

COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY

Topic: Christian Commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita
Convenor: Leo D. Lefebure, Georgetown University
Presenters: Francis X. Clooney, Harvard University
Maria Clara Bingemer, Pontifical University of Rio de Janeiro
John Sheveland, Mount St. Mary's College
Respondent: Catherine Cornille, Boston College

Catherine Cornille began the session by reflecting on the process of Christians commenting on a sacred text from another religious tradition. She is editing a series of volumes that will present Christian commentaries on sacred and classic texts from other religions. The first volume, which will appear shortly, will present various Christian responses to the Bhagavad Gita. She stressed that the series invites Christian authors to engage their own Christian faith and perspectives in the process of commenting on a text from another tradition.

Francis X. Clooney focused on one important verse, Bhagavad Gita 18:66, in light of both the Srivaisnava and the Christian traditions: "Having completely given up all modes of righteousness, to me alone come for refuge. From all sins I will make you free. Do not grieve." He noted other uses of key words in other passages of the Gita, and surveyed some of the most influential Hindu commentators, especially Ramanuja and Desika. He cited part of Bede Griffiths's commentary on the Gita (*River of Compassion*), which compares the teaching of the Gita to Paul's discussion of the "law." He juxtaposed the passage from the Gita with Matthew 11:28-30 and Galatians 5:1-6, and concluded with questions for further reflection.

Maria Clara Bingemer reflected on the relation of Simone Weil to the Gita, noting the different perspectives on suffering in the Gita and in Weil's thought. John Sheveland reflected on the image of the "equal eye" in the Bhagavad Gita, which proposes an ethic of equanimity. (Krishna says: "Do works for Me, make Me your highest goal, be loyal-in-love to Me, cut off all [other] attachments, have no hatred for any being at all: for all who do that shall come to me." Gita 11:55.) Sheveland compared this perspective to the ethic of participation in Paul (e.g., Gal. 3:27-28; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; and Rom. 6:3-4).

In the discussion that followed, it was noted that Jewish-Christian dialogue has moved beyond the interpretation of Paul's view of the Torah that Bede Griffiths had presupposed. Interaction among different dialogues can be of vital importance. There were also questions and reflections on the importance of consulting the commentary tradition of another religion to understand how the text has been received and interpreted over time.

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