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DISTINCTION WITHOUT SEPARATION:

CHALLENGING CONTEMPORARY YOGA-CHRISTIAN *PRAXIS* DIALOGUE THROUGH A COMPARISON OF STRIVING AND PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE *YOGA-SŪTRA* AND THE *LIFE OF MOSES*

by

SCOTT W. HODGMAN

Under the direction of Kathryn McClymond

ABSTRACT

In contemporary society, distinct traditions are bleeding into one another, blurring traditional lines of inquiry and historically significant boundaries. This phenomenon frames this project and creates the context for the Yoga-Christian *praxis* dialogue this study constructively critiques. Unfortunately, this dialogue exhibits an Eliadean concern for essentialism and universality. I challenge this trend by juxtaposing two distinct texts, Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtra* and Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*. These texts point to the similar idea that without striving and personal transformation neither the yogic practitioner nor practicing Christian logically subsists. More importantly, however, from this point of correspondence I constructively critique the Yoga-Christian *praxis* dialogue by concretely engaging these texts and paying particular attention to the differences inherent in them. My comparison, then, suggests how attention to particularity points to a more authentic dialogue: what I wish to call a dialogue of distinction without separation.

INDEX WORDS: Yoga, Christian spirituality, Patañjali, Gregory of Nyssa, Yoga-Sūtra, Life of Moses, personal transformation, praxis, comparative study, Hindu-Christian dialogue, Early Church Fathers, patristic

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by

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Georgia State University

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There are many people whose help contributed to this project's completion. Two in particular bear noting. Because this project is focused on texts, I wish to express my deepest appreciation to those individuals who opened my eyes to the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Life of Moses*. First and foremost I would like to thank Father Tom Francis, O.C.S.O. with whom I enjoyed numerous conversations on Yoga and Christianity. Father Tom was responsible for directing my attention to the *Life of Moses* after I expressed interest in Christian processes of purification and illumination. Through him the *Life of Moses* has not only entered my vocabulary, but become part of my work as a scholar. Without his encouragement over the years this project would never have seen the light of day. It was during a series of lectures given in Chicago that Gary Kraftsow first introduced me to the *Yoga-Sūtra*. Our shared interest in Yoga and religion opened avenues of inquiry that, otherwise, may not have been traveled down. The conversations that flourished because of our shared interest brought to light Patañjali's thought in the form of process models. That paved the way for this project while his guidance in reading the text brought to light nuances without which this project would be the poorer.

Within my department at Georgia State University three individuals stand out whose support and assistance were instrumental to this project. I would like to acknowledge Doctor Timothy Renick who first encountered my ideas with enthusiasm and whose encouragement was instrumental to entering the field of Religious Studies. Also, I would like to thank Doctor Christopher White and Doctor Kathryn McClymond. A year spent as Doctor White's research assistant insured I did not lose sight of my inspiration, and it is Doctor McClymond whose direction insured that selfsame inspiration did not overwhelm my responsibility as a scholar. Last, though not in the least, I would

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Scope and Purpose of this Study

In contemporary society, distinct traditions are bleeding into one another, blurring traditional lines of inquiry and historically significant contextual boundaries. For instance, to a modern Christian audience Gregory of Nyssa might be an unknown figure from a distant past whose world and thought may seem irrelevant. That same audience might be well aware, however, of Yoga even though this practice is outside the historical boundaries of the Christian tradition. This socio-cultural phenomenon frames this project and creates the context for the Yoga-Christian *praxis* dialogue this study constructively critiques. This dialogue is a growing discourse due to recent studies focusing on practical methods for Christian appropriation of Yoga. However, these studies primarily focus on asserting a practical and dialogical compatibility between Yoga and Christian religious *praxis*.[1] My study, on the other hand, focuses on differences as well as similarities.

