Part I: Why We Need to Revisit the Word[i] of God – Preliminaries

The posthuman[ii] has arrived, and St. Paul among the philosophers[iii] cries out for interpretations of the Bible which now refuse to see India only as a Third world[iv] nation where God resides in bygone colonial structures.

Indian Biblical Studies needs to become mainstream and non-polemical. The otherness[v] that marks Indian Christianity should be erased because Indian Christians are Indians like this author is an Indian and a Hindu. We as Indians cannot leave our religious texts to fanatics and their shenanigans. This is why we need to revisit what Christians consider the Word of God from both religious[vi] and hermeneutical[vii] standpoints. We need to appreciate the Bible anew, not through mere intertextuality or received wisdom. We need now to consider why we should see the Bible also through the eyes of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida.

As I had pointed out earlier, Derrida’s[viii] reading of the Genesis event is more powerful[ix] than even Walter Brueggemann’s commentary on Genesis[x]. Brueggemann is the most significant Old Testament scholar working today, and yet Brueggemann will agree with me[xi] that there is a need to open up Old Testament scholarship to Derrida et al. Old Testament poiesis will have no meaning in an age which is going to soon achieve AI singularity. It is within this zeitgeist that I begin this work. Perhaps, through this project, we can build bridges
within India and with other nations.

In subsequent essays, I shall establish such necessary technicalities regarding the Biblical edition(s) (translations) I may use; what I mean by the Bible and which texts, if at all, will I leave out. To begin with, it is good to remember that glossing is a very Indian tradition. The Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, and the Brahmasutras have all been glossed by Hindu seers and also by both Christian and Buddhist missionaries. It is from within this/these tradition(s) of close reading that we need to gloss the Bible in the here and the now.

As we proceed, we have to keep in mind that this is a theological and philosophical project and, therefore might be problematic for any Faith Community. We have to deal with issues ranging from the truth or untruth of Darwinian evolution, of evil as a simulation or, evil/שָּׂטָן as a Near Eastern accretion to the Israelites’ Judaism while they fled Egypt. Or, whether evil is an absence of the good or is it a malefic presence? Whether we agree with St. Augustine of Hippo or not, is equally important as to whether we agree or not with Eastern understanding(s) of evil. All hermeneutics (interpretative acts) and the best of negative capabilities are only historical and spring out of particular spatio-temporal dasein(s).

To further illustrate the problematics of reading the Bible in India, as an Indian, is whether we see the Word/Logos as part of the Sphota (Vibration) Theory found within Kashmiri Shaivism or should we consider the Word as the Upanishadic Aum[12]? This strategy of reading the Bible may not be the correct strategy of interpreting the Bible since the Christian God hangs in shame on His Wood[13]. In other words, the Christian God is weak and powerless due to His Covenant Love/ḥesed (חֶסֶד). Whereas, within Advaita Vedanta and Kashmiri Shaivism, Brahman qua God is powerful. Nowhere[14] within Vedanta and Shakta worship is the Supreme Godhead even remotely thought of as abject. Nonetheless, Christian Indologists have tried synoptic readings of the New Testament and the Upanishads.

Conversely, we have Hindus like Muni Narayana Prasad who have tried reading the Gospels
through the lens of Vedanta. It is essential for such a work as this to weigh how to interpret texts composed and then written down millennia ago. The hermeneutical problem is complicated by the existence of a large body of works on the Torah by Jewish scholars. Whom to refer to; who to reject? Is rejection possible or even the right approach in this post-postmodern and post-human era? The word post-modern is another troublesome area since it is often mistakenly conflated with moral and religious relativism.

Post-Enlightenment informed twentieth-century readings of the Old Testament includes negotiating anthropological and psychoanalytical discoveries. One example of this will illustrate the problems involved in reading the Old Testament. How do we accommodate Mary Douglas’s anthropological work on Leviticus? To disregard Douglas is to rob from the beauty of the Old Testament. To take Douglas at face value is to draw the ire of various faith communities who live by the prohibitions of Leviticus.

- This is an important book regarding the concept of Biblical Logos or the Supreme Godhead from within Hindu traditions. Christian celibate missionaries due to their vows of celibacy have preferred Vedantic readings of the Bible. But the primary mode of Hindu worship is Tantric, and it is within the various Hindu Tantric traditions that we find the fullest treatment of the concept of the Word/(bijā). In Gerard O’Connell’s Do Not Stifle the Spirit: Conversations with Jacques Dupuis (Orbis Books, 2017), we have Fr. Dupuis, the champion of non-religious relativism but cosmopolitanism (in the Cynical and Kwame Appiah’s sense), discussing The Calcutta School of Indologists. It is this School of Indologists who set the tone of future Indian Biblical exegesis which now seems to be dated and in need of refashioning. The monks of the Ramakrishna Order, headquartered at Belur Math, West Bengal, India, being celibates have preferred Vedantic readings of the Biblical Logos.
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Padoux provides a necessary broadening of our interpretative horizon.

