

Convener: Francis X. Clooney, Boston College
 Moderator: Carla Mae Streeter, Aquinas Institute of Theology
 Presenters: Scott Alexander, Catholic Theological Union
 David A. Clairmont, University of Chicago Divinity School
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 Respondent: Kathleen Cahalan, St. John's School of Theology,
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Francis Clooney drew on a classical Hindu Srivaisnava treatise, the *Rahasya Traya Sara* of Vedanta Desika (14th century), to ponder the glorified pure-being body to which all beings become heir after discarding the mundane body. In divine descents, the divine Visnu is born with a real body, made of pure luminous substance instead of ordinary matter, free from the constraints of good and bad deeds, flawless, immensely attractive to all. These characteristics seemingly put Visnu's body/ies in a category apart from human bodies, but after death, in heaven, all liberated selves receive such bodies. These Hindus also value the body both now and after death, sharing with Christians such values as the completeness of an embodied person, the permanence of the relationship of soul/self to material reality, the persistent "soul-body distinction and union," the fulfillment of human experience after death and in heaven in a perfect/ed body, and a partial analogy between divine body/ies of God and future human bodies. Resurrected and pure-being bodies are at least similar, linking the present and ultimate integrity of experience, reminding us of the mystery God is and we shall be.

David Clairmont explored Theravada Buddhist perspectives on bodily meditation. Using the *Visuddhimagga* (*Path of Purification*) by Buddhaghosa (5th century) as his primary example, Clairmont explained how meditation practices focused on one's own body and on recollection of the Buddha's body are central to achieving purification of seeing and insight into reality. Meditation on the body leads to a transitional "mind-made body" (*manomaya-kĒya*), and prepares for the full experiential realization of insight in relation to the Buddha's "dharma-body" (*dhamma-kĒya*). Thus the practitioner and the Buddha assume similar transitional bodies, uniting the bodies of the practitioner, the Buddha, and the body of the Buddha's teaching. Examining the intersection of meditation on one's own body and meditation on the various bodies of the Buddha, David asked whether these judgments on the nature and purpose of human bodily existence, aiding spiritual

growth, might help Christian comparativists to explore the categories of creation and resurrection regarding transformative impact on Christian practice.

Scott Alexander used a series of texts to reflect on Islamic illuminations of certain themes, beginning with Quranic views on a “new creation”; on God as the One who created the “first time” and can do so again; on God’s “initiation” of creation, coupled with God’s “restoration” of it; on creation as a progressive ascendant transformation from simple elements (semen, vegetal seed) to higher forms (e.g., full human beings, crops ready for harvest); on created entities as annihilated before resurrection; on the luminosity of the resurrected righteous ones. Second, medieval manuals by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali’s (d. 504/1111), and ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Qadi elucidate the postresurrection effects of preresurrection ritual purity, and the luminescence of the resurrected. Third, medieval and early modern Sufi reflections (by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Muhyi l-Din b. al-‘Arabi, and Jalal al-Din Rumi) illumine the pre- and postresurrection continuum of transformed bodies. Scott commented finally on possible foundations for Muslim discourse on personal (especially cross-cultural) transformation today.

Kathleen A. Cahalan, admittedly not a comparativist by profession, was undaunted in posing six investigative questions. The *who* question pertains to the divine person and the practitioner or disciple. In all three papers, the body is in no way permanent, yet identity is strongly connected to our bodies. Hindu and Buddhist supernal bodies too undergo transformation. In all three cases, it seems that both the supreme being and the practitioner are changed, new bodies attained. *What* is changed? What do these new bodies share, and what is distinctive? Next, *when* do you get a new body, and *where*—before, after, or at the moment of death? *How* is a greatest mystery in all cases, Christian included, and this recalls the issue of agency—is it a divine being who brings about change? Finally, *why* do we get new bodies? To enjoy divine union, experience freedom and liberation from suffering and illusion, sin and pain, and live in a state of pure being. Little time was left for discussion—the rest of the day could have been used to delve into such rich materials—but we felt vindicated in thinking through Christian creedal belief in light of other traditions’ formulations of the state of life after death.

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