Take Thomas Ryan's *Prayer of Heart and Body* (1995). Ryan depicts various yogic practices and metaphysical concepts as they might be appropriated by practicing Christians. In the process, however, he fails to contextualize Yoga, suggesting that a multiplicity of historically separate schools is a "universal science."[2] This unified trans-traditional Yoga is then easily harmonized with Christian thought, resulting in a practical if superficial manual for the Christian. Another example is Justin O'Brien's *A Meeting of*

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[1] The Yoga-Christian *praxis* dialogue grows out of the unique practical and dialogical concerns of Western appropriation of Asian spiritual forms. It inhabits a different trajectory from comparative work such as Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and The Profane*. Nonetheless, the Yoga-Christian *praxis* dialogue exhibits an Elidean concern for essentialism and universality. This stands in stark contrast to other comparative discourses that have matured because of post-colonial and post-modern critiques.

[2] Thomas Ryan, *Prayer of Heart and Body: Meditation and Yoga in Christian Practices* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 129.

Mystic Paths (1996). O'Brien targets a Western audience and asserts that Yoga can help recover the spiritual dimension lost by Christianity.[3] In doing this, O'Brien privileges thematic compatibility over the historical or contextual concerns that inevitably arise in cross-cultural comparisons. As a result, his study feels like it is recovering a supra-historical wisdom common to both Christianity and Yoga.

This is not to say that some scholarship is not engaging the topic critically or responsibly. Thomas Matus' *Yoga and the Jesus Prayer Tradition* (1984) critically examines Eastern Orthodox *hesychasm* in a comparative discourse with tantric yoga. Matus draws on the thought of Symeon the New Theologian and that of Abhinavagupta, creating a comparison based on mystical experience. Because of the critical method Matus introduces, he responsibly navigates his way through the problematic field of cross-cultural studies.[4] Despite this, few if any studies focus critically on the texts that help circumscribe these traditions.[5] In reality, these comparisons are seldom delimited by the concrete boundaries texts provide.

This project positions itself into this gap of comparative textual studies. It juxtaposes two distinct texts: Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtra* from India's yogic literary tradition and Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* from the patristic literature of the Greek Fathers. First, this thesis argues that the two texts suggest that striving and personal transformation identify a yogic practitioner and a practicing Christian. Second, in the

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[3] Justin O'Brien, *A Meeting of Mystic Paths: Christianity and Yoga* (St. Paul: YES, 1996), xii.

[4] Here I refer the reader to Matus' introductory sections, "The Christian Meaning of Yoga" and "The Problem of the Comparative Method." Thomas Matus, *Yoga and the Jesus Prayer Tradition* (Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1984), 8-17.

[5] See for example Swami Sri Yukteswar's essay, *Kaivalya-darsanam*, written in Serampore, West Bengal, in 1984 and later published in Los Angeles by the Self-Realization Fellowship (1972). *Kaivalya-darsanam* is one of the earliest examples in the Yoga-Christian encounter. In it Sri Yukteswar attempted to mediate the traditional language of Yoga and the language of the Bible. He accomplished this through frequent use of Biblical passages and Christian symbols to highlight the teachings presented in his *Kaivalya-darsanam*. In tracing the comparative discourse on Yoga and Christian *praxis*, this essay is one of the earliest attempts at dialogue. Of further interest is Brahmachari Michael Amaldas, *Yoga and Contemplation* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1982); Philip St. Romain, *Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991); and Bruno Barnhart and Joseph Wong, eds., *Purity of Heart and Contemplation: A Monastic Dialogue Between Christian and Asian Traditions* (New York: Continuum, 2001).

particular instances provided by these texts, the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Life of Moses* point to the similar idea that without striving and personal transformation neither the yogic practitioner nor practicing Christian subsists.[6] Using this correspondence, then, as a vehicle for critiquing the current dialogue, this thesis moves into the more important work of attending to particularities in a comparative discourse. We know this dialogue is dominated by comparative studies where similitude and compatibility are the main features. Also, this harmonization is accompanied by a lack of textual emphasis. Putting aside for the moment questions of essential compatibility or incompatibility, this study challenges this imbalance by its concrete engagement of texts. Therefore, highlighting key differences between the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Life of Moses* becomes a central feature of this project. In so doing, this study shows that differences are just as meaningful to the Yoga-Christian *praxis* dialogue as are similarities.

