'The dialogue between Tantra and Christianity: possibilities and challenges.'

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What questions might the tantra of Kashmir Shaivism put to Christian theology? Likewise, what questions might Christian theology put to the tantra of Kashmir Shaivism? Each section of Parts 1 and 2 first presents one tradition and then asks what question it may put to the other. In short, what dialogue can be set up between these two contrasting points of view?

Introductory notes:

a. Which Tantra?

In India, the term tāntrika can mean ‘charlatan’, or ‘practitioner of black magic’. In the West, it has acquired another meaning to which Georg Feuerstein applies the label ‘Californian Tantra’. “Their main error is to confuse Tantric bliss ... with ordinary orgasmic pleasure.”¹ Hugh Urban broadens the context, “... instead of the ideal of unity, order, or harmony, the late-capitalist aesthetic is one of physical intensity, shock value, immediate gratification, and ecstatic experience.”² But we are not dealing here with that form of tantra.

Originally the term ‘tantra’ meant a ‘loom’ for weaving cloth. By metonymy it comes to mean a ‘text’. There are many Hindu and Buddhist tantras that differ according to the various schools and deities involved.

‘Kashmir Shaivism’ is a term coined in 1914 by J. C. Chatterji in his Kashmir Śaivaism³ based on the many texts discovered by Johan Georg Bühler (1837-1898)⁴ and later published in the Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies. Its highpoint is reached in The Light on the Tantras (Tantrāloka),⁵ by Abhinavagupta (c. 975-1025 CE).

An extensive overview of Abhinavagupta’s opus was given by Kanti Chandra Pandey in his Abhinavagupta: an Historical and Philosophical Study first published in 1936.⁶ One of the first European studies was Raniero Gnoli’s The Aesthetic Experience according to Abhinavagupta.⁷ Gnoli’s monumental Italian

translation of Abhinavagupta’s Tantrāloka was published in 1972. The first major French contribution was Lilian Silburn’s Le “Paramārthasāra”, published in 1957 followed by her Le Vijñāna Bhairava in 1961. In 1975 André Padoux published his Recherches sur le symbolique et l’énergie de la parole dans certains textes tantriques. Research has continued with the work of Alexis Sanderson, for example, 'The category of purity and power among the Brahmins of Kashmir' and his monumental history, 'The Śaiva Exegesis of Kashmir'. His students have continued his work, among which the critical edition of the Mālinīvijayottaratantra, which is the foundational text of the Tantrāloka. Mention should also be made of the work of Lakshman Joo, Jaideva Singh, Bettina Bäumer, Mark Dyszkowski (India); Raffaele Torella (Italy); Colette Poggi (France); Thomas Matus and Paul Eduardo Muller-Ortega (USA).

This impressive work of scholarship illustrates the high regard in which the tantra of Kashmir is now held.

This paper wishes further to narrow the focus and to consider the Kula ritual whose origins are obscure. According to Jayaratha, it originates from Assam, and more precisely from Kāmarūpa. Abhinavagupta, after praising Macchanda as the founder of the tradition, recounts a legend. Śiva, in the person of Śrīkanṭha, is guru to three Siddhas, Āmardaka, Śrīnātha and Tryambaka. He directs them to teach three traditions: the dualist (dvaita), the dualist non-dualist (dvaita-advaita), and the non-dualist (advaita) respectively. The last of these, Tryambaka, has twin children, a boy and a girl. It is to his daughter, Ardhatryambakā, that he communicates the Kula tradition, which therefore has a female guru as its founder, unusual in the Hindu traditions.

According to Jayaratha, the learned commentator of the Tantrāloka,

‘... [Abhinavagupta] esteems more highly the guru who follows the Kula ritual procedure (kulaprakriyā) - because of [its] restfulness - in comparison with the guru who is devoted to tantra ritual procedure (tantraprakriyā).’

