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CHANGING WATER INTO WINE

A Thomist Model for Theological Engagement with Non-Christian Thought and its Relevance for Contemporary Christian Encounter with Asian Religions and Cultures

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In the view of the Vietnamese Catholic theologian Peter Phan, the future of Asian Christianity lies more in bearing witness to the Kingdom of God than in expanding the Church's membership through converts. Based on statements and documents from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Phan further argues that this bearing witness to the Kingdom of God should take the form of a threefold dialogue: a dialogue with Asian poverty, a dialogue with Asian cultures, and a dialogue with Asian religions.[1]

In this article I would like to look at how the Scholastic or Thomistic approach to theology might help us with promoting this threefold dialogue. In particular, I would like to consider one model Thomas Aquinas gives us for understanding how Christian theology might engage with the thought of Asian religions, and how members of Asian religions might engage with Christianity. This model for a theological dialogue with other religions, I want to argue, also supports the other dialogues with Asian cultures and Asian poverty.

[1]Peter Phan, ed., *Christianities in Asia* (Wiley-Blackwell: 2011), 255–259.

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The Thomist tradition of Christian theology has certainly been, and remains even today, one of the major forms in which theology has been done in the Catholic Church. Yet, it might well seem a very odd thing to look to Aquinas for models for a contemporary dialogue with Asian religions and cultures. As the title of one his greatest works—the *Summa Contra Gentiles*—suggests, was not Aquinas rather more *against* than *for* the Gentiles? His views of other religious traditions such as Islam were more condemnatory than friendly—hardly the kind of open dialogue we might hope for today.

On the other hand, Aquinas' work itself is remarkable for the extent to which he does engage with and use Greek, Jewish and Muslim philosophy as he seeks to explore and construct Christian theology. In his works, Aquinas often takes pains to argue that a) Christian theology can engage with non-Christian thought without fear of being diluted or corrupted by doing so, and b) that there are positive gains to be had from doing so. Moreover, over the course of centuries, there has been a sustained and important interaction between Thomist Christian theologians and Asian religions in pursuit of better ways of proclaiming the Kingdom of God in Asia and in the hope of developing Asian forms of Christian theology and inculturated Asian Christian communities.

For his part, Aquinas uses a number of striking scriptural images to discuss how Christian theology can engage with non-Christian thought. The one I want to consider in this article is a Johannine image of transforming water into wine. As we will see, this image as applied by Aquinas is not one in which Christianity is simply opposed to other religions or even simply replaces them or even simply leaves them alone as they are, but rather is one in which there is both continuity and a creative transformation of one tradition into the other. This process of continuity and transformation is what we can actually see at work in the history of later Christian encounter with Asian religions, both in terms of a theology of religions and in terms of theological engagement. Moreover, this same process is at work in the encounter that members of Asian religions themselves have had with Christianity. As such, the image Aquinas has and the model it expresses should be very useful

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for understanding and developing contemporary and future encounters between Christianity and Asian religions.

Now, in effect, what I am doing here is to resume and further extend the kind of approach that Raimon Panikkar takes in the first edition of his seminal work, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, in which he considers what it means for Christianity and Hinduism to encounter each other. Panikkar explicitly likens what he does in this book to Aquinas' own encounter with non-Christian philosophy. For Panikkar, as for Aquinas, the encounter is one of continuity and transformation. For his part, Panikkar uses an equally powerful Biblical image of death and resurrection to describe the process.[2]

In this article I will first outline what Thomas says and how this relates to his own work. I will then consider how Thomist theologians have continued his approach when it comes to engagement with Asian religions, taking the particular example of Catholic encounter with the Hindu Vedanta in India in the 20th century. Lastly, I will look at how members of Asian religions have also used the same approach in their engagement with Christianity, taking the example of Mahatma Gandhi's use of Christian teaching to inform his concept of non-violence. In the course of this approach, I hope to show that Aquinas' model actually does express something that is important in each of the three dialogues identified by Phan: the idea of a) dialogue with poverty as liberational challenge; b) of dialogue with culture as incarnational transformation; and c) of dialogue with religions as creative exchange. In other words, it is important that dialogue involves transformation as well as continuity.

[2]Raimon Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (DLT: 1964). In this article, we are following the approach to the theological relation between Christianity and Hinduism found in the first edition of this book. In the second edition of this work (1981), Panikkar has developed a somewhat different view of the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism, one fundamentally incompatible with the thought of Aquinas.

