among Hindus: do the Hindus of Bengal, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu learn sufficiently from each other's rich vernacular traditions? If learning across vernacular traditions is not encouraged and deepened, the danger is that a much more superficial modern English-language discourse — everyone's language, no one's language — will wrongly appear to represent the best of the traditions of Hinduism. The United States seems to be an ideal place where this interreligious dialogue can occur.)

Moreover, none of the above is merely theoretical. As I have noted and is well-known, Hindu traditions are rich in ritual practices, worship and sacrifice, plus an array of festivals, pilgrimages and other special events. These practices, though distinctive and quite different from Christian practices, nonetheless are consonant with some Christian — such as the Catholic — way of being: we share a concern about practicing the religion in which we profess belief.

Hinduism can help (one) to think more clearly about what that practice might look like in the 21st century. Since many Americans are genuinely seeking ways of practice, but often do not have a sense of depth or commitment with respect to any given path, it is good that the Hindu community can offer an array of ways of imagining ritual and worship, perhaps thereby to draw people back to traditional worship, Hindu or, with a renewed sense, Christian and Jewish and in other traditions too.

And on top of all the preceding, the very sources, forms, and practices distinctive to Hindu identity—as we can reflect on it and study it today—are diversifying. Religious insights arise not only from the traditional villages, but also now from the cities, with attention to the new developments of Hindu identity in urban settings where Hindus are articulating identity in new contexts. In addition, the United States itself is an important site for new developments in Hindu thinking and spirituality, such as would not develop in India. These new possibilities must be welcomed and studied carefully.

All of the above may add up to standard information that is rather commonplace to those already knowing India's traditions. But it gains more importance if we take it all very seriously in America today; for it is here that this rich tradition of Hinduism, very old and very new, can play a major role in our thinking about the future of religion.

V

I have thus far steadfastly urged upon you my main point, that we have much to learn from you; America needs the critical reflection on religious practice and life inherent in the Hindu traditions. But praise is not enough. Critical thinking has to do also with the ability not only to immerse oneself in one's own tradition, and defend it against outside critique. There is a need for believers to be critical in thinking about what they believe, since it does not work to leave the criticism to scholars, the defense of faith to believers. There is also a need to learn from the outsiders' questions, and to critique and explain our own traditions in light of modern concerns, ranging from the search for historical sources, the problem of