It is my intention, then, to present a particular case that responsibly engages the comparative study of religion and contributes meaningfully to the growing discourse regarding Yoga and Christian *praxis*. This project suggests how attention to particularity while engaging in a comparative discourse points to a more authentic dialogue; what I would like to call a *dialogue of distinction without separation*. The suggested shift in the dialogue maintains the distinctiveness of Yoga and Christian *praxis* through attention to particularity. At the same time, this shift maintains the dialogical relationship between these traditions; in so doing, it refuses to separate them into isolated conversations or area specific studies. This dialogue of distinction without separation offers an alternative for framing these traditions in a comparative discourse.

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[6] The use of *subsists* in this instance is logical – not metaphysical. Subsists, in the context of this thesis, is to be logically conceivable as the subject of a true statement. Applied to the *yogin*, striving and personal transformation are necessary if the attributive adjective "yogic" has logical meaning for the subject "practitioner." Applied to the Christian, striving and personal transformation are necessary if the predicate adjective "practicing" has logical meaning for the subject "Christian." Without striving and personal transformation "yogic practitioner" and "practicing Christian" are not logically true statements.

Given the task at hand, why did I select the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Life of Moses*? The *Yoga-Sūtra*'s contribution to yogic literature on personal transformation is significant. Systematically speaking, many scholars consider Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtra* the source text for Yoga. In *The Integrity of Yoga Darśana*, Ian Whicher remarks:

> In his own voice, Patañjali presented major yogic themes, concepts, and terms – largely consistent throughout the text – in a clear and convincing manner, whereby Yoga became recognized as one of the leading schools or classical philosophical systems of India....What is clear, however, is that Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtra* has superseded all earlier *sūtra* works within the Yoga tradition and that this is probably due to the overall comprehensive and systematic nature of Patañjali's presentation of Yoga.[7]

Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtra* is enormously influential in the yogic literary tradition. Subsequent systems of Yoga not only reference its theory and practice, but appeal to it as part of a textual tradition. For example the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, an influential yogic text from India's medieval period, claims its own system of *hatha* yoga "shines forth as a stairway for those who wish to ascend to the highest state of raja yoga [Patañjala Yoga].[8] Thus, it clearly associates its system with Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtra* to further establish its place within the yogic tradition. Finally, recent studies have labeled the *Yoga-Sūtra* an unacceptable source for comparison with Christianity, and this project will suggest otherwise.[9] What I hope to show by the end of this project is a fruitful comparison engaging the *Yoga-Sūtra* with the *Life of Moses*, a text clearly located within orthodox Christian thought.

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[7] Ian Whicher, *The Integrity of Yoga Darśana: A Reconsideration of Classical Yoga* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 47.

[8] Swami Muktibodhananda, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (Munger: Bihar School of Yoga, 1985; reprint, Munger: Bihar School of Yoga, 1998), 23. Interpolation mine.

[9] Matus comments in *Yoga and the Jesus Prayer Tradition*, "Of all the historical forms of yoga, that employed in Tantrism seems to imply a view of human existence which is closer to the orthodox Christian view than that of any other yogic school. Tantric writers often have a much more integral understanding of human nature and destiny than does, for example, Patañjali of the *Yoga-Sūtras*" (11-12). His comment would situate the *Yoga-Sūtra* at a greater distance from Christian thought than is warranted. That the *Yoga-Sūtra* understands human destiny differently than does orthodox Christianity I would agree with. This is an issue of difference in doctrinal beliefs. But, to exclude the text from any comparison with Christianity is exaggerating this doctrinal difference, eliminating comparisons along other lines of inquiry.