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Aquinas on the Relationship of Theology and Philosophy

Aquinas develops the image of water into wine most fully when he considers how Christian theology relates to philosophy in his commentary on Boethius' *De Trinitate*.[3] For Aquinas, Christian theology is properly *sacra doctrina*, sacred teaching, meaning the revealed truths of faith and, by extension, the reflection on this revelation that Christian thinkers undertake. On the other hand, philosophy means the works of non-Christian thinkers, be this ancient Greek and Roman or medieval Jewish and Islamic thought, and the truths discovered by the exercise of natural human reason within them.[4]

Now, one abiding objection to Christian theology engaging with non-Christian thought is the idea that this introduces something foreign into Christian theology and that it dilutes Christian faith. Aquinas introduces the scriptural image of water and wine in the form of just such an objection to Christian theology while making use of philosophical arguments and authorities:

> Besides, secular wisdom is frequently represented in Scripture by water, but divine wisdom through wine. But, in Isaiah Chapter 1, innkeepers are censured for mixing water with wine. Therefore, teachers are to be censured who mix philosophical doctrines with theology (*sacra doctrina*) (BDT, 1.2.3. obj. 5)[5]

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[3] *Super De Trinitate* 1.2.3. The image of water and wine is used for the same theme, but in different ways, by other Scholastics. So, for example, Bonaventure uses the image when he warns of the dangers of the use of philosophy in the exposition of Scripture: "Indeed, not so much of the water of philosophy should be mixed with the wine of Sacred Scripture that it turn from wine into water" (*Collations on the Six Days*, in Bonaventure 1960–1970, V, 291).

[4] The same basic scheme is developed in other works, e.g. S.T. 1, 8; S.C.G. 1.2–8.

[5] "*Praeterea, saecularis sapientia frequenter in Scriptura per aquam significatur, sapientia vero divina per vinum. Sed Is. 1 vituperabuntur caupones aquam vino miscentes.*

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In response to this objection Aquinas argues that what happens when Christian theology makes use of philosophy is not so much the dilution of the one by the other, but the transformation of the water of philosophy into the wine of an enriched Christian theology:

> It can, however, also be said that when one of two things passes over into the domain (*dominium*) of another, it is not reckoned to be a mixture, except when the nature of both is changed. Whence, those who use philosophical doctrines in theology (*sacra doctrina*) by bringing them into the service of faith, do not mix water with wine, but change water into wine (BDT 1.2.3. ad. 5).[6]

For Aquinas the relationship between Christian theology and philosophy is similar to that between the operation of divine grace and human nature: grace perfects nature; it does not do away with it. There is both continuity and transformation. In like manner, faith is not opposed to reason but perfects it.

Aquinas further specifies three ways in which theology relates to philosophy. The first is when we demonstrate by natural reason some of the things we know by the light of faith. Here there is simple continuity, since it is the same truths that are being known. So, for instance, we can know by natural reason that God exists, along with some features about what God must be like, and we can know that the world is created. Theology transforms the water of philosophy into wine in the sense that it shows the way that reason can go and confirms the findings of reason as true. The second way is when theology makes use of what Aquinas calls "likenesses," meaning those truths about the world and about ourselves which are discovered by reason, and which are like the truths known through faith. For instance, Christian theology has found in the

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Ergo vituperandi sunt doctores qui sacrae doctrinae philosophica documenta admiscent" (BDT. 1.2. ad. 5).

[6]"*Et tamen potest dici quod quando alterum duorum transit in dominium alterius, non reputatur mixtio, sed quando utrumque a sua natura alteratur. Unde illi, qui utuntur philosophicis documentis in sacra doctrina redigendo in obsequium fidei, non miscent aquam vino, sed aquam convertunt in vinum*" (BDT 1.2.3. ad. 5).

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human mind a likeness to the Trinity. Thus, the way knowledge and love are present within the human mind is a likeness for the presence of the Son, as the Word of God, and the Spirit, as the Love of God, within the Trinity.[7] Theology takes these likenesses and transforms them to help us understand the things of faith. Here then there is continuity and transformation. Lastly, theology refutes errors in natural reasoning when philosophy is seen to advance something contrary to faith. It corrects error, showing the way reason can go wrong. Here, we might say, there is discontinuity and transformation.[8]

In each case we see here the water of philosophy being changed into the wine of theology; there is discontinuity, continuity and transformation. The most striking case is the second one, where what we already know by natural reason is put to work to explain

[7]As with Augustine, "[w]e found a similar trinity in man, namely the mind, and the knowledge it knows itself with, and the love it loves itself with" (*De Trinitate* XV.10, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. [Brooklyn, New York: New City Press, 1991], 402–403).