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11 Alexis Sanderson. 'The category of purity and power among the Brahmins of Kashmir'. In M. Carrithers, S. Collins and S. Lukes (eds.). The category of the person; anthropology, philosophy, history. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. pp. 190-216.
15 Abhinavagupta. Tantrāloka 1.7.
Abhinavagupta sets out a hierarchy of traditions, which show a progressive movement from right to left, from the licit to the illicit, from the less powerful to the more powerful, from purity to impurity, from worship of the god to worship of the goddess.\textsuperscript{18} The hierarchy is usually listed as “Left, Right, Mata, Kula, Kaula, Trika.”\textsuperscript{19}

The Kaulasūtra speaks of two ‘boards’. In the Kula ‘board’, the “the extroversion of consciousness is active [visphāra]”; and in the Kaula ‘board’ “it [the extroversion] has ceased [śānta]”.\textsuperscript{20}

This emphasis on interiority is found supremely in the Trika, which Abhinavagupta places at the apogee: “The Trika is higher than the Kula”.\textsuperscript{21} The Trika is not a ritual or a system but the single mantra consisting of three phonemes: S, AU and Ḥ. This one mantra non-dually identifies transcendent consciousness with the whole manifest universe. By reciting it, indeed by becoming it, the practitioner enters into the fullness both of divinity and of this-worldliness, and so acquires the state of Śiva.

However, this article will deal with the most extreme of the tantras, the Kula ritual,\textsuperscript{22} which André Padoux describes as “an important element, in many respects the essential element, of tantrism”.\textsuperscript{23}

b. What method?

Francis X. Clooney defines ‘comparative theology’ as follows:

\begin{quote}

Comparative theology . . . marks acts of faith seeking understanding, which are rooted in a particular faith tradition but which, from that foundation, venture into learning from one or more faith traditions. This learning is sought for the sake of fresh theological insights that are indebted to the newly encountered tradition(s) as well as the home tradition.\textsuperscript{24}

\end{quote}

This method differs significantly from the comparative study of religion, for it proceeds from a specific confessional basis,\textsuperscript{25} and has a "strong autobiographical element", “… we see the other in light of our own and our own in light of the

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\textsuperscript{19} See \textit{Tantrāloka} 13.300b-301a; 13.319b, 15.319-320, 37.25b-27a.


\textsuperscript{22} Abhinavagupta gives his version of the Kula ritual in chapter 29 of his \textit{Tantrāloka}. See John R. Dupuche. \textit{Abhinavagupta: The Kula Ritual as elaborated in chapter 29 of the Tantraloka}. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2003.

\textsuperscript{23} André Padoux \textit{Comprendre le Tantrisme; les Sources Hindoues}. Paris: Albin Michel, 2010. p. 50.


\textsuperscript{25} Anita C. Ray. ‘(Re-)discovering comparative theology: An Australian perspective’. In \textit{Pacifica} 2014, Vol. 27 (1) 50–67. p. 54.
other...” Furthermore, it has a strong textual component, although in principle it can be applied to musical and visual expressions as well.

PART 1    POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR CHRISTIANITY

1.a. The mantra

The tantra of Kashmir Shaivism

In his *Hindu Theology*, José Pereira surveys the whole range of Indian traditions. He distinguishes between three basic types: the “theologies of difference” where difference is real and identity is unreal, found in many of the major schools of Indian thought such as Saṁkhya, Mīmāṃsā, Nyāya and also Śaivaśiddhānta, the rival to Kashmir Shaivism; “theologies of identity” where identity is real and difference is unreal, which he sees as overwhelmingly Buddhist but in which he also includes Śaṅkara; and “theologies of difference-identity” where both are real, in which he places Kashmir Shaivism.

In Saṁkhya, the foundational philosophical system of India, consciousness or spirit (*puruṣa*) is dualistically distinct from matter (*prakṛti*), which gives rise to the variety of the universe. Spirit is not matter. For Kashmir Shaivism, by contrast, the one is the other. The analogy is that of the perfect mirror, without stain or defect of any sort. The mirror does not of itself have an image, yet it is capable of presenting any image, whether it be a flower or the most distant star. In a sense the mirror has all these images and yet is none of them. Consciousness, like the perfectly clear mirror, has no form and yet contains every form.

Advaita Vedānta, of which Śaṅkara (8th cent. CE) is considered to be the most prominent exponent, gives a strictly monistic meaning to the famous phrase ‘Thou art that’, (*tat-tvam-asī*). The human person and all other things are simply and essentially ‘that’, an impersonal absolute. Gauḍa Pāda says: “As we view dreams, illusions and fairy cities [in the skies] so do the insightful Vedanta masters view the world.” For Kashmir Shaivism, by contrast, ultimate reality is not the “impersonal and passive brahman” of Śaṅkara but a subject, ‘I’ (*aham*), but not ‘I’ in the manner of a limited ego (*ahaṁkāra*). It is unlimited consciousness (*saṁvit*). This consciousness is not ignorant of itself; its self-revelation is expressed as ‘I am’. The relationship between consciousness and

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31 Chandogya *Upanishad* 6.8.7.


self-revelation is non-dual, for consciousness is not conscious of something other than itself.