The *Life of Moses* by Gregory of Nyssa is significant for its contributions to Christian literature on the ascetic and mystical life. With recent scholarship, Gregory has been (re)discovered "as an ascetical and mystical writer of the highest importance" with the *Life of Moses* among his crowning achievements.[10] This celebrated treatise on the aim and end of Christian life "marks the end as well as the high point of Gregory's reworking of the Platonic tradition,"[11] and that is a significant moment in the development of Christian spirituality. Gregory is often considered to be the father of apophatic theology, and his treatment of the divine darkness in the *Life of Moses* becomes a defining feature of later Christian spirituality.[12] This theme is found in Pseudo-Dionysius (late 5th c. or early 6th c.), Maximus the Confessor (580-662), and Gregory Palamas (1296-1359). As Anthony Meredith rightly notes, "It is to Gregory, above all, that Lossky, in *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (page 33) attributes the apophatic basis of all true theology."[13] As one of the leading theologians in Eastern Orthodoxy, Vladimir Lossky's *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* occupies a place of fundamental importance in church catechism. The twentieth-century theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar captures the importance of Gregory's thought when he notes:

> Only a very small number of initiates have read and are aware of Gregory of Nyssa….Who would suspect that under the unprepossessing exterior we are to find the most profound Greek philosopher of the Christian era, a mystic and incomparable poet besides? Yet Saint Maximus even designated him the Universal Doctor, and the Second Council of Nicaea confirmed him in his title Father of Fathers. Scotus Erigena, subtle expert on Greek thought that he was, cites him as frequently as he does Saint Augustine. Less brilliant and prolific than his great master Origen, less cultivated than his friend Gregory Nazianzen, less practical than his brother Basil, he nonetheless outstrips them all in the profundity of his thought, for he knew better than anyone how to

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[10] Hilda C. Graef, introduction to *The Lord's Prayer and the Beatitudes*, by St. Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1954), 6.
[11] Anthony Meredith, *The Cappadocians* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 60.
[12] *Ibid.*, 90.
[13] Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 139.

> transpose ideas inwardly from the spiritual heritage of Greece into a Christian mode.[14]

The *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Life of Moses* are significant for their contributions to spiritual *praxis* in Hinduism and Christianity respectively. These texts occupy pivotal moments of systemization within their tradition's development. This, then, makes them excellent choices for the type of comparison called for by this project.

2. Methodological Considerations

The comparative textual process is a complex dialogical relationship between the scholar's discourse and the historical discourses originally inhabited by texts. In relation to this dialogical process, Gavin Flood notes:

> The reference points of the reader will inevitably be different from that of the text, which, inevitably, will be measured against those [the reader's] references points. While it is important to establish texts in the narrative context of their occurrence, reading a text from another discourse entails its decontextualising from that place and its recontextualising in the new place of my discourse.[15]

Clearly, the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Life of Moses* contain primary meanings unique to their historical context; on the other hand, our reading provides an interpretive meaning localized to this study. This reading entails re-contextualizing these texts in a discourse with new referents, principally those of striving and personal transformation. These categories do not exist in the plain sense of either text; still, a careful interpretive reading brings them to the surface. Therefore, the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Life of Moses*' re-contextualization into this study must consider Flood's observation, and address the question of how this is accomplished responsibly. If this is not addressed responsibly,

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[14] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 15.
[15] Gavin Flood, *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory, and Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 22.

this study's contribution to a larger comparative study of religion is questionable. Let us consequently consider our approach.