[8]Aquinas sums up these three ways as follows: Thus therefore we can use philosophy in sacred teaching in three ways. First, to demonstrate those things which are preambles of faith, which it is necessary to know in faith, as those things which are proven by natural reasons about God, such as that God exists, that God be one and other such things proven either about God or about creatures in philosophy, which faith supposes. Second, to make known through certain likenesses those things which are of faith just as Augustine in the book about the Trinity uses many likenesses taken from philosophical doctrines to make manifest the Trinity. Third, to resist those things that are said against the faith whether by showing them to be false or by showing them to be not necessary ("*Sic ergo in sacra doctrina philosophia possumus tripliciter uti. Primo ad demonstrandum ea quae sunt praeambula fidei, quae necesse est in fide scire, ut ea quae naturalibus rationibus de Deo probantur, ut Deum esse, Deum esse unum et alia huiusmodi vel de Deo vel de creaturis in philosophia probata, quae fides supponit. Secundo ad notificandum per aliquas similitudines ea quae sunt fidei, sicut Augustinus in libro de Trinitate utitur multis similitudinibus ex doctrinis philosophicis sumptis ad manifestandum Trinitatem. Tertio ad resistendum his quae contra fidem dicuntur sive ostendendo ea esse falsa sive ostendendo ea non esse necessaria*" [BDT 1.2.3 *responsio*]).

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revelation and in the process used in ways that we would never have used before. This is, in fact, what Aquinas does with all the sources he draws upon—be it the Greek philosophy of Aristotle or the Arabic philosophy of Avicenna. Aquinas radically transforms the concepts and schemes he finds in these sources in explaining God, or the world or human nature and life as Christian faith understands them. He does not make Christian faith fit Aristotle or Avicenna; he makes their ideas fit what Christian faith wants to say. At the same time, their ideas and schemes do serve as the material out of which an enriched expression of Christian faith emerges. The water of Aristotle or of Avicenna becomes the wine of Christian theology, but the water of their philosophy still remains and without it we could not have the resultant theology we have.[9] If there is radical transformation, there is also continuity.

Thomist Encounter with Asian Religions

I would like now to consider the history of Thomist encounter with Asian religions in the light of the model that Aquinas gives. Can this be described as the story of the transformation of the water of Asian philosophy into the wine of Christian theology? The example I want to take is that of Catholic Christian encounter with the Brahmanical Hindu tradition of religious philosophy called the Vedanta. This encounter became very important in the 20th century and so it is a good historical case to take. However, the problematic nature of this engagement with Vedanta is also clear, since Vedanta represents the elite culture of Brahmanical Hindus associated with the social and

[9]Other examples include the way Aquinas uses and transforms Aristotelian virtue ethics or causality in the light of the order of Christian language of infused natural and supernatural virtues or sacramental causality. For good discussions of the water into wine image in Aquinas and its relation to his work, see Victor Preller, O.G.S., "Water into Wine," in Jeffrey Stout & Robert MacSwain, eds., *Grammar and Grace: Reformulations of Aquinas and Wittgenstein* (London: SCM, 2004), 253–269 and Mark Jordan, *Rewritten Theology: Aquinas After His Readers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 154–169.

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economic oppression of other sections of Indian society, especially those now known as the Dalits. In taking it as an example, however, I am not endorsing this particular engagement as such; rather, I am once again simply interested in the process of engagement itself. For the conclusion, I want to return to what the Thomist model might also contribute toward resolving some of the problems found therein.

Of course, the encounter between Christian Scholastic theology and Brahmanical Indian philosophy, including the Vedanta, goes back to the 16th century and the advent of the Portuguese in India. The early Jesuit missionaries such as Robert de Nobili (1577–1656) were themselves all formed in Scholastic theology, and insofar as they showed any openness to Indian thought, they viewed it in the same way Aquinas viewed Greek and other non-Christian thought—as the product of natural human reasoning—and they sought to engage with it in ways that reflected Aquinas' own understanding of how Christian theology relates to natural philosophy. Thus, de Nobili argued that Christianity in India should take on Indian forms and looked for natural truths in Indian thought that might then be used to express Christian faith.

