

Studying Rāmānuja's Manual of Daily Worship



2019 International Conference on Comparative Theology

Program content

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Australian Catholic University
Melbourne Campus



**Identities Transformed or Transgressed?
Exploring New Frontiers in
Comparative Theology and Interreligious Learning**

The Importance of This Conference

1. The move from external comparisons to integrative, transformative comparisons
 - a. Real learning, and thus the possibility of transgression as well
2. Exciting range of speakers
 - a. From here in Australia
 - b. From around Asia
 - c. From Europe and the United States
3. The impressive array of plenary speakers
4. And the amazing array of choices for the simultaneous sessions
5. The conference signals and celebrates ACU's situatedness as a Catholic, International, Australian and Australasian University – facing directly up to and into the world of pluralism



The questions we all will be engaging (in some way or another)

1. What Am I Studying from Outside My Own Tradition?
2. How Is This Study Comparative?
3. Is This Study Transformative?
4. Is This Study Transgressive?

1. What Am I Studying from Outside My Own Tradition?

The Manual of Daily Worship (*Nityagrantham*) of Rāmānuja (1017-1137) as a Text for Study

1. Background:

- a. Rāmānuja (1017-1137) and his theistic Śrīvaiṣṇava Hindu Vedānta: the worship of a supreme deity, Narayana, within a richly populated religious universe



Studying Rāmānuja's Manual of Daily Worship

At Rāmānuja's 1000th Birth Anniversary:



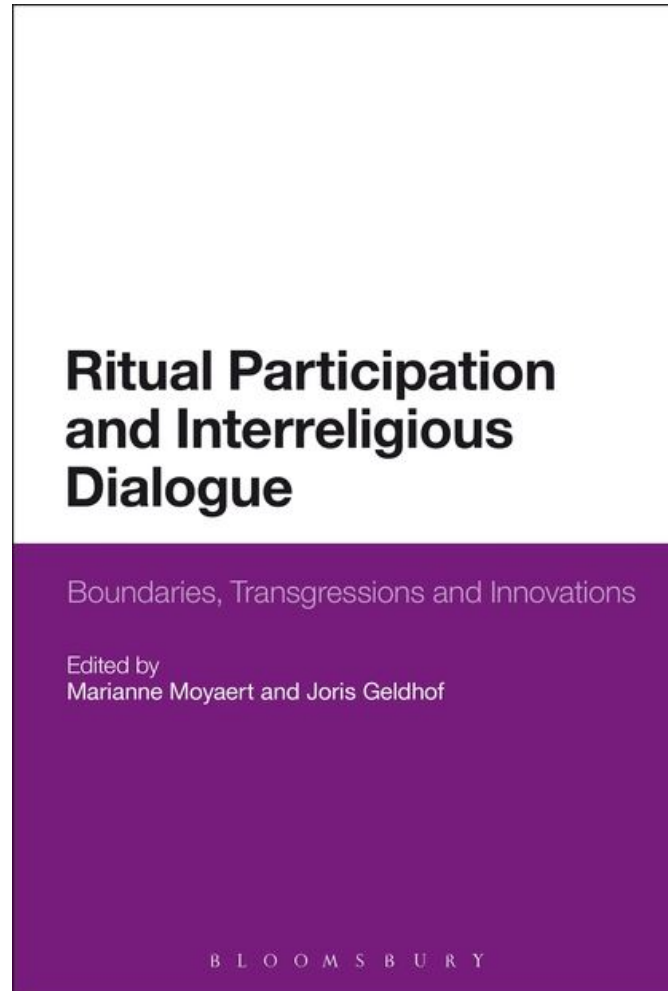
2. His canon of nine works, mostly commentarial (a-e) and devotional (f-i)

- Vedārthasaṃgraha (Summary of the Meaning of the Scriptures)
- Śrībhāṣya (The Auspicious Commentary)
- Gītābhāṣya (The Commentary on the Gītā)
- Vedāntadīpa (The Light on Vedānta)
- Vedāntasāra (The Essence of Vedānta)

- ⇒ Śaraṇāgatigadya (The Prayer for Taking Refuge)
- ⇒ Śrīraṅgagadya (The Prayer of Refuge at Śrīraṅgam)
- ⇒ Śrīvaikuṇṭhagadya (The Prayer of Refuge in Heaven)
- ⇒ Nityagrantham (The Manual of Daily Worship)

3. Respecting the ritual turn...

4. That is, doing the work to which Marianne Moyaert has called us!





Outline

Rāmānuja's Stated Purpose for the *Manual*:

“I will now explain the performance of the adoration of the Lord by the person single-mindedly focused on the Highest.”