Challenges to comparative religious studies have been instrumental in creating new and innovative approaches to the comparative enterprise. Arising from these challenges, Jonathan Herman's approach to "new comparativism" and Francis X. Clooney's "comparative theology" method are of particular interest here. Herman puts forward the opinion that comparative work can prevail, despite the challenges, if the comparativist works "within the prevailing...concern for context, but to do so with a renewed methodological self-consciousness and receptivity to the types of resonances that may indicate connections buried beneath the surface."[16] More specifically, Herman outlines an approach that justifies the comparative project without circumventing the demands of contextual study[17] or the incumbent responsibilities of the comparativist. Herman notes:

> When one wishes to develop a single discourse which integrates two or more distinct phenomena, it is indeed necessary that there be historical or conceptual basis for comparison, but it is most likely incumbent upon the researcher to locate or to construct the appropriate context, to determine the methodologies salient to the context, and to draw conclusions that do not exceed the scope of the context or the methods.[18]

Herman's approach is captured in four important questions the comparativist should respond to in proposing a comparative project: (i) What is the *purpose* of the comparison? (ii) What is its *justification*? (iii) What are the *contexts* inherent to the project? (iv) What *methods* will be employed? The answers to these questions not only justify the comparative work but suggest guidelines for engaging in his approach to "new comparativism." Both the *purpose* and the *justification* of this study are addressed in the beginning of this section. *Context* is addressed in the individual sections on the *Yoga-*

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[16] Jonathan R. Herman, "The Contextual Illusion: Comparative Mysticism and Postmodernism" *A Magic Still Dwells*, eds. Kimberly C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 98.
[17] *Ibid.*, 96.
[18] *Ibid.*, 98.

Sūtra and the *Life of Moses* respectively. For now, we turn to the question of *method* and Francis X. Clooney's *Theology After Vedanta*.

In *Theology After Vedanta* Clooney observes, "comparison forges a link which was not previously there, a link which (usually) cannot be justified on the basis of historical connections or of similarities so striking that they compel comparison."[19] Because of this, method becomes all the more important in a comparative project. For this reason, I adopt the proven method of textual coordination and comparative reading outlined in *Theology After Vedanta*. The fruit of such an effort is a comparative analysis that stands outside either text. Stressing the extra-textual nature of the comparison, this project does not intend the analysis to inform the texts as they stand within their historical traditions. On the contrary, it speaks meaningfully to the cross-cultural context more properly found in modern times. The following remark illuminates this method:

> It is possible to think of the use together of Christian and Advaita theological texts as an instance of coordination, aimed at a more skilled rereading of them, one which takes into account comparable terms and themes and parallel modes of operation – constituted as such in all the complex and ambiguous ways suggested above – while yet not reducing the two texts to a single text, or subordinating both to a perspective which would undercut the textuality of both. Like coordination, this reflective juxtaposition would be a largely practical experiment. Nor would it require complement by a completed theoretical position or extratextual knowledge about the truth or status of the compared texts. The knowledge that is gained would remain posttextual, emerging from the practice of comparing familiar texts without the encumbering desire, or ability, to reduce them to a single body of information.[20]

Clooney's theological emphasis is worth noting here. This entails him rereading the source texts and their truth claims in light of the theology that informs his comparative analysis. While this project seeks a similar reading and comparative analysis, it does so without the additional rereading and theological reflection exhibited in Clooney's work. Any type of theological reflection on the *Yoga-Sūtra* or the *Life of Moses* would

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[19] Francis X. Clooney, *Theology After Vedanta* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 154.
[20] *Ibid.*, 168-169.

necessitate a judgment about the truth claims each text presupposes, and that would be well outside this project's boundaries.

Clooney's method complements Herman's approach to comparative work. Using this method, comparative work is the patient practice of carefully reading back and forth between coordinated texts. In this process one is reading for nuances. This careful reading inevitably leads to the observation of similarities and differences. However, the act of comparison should not be reduced to "arranging similarities and differences,"[21] as the practice of comparison "is always richer and more potent than these component activities."[22] In the same way, no matter how significant the differences or similarities might be, the temptation to subsume one text into another is resisted. Part of the importance of comparison (and what makes comparative reading interesting) is the tensions, differences, and distances between texts.[23] Without them the comparative project is superficial at best.