The Pre-Socratic Greek philosophers enquired about the basic substance that underlies all substances. Thales taught it was water; Heraclitus said it was fire. For Kashmir Shaivism, the Word (vāc) is the answer to the Greek question of the one and the many. All objects are manifestations of the self-consciousness of consciousness. All realities are revelations of the primal revelation. All objects are the subject in various ways. The unenlightened person opposes object and subject, but every object that exists is fundamentally and essentially the eternal subject. All is ‘I am’, because ‘I am’ does not say ‘I am not’; for example, ‘I am not this tree, I am not this person’.

Human beings are among the many manifestations of Śiva. In ignorance of their real nature - for essentially they are Śiva - they think of themselves as inescapably limited in knowledge, will and activity. Because of this misunderstanding their actions are ‘off the mark’ and have karmic consequences.

In manifesting himself in limited form, Śiva obscures himself. But he also freely communicates his grace (anugraha) by which humans come to realize their true nature. They become aware that they are the manifestation of Śiva, and that their individual ‘I am’ is essentially the supreme ‘I am’. This is not some form of megalomania; rather they acknowledge that their time-bound self is the manifestation of the eternal Self, just as the spoken word and its speaker are identified. They recognize that they are not just like Śiva; they are Śiva.

The enlightened guru will play an important part in this work of grace, for the words of his teaching manifest the supreme Word and thus actually transform the disciple into the divine Word.

The guru teaches, but the process is complete only when he initiates his disciple, not just any disciple but the “one among a hundred thousand who possesses the suitability for such things”.34

The guru himself has been initiated, and his lineage stretches back through the Perfected Beings (siddha) to Śiva himself, whose primordial Word (vāc) is ‘I am’. These various levels are not set in opposition but imply each other.

The heart and essence of the initiation is the transmission of the mantra, personally and orally to the disciple in ceremony. If it is obtained from a book it remains a “dead letter”.35

The mantra can consist of a sentence, a single word, a phoneme or even a sound, but the mantra is not just a vocable; it is the phonic form of the deity. It always does have a meaning, but the mind does not discursively reflect on its meaning. Rather, to recite the divine mantra is to acquire the mind and being of the deity,

as well as to gain all the powers of the deity. The mantra is not just a manifestation of the deity; it communicates authority and efficacy (vīrya).

Jayaratha explains.

"The mantras mentioned in the tantras of the Siddhānta etc. are all impotent since they all lack the splendour of śakti. The great mantras of the Kaula tradition, by contrast, are splendid with innate fire; they shine with a divine splendour, immediately causing conviction."\[^{36}\]

There must be no separation between the reciter of the mantra (mantri) and the mantra, "If the practitioner of the mantra is one thing, the mantra another, perfection is never attained;"\[^{37}\] nor must there be opposition between the mantra and the power of the mantra. Thus the reciter (mantri), the mantra and the power of the mantra (mantra-vīrya) are non-dually one.

The leads ultimately to the ‘attitude of Bhairava’ (bhairava-mudrā).

"Mentally projecting all the faculties such as seeing simultaneously on all sides into their respective objects and remaining at the centre like a golden pillar, you [O Śiva] appear at as the one foundation of the universe."\[^{38}\]

When the practitioners look at the external world they see themselves since the external world is the projection of their being. When they look within themselves they see the panoply of the universe since it derives from them. Their outward and inward views coincide. There is no opposition of outer and inner, no hiding of one from the other, no duality. The focus of attention is on ‘I’, which in Sanskrit is written as AHAM. This one mantra contains reality in all its dimensions: A represents the absolute, Śiva, the origin of all; HA represents Śakti and the emission of the universe; M represents the vibration, the union of Śiva and Śakti.\[^{39}\]

**Christianity**

The mantra, according to Kashmir Shaivism, is the point of union between transcendent consciousness and manifest world. To what extent does this bring into sharper focus the non-duality that is at the heart of Christianity?

