

A Hindu reads the Bible

Hindu muses Biblically

Reading the Gospel of Glory

□ [MARCH 23, 2014](#) □ [SUBHASIS CHATTOPADHYAY](#) □ [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God (<http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5217>)...

In principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum...[i]

Reading prayerfully is different from reading structurally[[ii](#)]. Therefore we need not bother here with questions about what is meant by “Word” or “God”. Rather we will here try to understand the significance of this opening to the Gospel of St. John. We will ask: how does this sentence shape my life as an Indian Hindu who sees in Christianity a possibility for dialogue (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inculturation>), and personal enrichment. How does this sentence help in our personal retreat(s)?

Within the Hindu tradition[[iii](#)], there is used the primal symbol ॐ (Om or Aum). Om might stand for the Godhead without attributes (*nirguna* Brahman). This *nirguna* Brahman becomes *saguna* (with attributes) Brahman — the *Word*. This is the *Incarnation event* found in the Gospels; more tangibly in the synoptic Gospels.

This sentence draws out our very selves to contemplate the reasons for which this *nirguna* Brahman seeks to become *saguna*. Why does the impersonal become personal? What propels the Godhead to seek individuation and actualisation within temporality? And why does John differentiate between the *Word* and *God*?

And when was the beginning? What was before the beginning? If there was (is) a beginning, then there must be an end. What is this end?

1. The impersonal becomes personal; *has* to become personal for only one reason — unconditional love. The Atman/the Brahman/the Godhead seeks and finds love solely in the human person. Thus ॐ incarnates as the *Word*.
2. We are finite beings; it is not possible for us to behold the Godhead. Our eyes will burn out seeing the face of God. The infinite has to become finite if we as a community of believers have to respond to God’s love.[[iv](#)]
3. John may be separating the *Word* from/and *God* since the *Word* is *naamrupa*[[v](#)], of the Brahman-rupa. God as a name will mean nothing to most of us; whereas God as an individual will elicit responses of

love from us. This line inaugurates the theology of the human person. In the Divine economy God is not God if we humans do not love God freely. This is the mystery of God's Kingdom.

4. The beginning was when that One decided to become many[vi]. The Self multiplied.
5. Before the beginning was only the One who felt lonely; felt the pangs of Love.
6. There will be an *end* when all humanity, each and every one of us, will respond to this Love.

The first line of the Gospel of John calls out to us to/with Love. Let us meditate on the implications of this line — God is Love. And will do anything for us at the prompting of this unconditional Love. God is *only* Love. Time, as we know it, begins in/with God's love. The end will be when we turn freely to God in love.

One other consideration: even God is not immune to Love. Before God, it seems there was Love. May be, it is the God of our own making who came after Love.

[i] Pinkerton II, David E. "In Principio." Texts and Translations.

http://www.arvopart.org/composition_text.php?id=49 (http://www.arvopart.org/composition_text.php?id=49) (accessed March 23, 2014).

[ii] Structuralist readings of this sentence are to be found in

René Kieffer, "John," ed. John Barton and John Muddiman, in *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 188-89.

[iii] There is a consensus among structuralists about Hinduism being an aggregate of animistic and tribal beliefs. At most, Hinduism is a geographical phenomenon. This is like saying that Catholicism is a Roman product or the Episcopalians are English rebels. For a discussion of the construction of Hinduism as a pejorative term devoid of *dharma* see

Sharada Sugirtharajah, introduction, in *Imagining Hinduism: A Postcolonial Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2003), ix-xii.

Here I use the term Hinduism and the Hindus to denote a specific *faith community* who consider *Vedanta* and the *Tantras* to be the revealed truth received over millennia from Brahman. Those normative Hindus who question the existence of God or do not believe in the truth of the *Upanishads* are not to be called Hindus. There may be normative Christians who do not believe that Christ rose up after dying; they are simply not Christians. Those systems of Indian thought which do not agree with the existence of God are not Hindu systems of thought. There are normative Christians who consider the existence of God as a matter of debate; should they be called Christian philosophers or philosophers of religion?

[iv] See Chapter Eleven of the *Song of the Lord*; the *Bhagavad Gita*, for understanding the truth of God's nature. It is imperative that we *see* God in *the here and the now* darkly. For an easily accessible version of the *Bhagavad Gita* refer to

"Viśvarūpa Darśana Yoga." *Bhagavad-Gita*: Chapter 11. Accessed March 23, 2014. <http://www.bhagavad-gita.org/Gita/chapter-11.html> (<http://www.bhagavad-gita.org/Gita/chapter-11.html>).

[v] This is akin to a patina which hides the truth. The *naamrupa* or the name-form hides the *Brahmarupa* or the true form of the Godhead. Within the Hindu system, an idol is the *naamrupa* and what the idol indicates is the *Brahmarupa*. Hindu seers and mystics related the God-experience to what is readily accessible to the faith-community; thus we have a multiplicity of the representational forms of the Godhead.

[vi] “Ekam sat viprä bahudhä vadanti” (*Rig Veda* 1:164: 46). Cited in

Sudhir Anand, *Who Is God?* (Los Angeles, CA: ASK Publications, 2008), 91.

▣ BIBLE, CHRISTIANITY

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