However, it is in the 20th century that we really find a sustained encounter with Brahmanical Hindu thought, not least in the works of the so-called "Calcutta School" of Jesuits such as Pierre Johanns (1885–1955), Pierre Fallon (1912–1985) and Richard de Smet (1916–1998). They undertook serious study of the Hindu traditions—what a Catholic theology of Hinduism might be and what use might be made of Hindu thought for the expression of Christian faith. Their own Christian theology was the neo-Scholastic Thomism of the end of the 19th and early 20th century which dominated Catholic thought at the time, while the Hindu tradition they engaged most with was the Vedanta, especially non-dual Advaita Vedanta, with its great teacher Shankara. During this same period, this tradition was being promoted by both Western and Indian scholars as the high point or essence of Hinduism as a whole, and so it was natural (for Catholic theologians during this time) that the encounter would be one between Christian Thomism and the Hindu Vedanta—and especially Advaita Vedanta.

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To appreciate and appraise their endeavour, it may be useful to give an outline of the standard reading of Advaita. As commonly understood, Advaita—as radical non-dualism—is held to maintain that the soul (*atman*) is strictly identical with the ultimate reality, Brahman. Moreover, Brahman alone is ultimately real (*paramartha-sat*) and empirical reality, be it the material world, or of finite souls, is only apparently or practically real (*vyavaharika-sat*). Within this Vedantic tradition Brahman is said both to be partless and immutable, but also to be the substantive, as well as the efficient cause, of the world, transforming itself into the empirical world. To reconcile these two conflicting ideas Advaita maintains that the world is only the illusory transformation (*vivarta*) of Brahman into the world. The personal creative Lord (*Ishvara*), the God of theism, is regarded as part of that illusory manifestation and real only on the level of apparent or practical reality. Ultimately, Brahman remains immutable and impersonal in nature, without any distinct attributes (*nirguna*). When the liberating realisation of the non-duality or identity of the soul and Brahman comes about, then the liberated soul comes to know that only Brahman exits and that the world is illusory in nature.

Not surprisingly, most Christian theologians in India concluded that Advaita by itself was incompatible with the Christian account, Thomist or otherwise. Thus, rather than engage with Advaita Vedanta alone, Fr. Pierre Johanns attempted to create a synthesis of elements taken from different Vedantic schools. From Advaita he took the idea of Brahman as immutable, distinctionless and transcendent being, while from the theist Vedanta of Ramanuja he took the idea of a personal God and the reality of the world as different from, but dependent on, God.[10] In terms of Aquinas' image, we might depict what Johanns was doing as turning the water of the different Vedantic schools into the wine of the Thomist account of God and creation.

[10]Johanns' Thomist engagement with Vedanta was developed in a series of articles written for the journal *Light of the East* between 1922 and 1934, and subsequently gathered together and translated into English as *To Christ Through the Vedanta* Vols. 1–2 (Bangalore: 1996).

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Some Thomists, however, argued instead that we can interpret Advaita itself in such a way that it becomes compatible with the Thomist account. The most systematic and enduring attempts were those of Fr. Richard de Smet and his student, Sr. Sara Grant.[11] To support their position, they argued that we need to distinguish what Shankara, the early and principal teacher of the Advaitic system, teaches from the doctrines of later Advaita, which they accepted was the standard Advaita we have just considered.[12]

De Smet[13] argued that in Shankara's account the distinction between the ultimately real and practically real should be taken as one between self-subsistent being and contingent being. Likewise, Shankara's affirmation of the identity of the soul with Brahman is to be understood as indicating that the soul has no independent existence.[14] Statements that seem to deny the real production of the world really only deny that Brahman undergoes change in the production of the world. Moreover, rather than relegating *Ishvara* to a lower level of reality, Shankara in fact often uses the term *Ishvara* and Brahman interchangeably. When he does deny that *Ishvara* is Brahman and talks

[11]The life and work of de Smet is portrayed in Bradley Malkovsky, *New Perspectives on Advaita Vedanta* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 1–17.

[12]Sr. Sarah Grant, R.S.C.J. (*Sankaracarya's Concept of Relation* [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999]; *Towards an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-dualist Christian* [Indian: Notre Dame, 2002]) further articulated de Smet's Thomistic reading of Shankara. Some western Indologists, such as Paul Hacker, have also wanted to distinguish between genuine and spurious works of Shankara and between Shankara and later Advaita. See Wilhelm Halbfass, ed., *Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedanta* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995). De Smet knew Hacker's work, though he wanted to go further towards a realist reading of Shankara.