The Council of Chalcedon speaks of two natures in one Christ:

"two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; [ἐν δύο φύσεσιν ἁσυγχύτως, ἁτρέπτως, ἁδιαιρέτως, ἁχωρίστως -- in duabus naturis inconfuse, immutabiliter, indivis, inseparabiliter] the distinction

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of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved,”

Jesus is both divine and human. However, the reasoning mind ceases to function at the paradoxical nature of this teaching. As a result a more subtle perception comes into play that is due not to human faculties but to the power of the Spirit. The hearer goes beyond the mental categories of nature, whether human or divine, and perceives the Person. Chalcedon continues:

not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten God [μονογενὴς Θεόν], the Word [logos], the Lord Jesus Christ.

The term *logos* is used in a philosophical sense first by Heraclitus in the 6th cent. BCE to refer to the principle of order in a constantly changing universe. The *logos* transforms *chaos* into *cosmos*. Philo of Alexandria (25 BCE-50 CE) uses the *logos* to describe the intermediary between God and creation, but for him it is neither personal nor pre-existing. The writer of the Fourth Gospel, seeking for a Greek word, selects the term *logos* which refers in Mk 4:14, 15 and Acts 8:25 to the good news preached by the disciples but then comes to refer to Jesus himself who is in fact the good news.

St John’s use of the word *logos* has a background in biblical literature. The term *dabar* signifies ‘word’ but also ‘thing’, ‘act’ and ‘event’. The *dabar* gives life to those who accept it (Deut 32:46-47) and death to those who do not. The *dabar* heals (Ps 107:20). Even if the *dabar* is not personal it is almost autonomous. Once pronounced it goes on its way and accomplishes its purpose (Is. 55:10-11).

In late rabbinical works the Torah is deemed to have existed before all things and to be their model. The phrase “in the beginning” (Gn 1:1) is interpreted as “in the Torah”. Indeed, the theology of the *logos* in the Gospel of John may have been developed in response to rabbinical speculation on the Torah.

The term *memra* (‘name’) has an important place in the Targum and in the New Testament. It is one way God refers to himself even before creation, but *memra* also relates to creation since, as the Targum explains, the title ‘I am’ means ‘The One who spoke and the world came into being; who will speak and the world will come to be.’ Some describe *memra* as a reality distinct from God, others hold that the *memra* is an intermediary between God and creation, but for most *memra* is a way of avoiding pronouncing the Ineffable. It is also suggested that

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42 Hayward. ‘The Holy Name’. p. 28.
43 Hayward. ‘The Holy Name’. pp. 16-17.
the *memra* refers to the 'I am' of Exodus 3:14 and that it is one of the sources of the word *logos* in Jn 1:1 ff.\(^{44}\)

The three terms, *dabar*, Torah and *memra*, help in understanding the Word who became flesh. Jesus is presented as the divine Name, the self-expression of God. He is the incarnate expression of the divine activity on earth and the presence of God both in the act of creation and in the work of redemption.\(^{45}\)

Christian theology often lists a series of opposites: creator and created, heaven and earth, good and evil, sin and grace, faith and reason, church and state and yet St Paul speaks of Christ overcoming all divisions. For example,

> "He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together ... 
> 19...in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col 1:17, 19-20)

Richard Rolle (14\(^{th}\) cent.) emphasizes the power of the very name of Jesus. “If you think on the name Jesus continually and hold it stably, it purges your sin and kindles your heart.”\(^{46}\) Bernadine of Sienna (15\(^{th}\) cent.) goes further. He promoted the devotion to the Holy Name and taught that the very name of Jesus contains all that he is. Indeed, he would display the trigram IHS on a tablet in gold letters and then ask his listeners to "adore the Redeemer of mankind". When his teaching was judged by some to be excessive, Pope Martin V and after him Pope Eugene IV came to his defense. Something of this same emphasis is found in the Orthodox East. Theophan the Recluse (19\(^{th}\) CE) says “The Jesus Prayer is stronger than all other prayers by virtue of the power of the Holy Name.” And John of Kronstadt (19\(^{th}\) CE) teaches that "The Name of the Lord is the Lord Himself".