- This is a useful encyclopaedia for all things posthuman. Recommended for terminological clarity.
- This is an invaluable book for contemporary Biblical Studies. The writers of this volume are Christians in the sense that Søren Kierkegaard was a Christian. The problematics of Kierkegaard’s Christianity is necessary in a world where cyborgs rule. But the extent to which we can we call Žižek and Badiou Christians depend on our expansivity of Jesus’s saying that those who are not with Him, were for Him (Mark 9:38-41). Both Žižek and Badiou are contributors to this volume. For a discussion on cyborgs see, Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *Cyborg Manifesto*. Victoria, British Columbia: Camas Books, 2018. This is a reprint of Haraway’s 1985 essay of the same name.
- Kierkegaard’s works are essential for reading the Bible and, for the moment, we would do well to go through his journals. See Kierkegaard, Søren. *Papers and Journals*. Translated by Alastair Hannay. London: Penguin, 2015.
- Sugirtharajah’s book is important but is slowly losing relevance to an India which is increasingly powerful as a State. It is not possible to agree with Sugirtharajah that there is no India as such. That was the case once upon a time; as was the case with the US. Once upon a time, the US was a tribal nation. Then it became a gunfighter nation (See Slotkin, Richard. *Gunfighter Nation: the Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. Norman, OK: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2008.). Now it is one, united Homeland. Similarly, once upon a time, India was defined by British and European Indologists as a broken nation. Now we have a federal structure and there are as many injustices in India as there are in the First World. More crucially, India like other countries is a nation of precariats.
Precariats are global nomads, and the pink slip can be given by Amazon India to a white worker overseeing operations in India or to an Indian worker employed by Amazon in Germany. Instead of Sugirthrajah’s ‘Third World’ readings, it is more fruitful to read the Bible in terms of the politics of Giorgio Agamben’s ‘homo sacer’ and Kwame Appiah’s concept of Cosmopolitanism.


- Interpreting the Bible by a Hindu necessarily arises from contesting views as presented in Vishwanathan’s book. Christian efforts at proselytising in Indian metropolises have been a failure as had been pointed out by Michael Amaladoss repeatedly in his corpus. Viswanathan provides the reasons which are similar to Amaladoss’s reasons for this failure. Indian Christianity cannot be modelled on First World or Third World Christian Churches. Metropolitan visible Christianity is based on coveted power structures in India which often lead to negative Christian witness. They are perceived as oligarchical structures. This is true for both Protestant and Roman Catholic Christianity in urban India. Christian educational institutions have very little to do with Christianity in our metropolises. This is another reason that a Hindu needs to re-read the Word of God of the Christians.


- Barth has effected paradigm shifts in religious studies all over the world. Of course, Barth’s oeuvre is huge, but this book is a good place to begin understanding what religion is before moving on to the hermeneutics of reading the Bible.

- [vii] The Greek god Hermes, as is well known, acted as the messenger between Zeus and other divine beings and humans. Thence the word hermeneutics. We shall have to discuss this at length later since this annotation-project is entirely a hermeneutical project.

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• [x] Brueggemann is an author I respect immensely. We shall have occasion to repeatedly refer to his exegesis over the course of this project.

• [xi] In *An Other Kingdom: Departing the Consumer Culture* (2016), Brueggemann weaves in apparently unrelated texts and scholars without whom he knows that Old Testament scholarship will be irrelevant. Brueggemann’s knowledge of Marxism and the ‘epistemic break’ is crucial to religious studies today.

• [xii] There is little difference between Kashmiri Shaivism and the Upanishads. Both systems lead to Advaita Vedanta.


• [xiv] That the Christian God is a weak God, rendered powerless by His Love for man, had been pointed out by Jürgen Moltmann more than half a century ago. Moltmann is another of those theologians we need to refer repeatedly if we are to understand the Bible.

• [xv] In electronic and telephonic conversations with this author, Swami Narasimhananda of the Ramakrishna Order, of the School of Totapuri amongst the Ten Orders (dasanamis) of Hindu monks, pointed out that Hinduism, especially Vedanta does not admit of any weakness in God. But this author is of the opinion that Avatara-vada (roughly cognate with Incarnation) shows that God becomes human/e enough to suffer alongside us. Further, in Vaishnavism, there exists the concept of a personal God.


• [xvii] Reading is an act of love; of jouissance. *Leviticus* is literature since it can withstand and transcend the scrutiny of Douglas. It is a commonplace in Old Testament studies that it is sheer poetry.
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