[13]Richard de Smet & Joseph Neuner, eds., *Religious Hinduism*, 3rd ed. (Allahabad: St. Paul Publications, 1996), 80–96. Also see Richard de Smet, "Sankara and Aquinas on Creation," in *Indian Philosophical Annual* 6 (1970): 112–118.

[14]de Smet and Neuner, *Religious Hinduism*, 90–92.

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of *Ishvara* as belonging to the practical level of reality, this again serves only to deny that Brahman in itself has really distinct attributes or is really related to the world as creator and lord, in the sense of undergoing change.[15] Shankara's account can thus be said to be compatible with the Thomist account of God and creation. De Smet was keen to assert that the central concept of non-dualism in Shankara is not the same as monism for it affirms dependence, not identity, of being.[16]

De Smet's reading of Shankara remains something that very few Hindu or non-Hindu scholars of Advaita (for whom the great Advaitic teacher is to be interpreted within the terms of later Advaita teaching) would accept. De Smet's account of Shankara is based on strict textual scholarship, distinguishing between those works attributed to Shankara (which he considers properly to be ascribed to Shankara) and those which he considers to be the work of the later tradition. Whether we accept the standard interpretation of Shankara or that of de Smet depends, then, both on whether we agree with the division between authentic and inauthentic works and whether we accept the interpretation given to those works taken to be authentic.

However, it remains the case that de Smet develops this reading of the Advaita Vedanta of Shankara to enable Shankara's thought to become of service to the expression of Christian faith. What we have here is also a form of the turning of the water of non-Christian philosophy into the wine of Christian theology. Shankara and Advaita are read anew in the encounter with Thomist theology, read in terms of the truths found in Thomist Christianity. If one agrees that this is the right objective interpretation of Shankara, it is a discovery of common ground. If one follows the standard Advaitic reading of Shankara, it is

[15]In the Thomist account, the world is said to be really related to God as created being, but God only notionally related to the world, as creator, since a real relation would indicate that God undergoes change in creating (ST 13, 7; 45, 3). The parallel between Shankara's account and the Thomist account of mixed relations is explored in some detail by Grant, *Sankaracarya's Concept of Relation*.

[16]de Smet and Neuner, *Religious Hinduism*, 95.

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one of creative transformation. For de Smet's own part, the difference between Shankara and Aquinas is basically one of expression, not of content. Shankara affirms contingency by a more negative approach, valorising finite being negatively against absolute being, whereas Aquinas has a more positive approach, using the language of participation.[17]

De Smet and Grant, however, also came to talk of the Advaitic account as enriching the Thomist account and Christian theology in general. De Smet remarked that Shankara's account had taught him personally to be aware of "God's non-dual presence within."[18] Even more emphatically, Grant argued that Shankara's non-dual language and experience, as well as the Vedantic emphasis on the immanence of Brahman, challenge tendencies in western Christian theological discourse towards a dualism between God and the world in which God is depicted as outside and remote from the world.[19] Her suggestions were in turn taken up by the American Thomist David Burrell in an exploration of the way Aquinas uses non-Christian accounts as intellectual resources for developing his doctrine of creation. For his part, Burrell considers primarily the way Aquinas uses Islamic and Jewish philosophy as conceptual resources in the manner of turning water into wine. Accepting Grant's account of the complementarity between Shankara's non-dualism and the Thomist account of creation, Burrell has also suggested that non-dual language is not to be feared as pantheistic and can be useful in expressing the unique and inseparable relationship of creation, helping us to "think both creator and creature together."[20] Here then we see yet another way in which the water of philosophy is turned into the wine of theology, not in merely coming

[17]Malkovsky, *New Perspectives on Advaita Vedanta*, 15–16.

[18]Malkovsky, *New Perspectives on Advaita Vedanta*, 11–12.

[19]Grant, *Towards an Alternative Theology*, 54–56.

[20]D.B. Burrell, "Act of Creation with its Theological Consequences," in T. Weinandy, D. Keating, & J. Yocum, eds., *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 27–44.

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to say the same thing, but in enriching the expression of that theology, in transforming earlier theology and giving further ways of expressing faith—a richer kind of wine we might say.