Part One:

Purification as a Physical and Spiritual Practice

De-creation and Re-creation of Self

Recollection and Reaffirmation of Act of Taking Refuge



**The prayer from the *Prose Prayer of Taking Refuge*
(*Śaraṇāgatigadyam*) to be repeated near the beginning of
worship each day:**

Your proper form is opposite to all that is to be avoided and focused solely on the auspicious, different from all beings other than Yourself, solely intelligence and bliss without limit, Your divine form is a single form appropriate and pleasing to yourself, a treasury of unimaginable, divine, wonderful, permanent, flawless, unsurpassed qualities – beginning with splendor, beauty, fragrance, tenderness, handsome demeanor, and youth, Yours is a great ocean, host of innumerable auspicious qualities, all by nature yours, flawless and superabundant – beginning with intelligence, strength, lordship, valor, power, radiance, easy accessibility, tenderness, gentleness, straightforwardness, good-heartedness, sameness, compassion, sweetness, profoundness, generosity, adroitness, firmness, fortitude, heroic valor, boldness, all desires fulfilled, all intentions realized, the capability to carry out all resolves, helpfulness and gratitude...You are the wishing tree for those in want, the friend of those in distress:

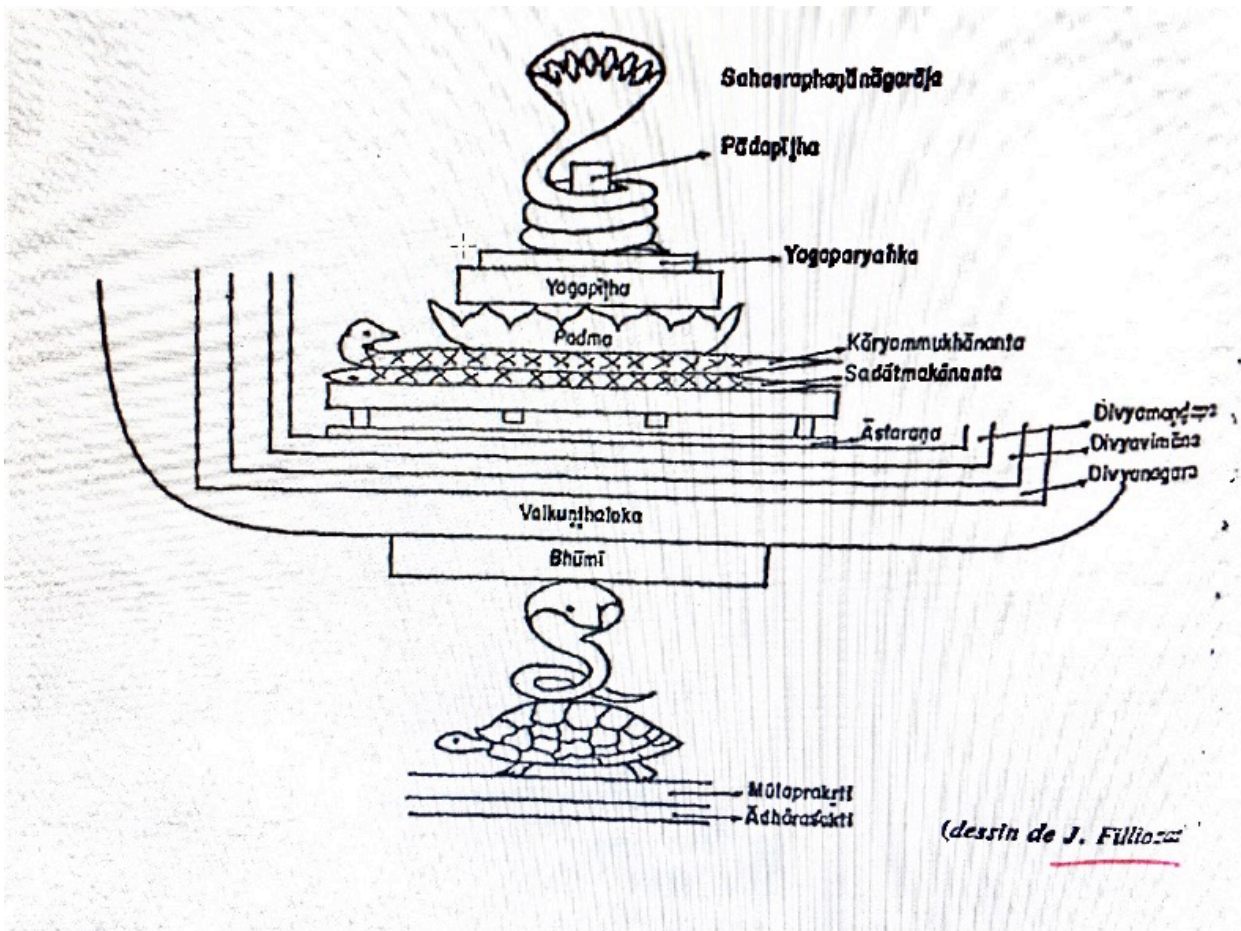
You are Nārāyaṇa with Śrī, You are the refuge of those without refuge – and I, who have no other refuge, surrender at Your lotus feet.