Because the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Life of Moses* are multi-layered, exegesis entails reading the source text and its commentary as a single text. This approach is encouraged by the historical circumstances of the manuscripts themselves and it also finds support in Clooney's "comparative theology" method. Though *Theology After Vedanta* is specific to the Vedānta tradition Clooney is examining, I believe his assertions apply to an exegesis of the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Life of Moses* as well. Clooney notes that the commentarial traditions associated with texts are often the means for assessing the meaning in older texts.[24] The commentaries guide the way we read these older texts. Together this combined reading forms what Clooney calls a reading of "the Text": the original manuscript plus its commentaries.[25] From this,

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[21] *Ibid.*, 168.
[22] *Ibid.*, 168.
[23] *Ibid.*, 165.
[24] Clooney, *Theology After Vedanta*, 18.
[25] *Ibid.*, 23.

reading the *Yoga-Sūtra* or the *Life of Moses* becomes an exercise in reading the Text, and at the same time, remaining sensitive to the multi-layered nature each Text has. "The result can be legitimately called a construction of texts' meaning from the Text itself."[26]

Historically, the text of the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the text of the *Life of Moses* are each composed of more than one textual source.[27] In the case of the *Yoga-Sūtra*, the text is explicitly multi-layered: (1) the original text of the *Yoga-Sūtra*; and (2) the commentary by Vyāsa, the *Yoga-Bhāsya*, on the *Yoga-Sūtra*. The *Yoga-Sūtra* is virtually never presented separate from Vyāsa's commentary, and together they constitute a single "Text." In the *Life of Moses*, the text is implicitly multi-layered: (1) the Exodus narrative summarized by Gregory forms a core text, and (2) Gregory's spiritual commentary stands upon the narrative, and these together form the "Text" of the *Life of Moses*. Even though the *Life of Moses* is a single literary work, whereas the *Yoga-Sūtra* and *Yoga-Bhāsya* are separate literary works, textually there are important similarities. First, there is a foundational text that serves as the source layer in each: Patañjali's aphorisms and

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[26] *Ibid.*, 32.

[27] In Ian Whicher's textual, historical, and interpretive study of the *Yoga-Sūtra*, *The Integrity of Yoga Darśana* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), he emphasizes its multi-layered aspect. Whicher observes: "In the lineage of Yoga philosophy the two names [Patañjali and Vyāsa] have been inseparably linked together so that in spite of the existence of later independent commentaries the word "*Yoga-Sūtra*" evokes the name of Vyāsa. Yet, perhaps two or even three centuries separate the two Yoga authorities, and as such it would be inappropriate to accept the *Yoga-Bhāsya* at face value and without some degree of caution.... Suffice it to say, however, that like much of the Yoga tradition in India this study regards the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Yoga-Bhāsya* as a single composite whole, the two parts of which complement each other..." (50). This, in fact, is the case for most historical and modern translations of the *Yoga-Sūtra*. Most scholars, if not translating Vyāsa's commentary as part of their edition, will refer to Vyāsa to interpret Patañjali's aphorisms. According to Christopher Chapple and Yogi Ananda Viraj, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 2004), seemingly without exception these scholars "rely heavily upon Vyāsa for guidance" (88). The *Life of Moses* is somewhat different. It combines the Exodus narrative and Gregory of Nyssa's spiritual commentary to form a single text from a literary point of view, but maintains four distinct sections. According to the translator's introduction to the *Life of Moses*, Gregory followed the Alexandrian tradition in his exegesis using the Greek version of the Old Testament (23). Also, following the Alexandrian tradition, "The *Life of Moses* has the form of *logos*, which is a formal treatise, dealing (as its complete title indicates) with 'Perfection in Virtue.' There are four sections: the Preface, or [Gregory's] covering letter of introduction [to the recipient of the treatise]; the History (*historia*), or paraphrase of the Biblical story; the Contemplation (*theoria*), or Spiritual meaning of the Scriptural narrative, which is his main concern; and the Conclusion" (3). The third part of the *Life of Moses*, Gregory's *theoria*, refers back to the events narrated in Exodus. In so doing, Gregory fashions a spiritual commentary on top of the narrative along traditional Alexandrian exegetical lines.

the Exodus narrative. Also, each Text contains a second layer of commentary: Vyāsa's *Yoga-Bhāsya* (yoga commentary) on Patañjali's aphorisms and Gregory's *theoria* (spiritual commentary) on the Exodus narrative.