It is now that we can go back to Panikkar and the *Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. In the third part of the book Panikkar develops what he calls a Christological *bhasya,* or commentary, on a Hindu Vedantic text. Panikkar, as a Christian theologian, identifies the *Ishvara*, the creative Lord, in Vedanta with Christ and thus reads Vedanta in the light of Christian faith in the Trinity. This, Panikkar argues, helps resolve a genuine difficulty within Vedanta about how to relate the Absolute (Brahman) to the world. Here again we see both continuity and transformation. Panikkar is not doing away with the Vedanta, but neither is he leaving it unchanged. Clearly, neither Christ nor the Trinity are part of the Vedantic tradition; rather, we have a Christian reading of the text. Panikkar himself states that he is giving the *sensus plenior*, the fuller sense, of the text, and as I noted at the beginning of this study, he likens what he is doing to what Aquinas does with Greek thought.[21]

Christianity and the Transformation of Asian Religions within Themselves

Aquinas' image of the transformation of water into wine and his understanding of what is involved in the engagement of Christian theology with philosophy is also useful when considering the encounter with, and use made of, Christian ideas by other religions. This is of course not something that Aquinas himself pays much attention to, but his model can quite happily be extended to this other context.

[21]Panikkar, *Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 126–138. For an appreciative appraisal of the theological significance of what Panikkar does here, see Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Wiley-Blackwell: 2009), 40–45.

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In the modern period especially, members of Asian religions have engaged with Christianity and not all of this encounter has been a matter simply of combating Christian missionary and colonial activities. Hindus and Buddhists have also adopted and made use of Christian ideas in order to develop forms of Hinduism and Buddhism that can serve what they want Hinduism and Buddhism to say and achieve in the modern world.

One obvious example of this is what is often referred to as the Hindu Renaissance, that is to say the work of leading Hindus such as Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833), Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) in the period from the end of the 18th century to the second half of the 20th century, in which a reformed type of Hinduism emerged very much influenced by Western and Christian ideas.[22]

For example, a central idea in Mahatma Gandhi's teaching is that of non-violence, *ahimsa*. Non-violence is for Gandhi the means by which we get to the Truth, which he identifies as the divine. Non-violence is thus the dynamic of *satyagraha* (or Truth-force), another central idea in Gandhi's teaching. Gandhi's emphasis on non-violence accords with his fundamental understanding that religion is primarily a form of ethics rather than a system of doctrine. For Gandhi, the concept of non-violence defines how human beings should act in religious, social and political life.

Gandhi's concept of non-violence is certainly rooted in Indian religious tradition. It is there in Hinduism; it is there especially in Jainism and Gandhi was much influenced by Jain ideas, not least as a result of his positive encounter with the Jain poet Raychandbhai. However, the primary reason why non-violence became so important a concept for Gandhi was because of his encounter with Christianity. Gandhi was

[22]See, for instance, M.M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christianity of the Indian Renaissance* (Madras: CLS, 1970); Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988); Arvind Sharma, ed., *Neo-Hindu Views of Christianity* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988).

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profoundly impressed by Tolstoy's promotion of passive non-resistance, which for Tolstoy was the central teaching of the New Testament, especially the Sermon on the Mount. Independently of Tolstoy, Gandhi found the New Testament the source of much that was true and valuable for him as a Hindu. What emerged was a concept of non-violence that was informed by Tolstoy's reading of the New Testament, which was then used by Gandhi to re-interpret the traditional Indian concept of *ahimsa*. The water of the traditional idea of *ahimsa* is transformed into the wine of Gandhi's concept of non-violence.

We can see this when we consider how the concept of non-violence is actually developed by Gandhi. Traditionally in Indian religions, the primary emphasis in the idea of *ahimsa* is on the negative aspect: the not killing, not harming of other forms of life. A secondary emphasis is on a positive aspect: the promotion of kindness towards other forms of life. In Gandhi's understanding of non-violence, on the other hand, while avoiding violence is certainly a key idea, there is a much greater stress on the positive element of concern for the welfare of others, and it is here that the Christian influence is present. Gandhi equates *ahimsa* with the "law of Love," in effect the central law of Christian ethics—love of neighbour, including one's enemies. In typical Hindu fashion, Gandhi extends the scope of this law of Love to cover not just human beings but all creatures.