Part Two:

Yāga: Cosmic Ascent to the Lord's Heaven, and Return to the Place of Daily Worship

The Yāga:

A Traversal of the Devotional Cosmos, from Elemental Foundations Up to the Throne of God



... and back down to the place of worship.

Part Three:

Pūjā: Intimate Worship of the Lord, Here and How (Materially, or in the Imagination)

For example,

After reverencing all the attendants of the Lord, beginning with the Foundation Power and ending with the Seats, honoring each with scents, flowers, incense, and lights;

After preparing the lotus-seats in their respective places for all the entourage, placing the lotuses as seats for Ananta, Garuḍa, and Viṣvaksena, strewing flowers and grains everywhere,

After worshipping these gurus on the northwest sides of the yoga-seat with scents, flowers, incense, and lights, he prostrates himself with the words, "*om, obeisance to my gurus;*"

With their permission, let him begin the Lord's sacrifice.

Let him meditate:

“The Lord, Nārāyaṇa, is seated on the coils of the visualized serpent, His eyes elongated and pure like petals of the lotus, adorned with all His adornments, the crowns, bracelets, necklace of pearls, His right leg bent, His left leg forward, His right arm forward and placed on His knee, His left arm placed on the coils of the serpent, holding the conch and wheel by His two upper arms, He who is the cause for the creation, preservation and destruction of all, dark in appearance, shining with the kaustubha gem, His body comprised of the five powers, the supreme pure being that is unprecedented and inconceivable, shining, awake, tall, manifest.”

Having thus meditated on Him with the five upaniṣad mantras, having prayed again with the root mantra “*Look favorably on my worship,*” with the root mantra let him fall prostrate like a stick; having risen, having offered welcome, let him ask Him to be present up to the completion of the worship.

Part Four:

Conclusion, with a Repetition of the Act of Surrender

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Then, at the End of the Worship, a Renewed Taking of Refuge:

After finishing that worship, he offers obeisance to the Lord with an eight-limbed obeisance. Let him then take refuge.

“With mind, understanding, and ego, he places on the ground like a tortoise his four limbs and his head as a fifth. Always with a circumambulation in that form, he pays reverence with his eight limbs. He pays respect with his eight limbs. He sits before the Lord.” Thus is the eightfold obeisance stated.



Theological Expansions

1. The Manual as a Key to Rāmānuja's other writings – finding echoes in all the great texts,
2. Reading his commentarial works now after, in light of, the devotional:

- Śaraṇāgatigadya (The Prayer for Taking Refuge)
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- Nityagrantham (The Manual of Daily Worship)
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3. Encountering a “whole theologian”



The Fruits of This Study within Hindu Studies

5. Toward a richer religious reading of a religious intellectual
 - a. Ideas, words, arguments, seen in light of their purpose
6. Understanding a Hindu Ritual (while not excluding the possibility of observing it too) – between text and practice; text for the sake of practice
7. An opportunity to understand a text of practice in relation to a Hindu theologian's overall theology
8. Discovering the practical, communal point underlying a theologian's intellectual works
9. Having to read such a figure in a similarly intellectual and spiritual manner



2. How is the Project Comparative?

10. Studying a Thinker in Another Tradition as a Whole Person

11. Theological Comparison: The Study of the Eucharist in the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas

The sacrament itself (III, Question 73).