Kashmir Shaivism teaches that the mantra that has been received at the time of initiation brings about identity with the divine. This supports the teaching readily available in Christianity that the very name of Jesus, which has been received in faith, unites heaven and earth non-dually. In moments of prayer or even at the moment of death, like Joan of Arc who appealed to the person of Jesus, crying out his name at the moment of her burning,\(^{47}\) those who recite the mantra ‘Jesus’ are personally united with the transcendent God and taste the first fruits of redemption. The tantric teaching on the mantra shows the power of the name of Jesus that has been given to them and with which they are one.

1.b  A spirituality of power

*The tantra of Kashmir Shaivism*

\(^{44}\) Hayward. ‘The Holy Name’. p. 32.  
\(^{45}\) Hayward. ‘The Holy Name’. p. 31.  
The term ‘mantra’ is derived from the root MAN, ‘mind’, and the suffix TRA, which is instrumental. Thus the mantra is an instrument of the mind as distinct from a tool which an instrument of the hand. The mantra is not a magical formula that has an effect irrespective of the attitude of the one who pronounces it. It is properly recited once the person has become the mantra.

The kaula guru has placed unbounded power into the hands of his initiates, namely the Kula mantra, which transcends impure and impure, licit and illicit. Indeed, the initiates will consciously enter into the illicit and impure to show that they transcend all divisive categories and that they are at one with the power of the mantra. This is in keeping with the story of the god Bhairava (aka Śiva in his fearsome form) who had been accused of the most heinous crime and although he was innocent was condemned to wander. He dwelt for many years in cremation grounds, experiencing their impurity and achieving great power.

The term bhāvanā is derived from the root BHŪ, ‘be’ which has a more dynamic sense than AS, ‘be’. It can mean ‘causing to be’, ‘manifesting’, ‘imagining’, ‘contemplating’. The act of contemplation, bhāvanā, is effective. By the power of the mantra (mantravīrya), the practitioners can bring into reality the object of their contemplation. Indeed, the hallmark of union with the divine in much of Hindu religious thought is the ability to exercise power.

Christianity

In what way does Kashmir Shaivism show that a spirituality of power lies at the heart of the Gospel, not mere economic or political power, but the power to recreate the world?

On the first Easter Sunday Jesus gives his disciples the supreme spiritual power, namely to free people from their sin or to hold it against them (Jn 20:21-23). He has this power because

“For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor 5.21)

He has not just known sin; he has become sin. The pure is made impure. It is from the paradoxical union of incompatibles that infinite power flows.

United with him, the disciples will have his power, on condition that they too endure what he has endured. He had earlier told them:

“If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, “Be uprooted and planted in the sea”, and it would obey you.” (Luke 17:6)

This teaching is not just rhetorical, making a point by overstating the case. The example shows the totality of the power of faith by which the disciples can do what seems impossible and even contradictory. How and why plant a tree in the sea? However, their command will be effective only because it has the Word at
its heart. The disciples are identified with Christ, and without this identification their words are powerless. “Without me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5).

Jesus puts forward a spirituality of power. He can give power because he already has it. This fact is noted by the Centurion who stands in admiration of Jesus’ capacity. Whereas the Centurion has to give audible commands for minor things to be done, Jesus can heal the servant at a distance, when and how he wishes (Mt 8:5 ff).

This spirituality of power does not lead to licentiousness, as might be feared, for the power of the word depends on the union of faith in Christ who spoke against the “tyrants” (Mk 10:42). True power increases with use; licentiousness exhausts itself. Those who are lacking in power will seek to deprive others of power. Those who are truly powerful make others powerful. Power empowers.

The saying concerning the mulberry tree means that the disciples are free to do as they wish; it is up to them to choose. They can contemplate what they wish to do and then they can do it. They can make a new heaven and a new earth, just as God first planted the garden in Eden.

1.c. The world

The tantra of Kashmir Shaivism

According to Kashmir Shaivism, this world is not created, if creation means absolute separation from the deity and the establishment of an unbridgeable gulf between creator and created. Rather, this world is an emanation (sṛṣṭi), which can be compared to the communication made by a person who speaks truly and openly. He is what he says; he is in what he says. There is no separation between the speaker (vācaka) and spoken (vācyā); they are one. His words are not just information; they are who he is. At the same time, the speaker may fall silent. Thus he is and he is not what he speaks. He identifies with all he says but is not confined to what he has said.