The Christian influence on Gandhi's presentation of *ahimsa* comes across in the following comment:

> Ahimsa means "love" in the Pauline sense, and yet something more than the "love" defined by Paul, although I know St. Paul's beautiful definition is good enough for all practical purposes. Ahimsa includes the whole of creation and not only human … Ahimsa is not merely a negative state of harmlessness, but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil doer.[23]

[23]*The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* VI (Navajivan Publishing House: 1969), 264. St. Paul's definition is: "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is

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What Gandhi develops and promotes is an enriched notion of *ahimsa* and it is enriched because of his engagement with, and use of, Christian teaching. In Gandhi's doctrine of non-violence, the water of the traditional Indian idea of *ahimsa* is changed into the wine of the law of love. We might call this the transformation of water of Indian religion into the wine of Christian ethics, but we might also talk of the transformation of the water of Christian religion into the wine of Hindu ethics, since what we end up with is a reformed Hinduism.

Aquinas' idea of continuity and transformation, of water into wine, also accords with Gandhi's own views on the engagement between religions. Gandhi was against people converting from one religion to another, but he did argue that those in one religion should accept everything that is valuable from the other and transform it into the terms of one's own. For Gandhi, this too is an aspect of *ahimsa*, manifest in a respect for other faiths that the seeker of Truth must have.

In Gandhi's account we can, in fact, see all three of the relationships Aquinas identifies between theology and philosophy: first, there is the continuity whereby the truth of *ahimsa* is affirmed as known by traditional Indian religious reflection; second, there is the continuity and transformation of the idea of *ahimsa*—taken to be an imperfect likeness of the fuller concept of *ahimsa* as the law of love that Gandhi promotes; and third, in Gandhi's thought non-violence opposes and refutes any form of violence (*himsa*), be it actual violence in political or social life, or a giving in to bodily desires.

Another example is that of socially engaged Buddhism, the sort of Buddhism promoted by the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh (1926–), the Thai monk Buddhadasa (1906–1993) and the Dalai Lama (1935–). Engaged Buddhism has developed a new emphasis on human social and political emancipation in this world, which represents a transformation of more traditional Buddhist ethics, away from the

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not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13: 4–7 [RSV]).

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goal of liberation from mundane conditions altogether. While the impact of Christian ideas on Engaged Buddhism is much less explicit than with the Hindu Renaissance, nonetheless contact with the West and with Christianity has played a significant role in bringing this transformation about and in influencing the terms in which Engaged Buddhism has been promoted by its leaders.[24]

Christopher Queen characterizes Engaged Buddhism as a case of "cultural interpenetration" between the American-European Christian and the Asian Buddhist cultures in the modern period. He identifies the earliest phase of Engaged Buddhism as found in the "Protestant Buddhism" of Col. Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) and Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933), whose Buddhism was both informed by Liberal Protestant Christianity, as well a protest against many aspects of Christian teaching and Christian mission, and being indeed a protest against the contemporary practice of Buddhism itself. Queen also points to Ambedkar and his development of a form of Buddhism almost entirely centred on social emancipation as very much reflecting Western and Christian forms. Likewise, it is a mark of the work of later Engaged Buddhist leaders such as Nhat Hanh, Buddhadasa and the Dalai Lama that they have all known and engaged positively with Christian teaching, as well as with leading modern Christians, so that the language and concepts of Christian ethical teaching informs their presentation of Buddhism in a similar way to that found in Gandhi. Thus, while it is possible that Engaged Buddhism could have developed without contact with Christianity, nonetheless as a matter of fact,

[24]For discussions of Christian influence on Engaged Buddhism, see Christopher Queen, "Introduction: The Shapes and Sources of Engaged Buddhism," in Christopher S. Queen & Sallie B. King, eds., *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 1–44. For a study of the difference between the ethics of Engaged Buddhism and traditional Buddhism, see James E. Dietrick, "Engaged Buddhist Ethics: Mistaking the Boat for the Shore," in Christopher Queen, Charles Preish & Damien Keown, eds., *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 252–269.

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Engaged Buddhism in its present form has come about as the result of the cultural interpenetration of which Queen speaks.