The matter of this sacrament: its species (III, Question 74),

the transubstantiation (III, Question 75),

the real presence (III, Question 76)

the accidents (III, Question 77) of bread and wine.

The form (III, Question 78) of this sacrament.

The effects (III, Question 79) of this sacrament.

The recipient in general (III, Question 80)

The recipient at its institution (III, Question 81).

The minister (III, Question 82) of this sacrament.

The rite (III, Question 83) of this sacrament.

From this theology back to the piety and practice

Devotional Comparison

10. Reading Aquinas' Hymns and Prayers
11. His theological hymns for Corpus Christ:
 - i. *Lauda Sion* (Praise, Sion...),
 - ii. *Pange Lingua* (Sing, my tongue...)
 - iii. (including) *Tantum Ergo* (Hence So Great a Sacrament...)

b. Prayer at the end of Mass

Lord, Father all-powerful, and ever-living God, I thank Thee, for even though I am a sinner, Thy unprofitable servant, not because of my worth, but in the kindness of Thy mercy, Thou hast fed me with the precious Body and Blood of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ... May it be a helmet of faith and a shield of good will. May it purify me from evil ways and put an end to my evil passions. May it bring me charity and patience, humility and obedience, and growth in power to do good...

And I pray that Thou will lead me, a sinner to the banquet where Thou with Thy Son and Holy Spirit, art true and perfect light, total fulfillment, everlasting joy, gladness without end, and perfect happiness to Thy saints. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

c. Also, his prayer used in the Office for Corpus Christi:

...May it be my strong defense against all my enemies, visible and invisible, and the perfect calming of all my evil impulses, bodily and spiritual. May it unite me more closely to You, the one true God, and lead me safely through death to everlasting happiness with You...

12. Rāmānuja and Aquinas as “meant for one another” as theological, spiritual, and ritually committed persons

3. Is This Study Transformative?

13. Returning to Christian piety and ritual, with a transformed awareness
 - a. Re-connecting Catholic practice, piety, and theology
 - b. The Eucharist, after and in light of the Manual of Daily Worship
 - c. The regular experience of the Eucharist/Mass
 - d. As committed to daily prayer, and as a priest at Mass

14. For example: John Dupuche's work on Tantra and the Eucharist"

"Tantric aspects of the Mass', in Enlightenment and Tantra, Hindus and Christians in Dialogue (Rome, 2018)

The Eucharist plunges Christians into the divine mystery, and no amount of reflection can exhaust its meaning. This paper is only an example of how, by the process of comparative theology, one ritual can throw light on another. Indeed, in the light of the Kula ritual the Eucharist can be appreciated more fully as a manifestation of the glory and power of the Spirit... To enter into the church and to take part in the Eucharist is to enter into the paradox of Calvary, the paradox of beauty and horror, joy and sadness, life and death, the paradox that leads beyond mind to the most profound silence and peace, and to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

By virtue of their baptism into Christ, which happens through the inspiring force of the Spirit, the participants are divinized, with Christ they transcend ritual purity; with him they seek to enter into impurity so as to take away the sin of the world and to manifest the extent of divine love, which is manifested supremely in the gift of the Spirit...

4. Is This Study Transgressive?

15. Transformation, but perhaps also Transgression...
 - a. Minimally, worship becomes a point of connection, not separation:
 - i. Beyond the category of true vs. false worship
 - ii. Beyond charges of idolatry
 - iii. Beyond using the Eucharist to exclude the religious other
 - b. Close-up, even intimate, look into another tradition's worship involves the scholar, beyond the role of spectator

16. Transgressions perceived in different ways:
 - a. For the individual, the possibility of multiple participations
 - b. For the home community, having such members
 - c. For the other community, having such visitors

During These Next Two Days:

17. Comparative theology as an evolving, progressive practice
18. Its potential manifest today and tomorrow in the exciting papers we will be hearing

Let us proceed!