A comparative reading of the *Yoga-Sūtra* and *The Life of Moses* begins with an independent reading of the Texts. Isolated reading of the Texts allows us to consider specific passages before entering the comparative discourse. In this project, striving and personal transformation are the central themes under investigation. Identity is not the issue here, whether authentic or otherwise.[28] Who the *yogin* or Christian is can be a complex question with a variety of answers, all of which are outside the scope of this project. Of interest here is how the *Yoga-Sūtra* and *The Life of Moses* identify the *yogin* and the Christian respectively. In this search, we know that the *yogin* and Christian are practitioners of their respective Text's truth claims, and that these truth claims somehow define this identity. Accepting that, the question we turn to in our reading is this: What language – indices, attributes, or characteristics – describes the yogic practitioner and the practicing Christian in the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Life of Moses*? Answering this question independently for each Text sets the stage for our comparison, and comprises Section II and III of this project. Section IV, then, draws the independent readings into a comparative discourse that results in the extra-textual analysis suggested by our

[28] It is important to this project to understand that identity is not the same as identification. Identification is a collection of attributes that identifies a person. The sum of these attributes does not equal the whole. The whole to which we refer is the identity. In *Christophany* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), Raimon Panikkar tackles this very distinction, as it relates to the Hindu-Christian dialogue. He notes, "Modern nominalistic and scientific methods of approaching reality have so infiltrated theological thought that the question about *what* an individual is becomes confused with *whom* the person is. Despite such nominalism, having understood a concept leads many to believe that they have grasped the thing....In brief, the Cartesian coordinates help us identify a phenomenon but not to know the identity of the event....Although identity and identification cannot be separated, they are not the same thing" (153). Panikkar continues, "Nor is the identity of a person the sum of his attributes: on the contrary, attributes serve to identify a person" (154). For this project, answering the questions: "What?" is this authentic identity or "Who?" is the subject of this authentic identity, are not in its scope, it is important to note that both texts have a definite view or ultimate end in mind that defines identity. What we are concerned with in this project is identification. Without recounting his entire argument, Panikkar concludes with three key assertions regarding identification: (1) Identification consists in placing the other within a system of coordinates in order to avoid confusion with any other being; (2) Identification is simply words and works [attributes] of the individual as indices of the person himself; and (3) Words and works [attributes] are said and done within a concrete context (which confer meaning and value on them (56-57).

method. Finally, Section V reflects on the similarities and differences in the Texts. This section capitalizes on Clooney's method whereby the comparison is understood to be *richer than the component activities of arranging similarities and differences*. Section V brings this project to a close showing that there is more to this comparison than discovering the similarities exhibited by these Texts and, thereby, similarities between Yoga and Christian *praxis*.

II. READING THE TEXT: THE *YOGA-SŪTRA*

1. Contextualizing the *Yoga-Sūtra*

Historically, the *Yoga-Sūtra* grew out of the period of ferment preceding early Hinduism. Associated with this period are the *Upaniṣad*-s, the rise of ascetical sects, philosophical discourses on reality, and the birth of heterodox movements such as Buddhism and Jainism. The *Yoga-Sūtra*'s precise dating is unknown but authorship is generally accepted between the 3rd and 4th C.E. Since that time, many commentaries have been written on the original text and further expositions written on these commentaries. The final product is a multi-layered text where the density of the original teaching is slowly unpacked by commentary, and further expounded by an expositor or teacher. Brief philosophical aphorisms compose the *Yoga-Sūtra*, and these aphorisms are highly dense bytes of information. This structure is specific to the *Yoga-Sūtra*'s oral tradition and provides the teacher with a framework for teaching.