Again, however, the end result is a Buddhism that is felt by the promoters of Engaged Buddhism to be continuous with traditional Buddhism and to be the authentic voice of Buddhism in the modern world. If it is water into wine, it is also the water of earlier teaching within Buddhism changed into the wine of a Buddhism needed for the modern world. We also see in Engaged Buddhism the kind of creative interaction between Christianity and Buddhism in Asia in support of the emancipation of the poor as promoted by the pioneer of Asian liberation theology, the Sri Lankan Jesuit Aloysius Pieris. According to Pieris, for Christianity to be *of* Asia rather than simply *in* Asia, it must embrace both the religiosity and the poverty of Asia "to be baptised in the Jordan of Asian religion and on the Calvary of Asian poverty." Christianity and Buddhism should both be committed to the liberation of the poor and should discover aspects within their own traditions that support this. At the same time, Christianity in Asia has a positive contribution to make. In part, Christian liberative theology serves prophetically to reveal or bring out Buddhism's own liberative dimensions and potentialities so that, as Pieris puts it, "theology in Asia is the Christian apocalypse of the non-Christian experiences of liberation."[25] In part, however, Christianity contributes the unique axiom of God's preferential option for the poor, something "revealed only in the Bible, specific only to the Christian faith and totally absent in all non-Semitic religions … that this same God has made a defence pact—a covenant—with the poor against the agents of mammon, so that the struggle for the poor for their liberation coincides with God's salvific action."[26]

[25]Aloysius Pieris, S.J., *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1988), 41. For Pieris' influential vision of Asian liberation theology, the nature of an authentic Asian Church and Christian-Buddhist encounter, see, for instance, this work and his seminal work, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988).

[26]Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 120.

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Conclusion: Against or For the Gentiles?

In conclusion, then, I think Aquinas' image of water changed into wine and the understanding he has about what is involved in Christian theology engaging with philosophy is helpful as a model for us in developing a creative engagement between Christianity and Asian religions—in the dialogue with these religions. What it provides is a model that allows us to steer between sheer opposition and sheer replacement. In accommodating both continuity and transformation, it is a model that is adequate to what Christians, Hindus and Buddhists have themselves felt important. Aquinas' model is one that is *for the Gentiles*, rather than simply *against* them. Yet it is a robust approach, one that recognises the need for challenge and change on the part of all those involved.

Finally, how does it help us with the other members of threefold dialogue put forward by the FABC and Peter Phan—the dialogue with poverty, with culture?

In terms of a dialogue with culture, the image of water into wine accords well with those views of inculturation that stress an "incarnational" model of what is involved, in which Christian life and the Christian message, as the former Jesuit General, Pedro Arrupe, has put it, "not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation."[27] In other words, it is a model of dialogue with culture where there is transformation, where a deep immersion in the culture leaves neither Christianity nor that culture the same. It is a model of inculturation that is neither the transplantation and imposition of a Western Christianity into the land of Asia, nor the total translation and reduction of Christianity into the existing norms of that culture.[28]

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[27]Pedro Arrupe, S.J., *Acta Romana* 17 (1978): 256–281.

[28]For a further discussion of inculturation in Asia as transformative, see Elizabeth Koepping, "India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma/Myanmar," in Phan, *Christianities in Asia*, 9–44.

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The dialogue with culture and the dialogue with poverty are, of course, inseparable. Earlier Thomist attempts to inculturate into elite cultures, such as that of the Brahmanical Hindu tradition of Vedanta, are indeed problematic and suspect if they simply ignore the relationship such elite cultures have to social oppression and patterns of poverty. Here the image of water into wine becomes one of challenge. It speaks of a dialogue of poverty in which any Christian engagement with Asian religions or Asian cultures has to be one that challenges oppressive and exploitative elements in them. It suggests that if there is to be any inculturation into elite cultures, this can only be the case if there is also a transformation of those cultures away from oppressive dimensions and towards emancipation of the poor—a transformation of the water of these cultures into the wine of a culture freed from oppressive elements.

The image of water into wine seems to capture and express contemporary concerns among Asian theologians that there be a liberational dimension in Christian approaches to dialogue of any of the three types—a liberational critique of other religions and cultures—with an emphasis on what is needed for social and political emancipation, such as found for instance in the work of Aloysius Pieris and Dalit theology.[29] An emphasis on human emancipation is also something at the heart of those modern transformations of Hinduism and Buddhism—Renaissance Hinduism and Engaged Buddhism—to which Christianity has contributed its own water for transformation.

Water into wine, then. Transformation and challenge as well as continuity. An old image and an old model indeed. But an image and a model that are, I hope, not lacking in something to offer us today as we think about the future of Christianity in Asia.

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[29]As, for example, in Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*; K. Pathil, ed., *Religious Pluralism: An Indian Christian Perspective* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999); especially in Soosai Arokiasamy, "Theology of Religions from Liberation Perspective," in K. Pathil, ed., *Religious Pluralism: An Indian Christian Perspective* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 300–323.

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