Śiva is manifest in all the variety of the universe. He does not emit something apart from himself. He manifests himself in the physical, and in that sense he is the physical. The physical is the revelation of his being, and he identifies with what he reveals. Even though the expressions of his light are the darkening of his light, he is pleased become inert and ignorant.

Christianity

Śiva and the primordial Word (vāc) are one. Since all the variety of the universe is the outflow of that primordial Word, he is identical with all that is. What can this say about the Christian tradition?

The ‘universe’ (ōlām) in Hebrew refers to the totality of heaven and earth. It is only in late Hebrew that ōlām means this world. The Greek word kosmos refers
to the order of the universe in contrast with the disorder of chaos. The term *kosmos* in the Gospel of John has several meanings. It can refer simply to the created order in a neutral sense. It can also have a positive sense since God so loves the world that he will sacrifice his only Son for its sake. But the closer the word comes to the passion it takes on a negative meaning and signifies hostility towards Jesus.

The Prologue says “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.” (Jn 1:3) And Colossians says

“*in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers - all things have been created through him and for him.*” (Col 1:16).

At the same time, the Prologue distinguishes between “he was in the world,” and the intimacy of “he lived among us” (Jn 1:14), that is in the community of believers.

The word ‘flesh’ signifies humanity and all that lives, both material and angelic. The dualistic opposition of flesh and spirit is foreign to biblical thought and was adopted only in the 2nd or 3rd centuries. The Prologue does not say that the Word became ‘a flesh’ or ‘a man’, but simply ‘flesh’ (Jn 1:14) and therefore that the Word identifies with all living reality. Moreover, the word ‘flesh’ signifies weakness, mortality, ignorance and even the sinful state – “by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rm 8:3) - which would have been unacceptable to the Gnostics since they would not have accepted that the major manifestation of the eternal Word would be in vulnerable and imperfect flesh.

Are there limits to the incarnation? Kashmir Shaivism sees a clear identity of Śiva with all that is manifest. He is and he is not all that is, for all things are the expression of his being, but a passing expression. The Kashmiri tantric teaching on the Word (vāc) may help in showing how Christianity is essentially non-dual. For if all is Word, if all is revelation, if God and his revelation are one, and if at the same time the glory of God (cf. Rm 1:20) is revealed in ever-changing ways, in a sense God both is this world and transcends this world.

PART 2 POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR TANTRA

2.a. Love

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49 Jn 3.16. See also Jn 11:9 ; 17:5, 24; 21:25.  
50 See also Jn 1:29; 4:42; 6:51; 8:12; 9:5.  
51 See also Jn 12:31; 14:17, 22, 27, 30; 15:18-19; 16:8, 11, 20, 33; 17:6, 9, 14-16.  
52 Ex 10:12.  
Christianity

The theme of ‘person’ lies at the heart of Christianity, with its doctrine of one God in three Persons, not in three individuals or three modes. It rejects the concept found in antiquity, which saw God as monarchia and a numerical unity. In the Trinitarian view, God exists only as ‘we’. However, the precise relationship and quality of the Three Persons is the constant subject of meditation and reflection.

Under the impact of Christianity, the term persona, which originally meant a mask worn by actors to indicate their roles in a play, takes on a fundamentally new meaning. Indeed, the concept of the person is “one of the contributions to human thought made possible and provide by Christian faith.” The ‘roles’ now become “dialogical realities”.

“In transcending itself it has itself; by being with the other it first becomes itself, it comes to itself ... being with the other is its form of being with itself.”

Benveniste makes the same point.

“Consciousness of self is possible only if it is experienced in contrast. I use the form ‘I’ only in addressing someone who will be the ‘you’ of my address. ... the form ‘I’ posits another person ... [neither ‘I’ nor ‘you’] is conceivable without the other ...”

The relationship between the divine Persons is love, as noted by diversely by St Augustine and Richard of St Victor in both their works called De Trinitate. That love is to be found in this limited world as well. The love of God is the first command, and “the second is like it, to love one’s neighbor as oneself” (Cf. Mk 12:31). All Christian morality depends on this threefold love. St Paul teaches that there are three things that last: faith, hope, and love, but the greatest is love (1 Cor 13:13). St John says simply “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them” (Jn 4:16), whether they are Christian or not. St John of the Cross states: “At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love.” That is, love will assess simply the love that has been shown, and at the same time love will look on human weakness with love.

The tantra of Kashmir Shaivism

All this seems to fly in the face of the rigorous non-dualism of Indian thought. In his poem, Mahopadeśaviṁśatikā, Abhinavagupta states,

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56 Ratzinger. ‘Concerning the notion of person in theology’. p. 439.
57 Ratzinger. ‘Concerning the notion of person in theology’. p. 441.
“When your own Being reveals itself,
You are, I am, this whole world is.
When creation is once again reabsorbed,
there is neither You, nor I, nor this world.” 61

This needs to be held in balance with his commentary on Parātrimśikā verses 3-4 62 regarding the command ‘Listen’ (śṛṇu) by which Śiva addresses Śakti, his consort. Abhinavagupta examines relationships by studying the pronouns, ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘it’, ‘you’, and ‘I’. Śiva is ‘I’, Śakti is ‘you’, but since Śiva and Śakti are essentially united, there is an eternal and unbreakable I-Thou bond at the very source of all things. They are non-dual; their ‘I’ and ‘you’ are identified but not eliminated. The ‘he’, ‘she’, and ‘it’, which are the objects of the universe, are the outflow of Śakti. When they are addressed they are transformed. The very act of addressing changes their nature: the ‘he’ or ‘she’ or ‘it’ cease to be an impersonal object and becomes the personal ‘you’.

However, Abhinavagupta’s short commentary on ‘Listen’ is unusual. Most often the concern is with the nature of consciousness. Indeed, Kashmir Shaivism starts from the discovery of the Śivasūtra whose opening aphorism is “Consciousness is the Self” (caitanyam ātmā). So, where is love?

The Cologne Digital Sanskrit Lexicon lists 50 words that are connected with love. The exquisite poems of the Śatakatraya attributed to Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa (c. 5th cent. CE) explore the range of human affections. In his Gitagovinda, Jayadeva (12th cent. CE) celebrates the devotion (bhakti) of Rādhā the cowgirl for Kṛṣṇa the god. But these seem, at least at first sight, to be dualistic.

Silburn defines term bhakti as “the respectful love and adoration of God”. It is not found in the Śivasūtra although it is found in later texts of that tradition such as the Stavacintāmaṇi (v. 55) and the Vijñānabhairavatantra (v. 121). In the manner of the dualists yet without being dualist, Silburn notes, the Shaiva devotee adores a God whose presence is experienced and who is considered to be personal. 64 But, properly speaking, he is not the object of adoration, for Śiva is the Subject (aham) and cannot be an object. He has no other witness than himself. 65 Once the duality of ignorance has given way to non-dualism, the

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61 “Wenn sich Dein eigenes Wesen offenbart,
bist Du, bin ich, ist diese ganze Welt.
Wenn das Geschaffene wieder eingezogen wird,
bist weder Du, noch bin ich, noch ist die Welt.”


64 Silburn. La Bhakti. p. 13.

65 Silburn. La Bhakti. p. 13.
polarity of adorer-adored gives way to identification.\textsuperscript{66} Indeed, Umā, his consort, personifies the love that Śiva has for himself.\textsuperscript{67} Yet the tension continues.

“Even as I penetrate into You, the unfathomable, the ineffable, the non-dual, the self, the own-form, the all-devouring, O Lord of Umā, I wish to worship you and proclaim You always.”\textsuperscript{68}

This tension cannot be resolved by reason, Silburn proposes, but only by mystical experience, for the all includes both unity and duality.\textsuperscript{69} She notes that the process of bhakti leads to the stage where “lover, beloved and love are but one”\textsuperscript{70} which echoes the teaching of St Augustine on the Trinity, “Behold! There are three: the one that loves, the one that is loved and the love.”\textsuperscript{71}

Non-dualism may seem to reduce all diversity to undifferentiated consciousness. On the other hand, does not consciousness involve love? Consciousness does not reject, nor oppose, nor exclude. It is completely open, and fully understanding. The ‘I am’ does not say ‘I am not’. It does not disallow. It implies being able to say to another person, ‘you are my very self’. This attitude is close to the idea of love, even if it is expressed differently.

In keeping with the method of ‘contemplative theology’, is it possible that, in the light of the Christian teaching, Kashmir Shaivism might perceive more clearly that the highest reality is an I-Thou state? Furthermore, is it possible for the Kashmiri Shaivite to recognize more explicitly how consciousness implies love? And in return will Christians realize with greater clarity that authentic love is fully conscious, and that love leads to the non-dualist unity of persons? In this way loving consciousness and conscious loving will ultimately be seen as identical.

2.b. service

Christianity

The theme of service is basic to Christianity. At the Last Judgment the question will be asked simply about the service that has been done to the hungry, the prisoner, and the sick (Mt 25:31 ff). Jesus himself comes to serve and not to be served (Mk 10:45). “Pure and undefiled religion consisting in coming to the help of widows and orphans” (cf. Jn 1:27). Yet, the command to teach all nations is equally clear and emphatic: “teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:20).

\textsuperscript{66} Silburn. \textit{La Bhakti}. p. 47.
\textsuperscript{67} Silburn. \textit{La Bhakti}. p. 36.
\textsuperscript{69} Silburn. \textit{La Bhakti}. p. 49.
The tantra of Kashmir Shaivism

Does service, which is so essential to Christianity, have any counterpart in Kashmir Shaivism? The Bhagavad Gita teaches: “Let the wise man work unselfishly for the good of all the world.” The Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣat tells the story of the three groups, gods, demons and human beings. They came to Prajāpati, chief of the gods, who spoke one syllable to them: ‘da’, which they understood differently. The gods understood it to mean ‘dama’ (self-control); the demons interpreted it to mean ‘dayā’ (mercy, compassion). The humans understood it as ‘dāna’ (giving, sharing). In other words, all three aspects complement each other: Without self-control there cannot be compassion and without sharing a truly human world cannot be built. The word dāna is found in the Rig Veda: “Bounteous is he who gives unto the beggar who comes to him in want of food and feeble.” According to the Hitopadeśa, a collection of fables dated to the 14th century or earlier, ‘dayā’ is not dependent on the quality of the recipient: “The good show mercy (dayā) even unto worthless beings. Good people are compassionate even to beings that have no value.”

There were also charitable institutions.

“…..chatrams, the Indian institutions of hospitality, where bells were rung at midnight to invite the seeker to come and receive his food, where orphaned children were provided shelter, food, education, and care till they were able to face the world.”

However, in Kashmir Shaivism service (sevā) is done above all by worshipping the deity and waiting on the teacher, fetching sticks and drawing water, so to speak. The teacher in turn has compassion on his student and teaches him the path that leads to knowledge. This is considered the greater service. Tantric spirituality does not seek to change the social order.

It is especially in the modern forms of Hinduism that large-scale organized charity can be found, such as with the followers of Swaminarayan and of Sri Satya Sai Baba, with the Ramakrishna Mission, with the Chinmaya Mission, and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) who actively provide for educational and medical needs.

The question can be asked whether, in the light of Christian service, a closer connection can be made between divine worship and public responsibility. If

75 Max Müller. The First Book of the Hitopadeśa. London: Longmans, Green, Longmans, Robert & Green, 1864. Bk 1, v. 60a, p. 42.
77 Padoux. Comprendre le Tantrisme. p. 90.
reality is a manifestation of the deity, does it not make sense to wash the poor, to feed and clothe them, as one does for the image of the god in ritual?

**Concluding remark:**  
**A Christian Tantra, a Tantric Christianity?**

Comparative theology is not competitive theology. There is no attempt to prevail but only to serve. This article has shown how the teachings both of Kashmir Shaivism and of Christianity enable each other to be more fully experienced is no one corpus of doctrine. Rather, tantra is to be seen as a flow, an indefinable trajectory with a certain ‘family resemblance’. Can there be a Christian tantra in the way that there are a many types of Hindu tantra and many schools of Buddhist tantra?

This article has sought to show that Christianity has many aspects that reflect the tantra of Kashmir Shaivism, especially in its Kula tradition. It has proposed that Christianity is essentially non-dual; that it posits the Word as the centre of all; that the power of the mantra has been placed in human hands; that the divinized human has the freedom to create a new heavens and a new earth; that the Christian is not constrained by Law or the divisive concepts of pure and impure but freely enters into them out of love; that Christians can bring about the reconciliation of opposites, and so attain the highest bliss. There are many other tantric themes that could have been discussed but these suffice to show that it is possible to speak of a ‘Christian tantra’.

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