The *Yoga-Sūtra* presents Yoga philosophy as a theoretical and practical system. Essentially, the text articulates a pragmatic approach to India's soteriological concern for liberation of the individual from bondage within the material world.[29] The *Yoga-Sūtra*

[29] Whicher, *The Integrity of Yoga Darśana*, 51.

privileges immediate experience and direct perception of reality over logic (Nyāya), discernment (Sāmkhya), or ritual action (Pūrva Mīmāmsā). This approach sets it apart from other Indian philosophies. It is rightly suggested that Patañjali's Yoga philosophy is "a provisional, descriptive, and 'practical' metaphysics...abstracted from yogic experience."[30] This theoretical framework provides practical "signposts" guiding the practitioner along the path to liberation. Because of this Patañjali's Yoga philosophy has no meaning apart from practice, and the experience practice provides.[31]

The *Yoga-Sūtra*'s 195 philosophical aphorisms are bound into a coherent system by the central theme "subtilization." In *The Yoga-Sūtra of Patañjali*, translated by Christopher Chapple and Yogi Ananda Viraj, we find a clear articulation of "subtilization."

> There are three principal concerns in the *Yoga-Sūtra*: practice (*sādhana*), return to the origin or subtilization (*pratiprasava*), and *samādhi* [contemplation]. The three are interrelated and at times synchronic. The application of yogic practices causes a progressive subtilization of one's focus, which is directed away from the gross manifestations of *citta-vrtti* [cognitive and affective activity] to the most sublime aspect of *prakrti* [matter], the state of *sattva* [the reflective quality of intelligence]. When this is achieved, the resulting equipoise is defined as a state where distinctions between grasped, grasping, and grasper dissolve.[32]

And,

> The technical procedure for the subtilization of the *citta* [mind] serves as a thread that binds together the *Yoga-Sūtra*....In a sense, the entire yoga system is designed to accomplish and perfect this process....The progressively subtle hierarchy of [contemplations]...further establish the nature of yoga as requiring the gathering back of the mind from its obfuscated involvements with the world.[33]

Simply stated, Yoga is a system meant for a practitioner. It requires a subject to engage in its methods, using the texts' theoretical framework to guide personal transformation (*yogasādhana*). Theory then becomes a roadmap for the practitioner, guiding the

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[30] *Ibid.*, 55.
[31] *Ibid.*, 53.
[32] Christopher Chapple and Yogi Ananda Viraj, trans., *The Yoga-Sutras of Patanjali* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1990), 4. Interpolation mine.
[33] *Ibid.*, 5. Interpolation mine.

practitioner but not defining him or her. Because of this, the practitioner's embodied effort becomes central to the transformative process; and more importantly, this theme points to the inherent differences meaningful to this study.

2. Personal Transformation and the Yogic Practitioner

Here we pursue the question of how the Text identifies a *yogin*. To answer this question we turn to YS 1.17-1.22:

> Perfect [cognitive] contemplation with full consciousness of the object passes, becoming reflective contemplation, then intuitive, the beatific, and lastly, full consciousness of self in the experience.[34] (1.17)
>
> Regular immersion [persevering practice] in contemplation [cognitive contemplation] without mental fluctuations brings contemplation [acognitive contemplation] in which only mental permeation subsists.[35] (1.18)
>
> This state is innate for two kinds of predestined beings: "those without a body" and "those who are reabsorbed into original matter." (1.19)
>
> For the others, faith engenders energy, that reinforces memory [mindfulness], allowing concentration [contemplation] on wisdom.[36] (1.20)
>
> For those impelled by intense ardor, the goal is near. (1.21)
>
> There still remains a difference based on distinct temperaments: gentle, moderate, lively. (1.22)

With aphorism YS 1.18, Patañjali defines the goal of Yoga as acognitive contemplation. Patañjali then places two aphorisms, YS 1.19 and 1.20, in comparative apposition. It is

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[34] All references to the *Yoga-Sūtra* use the convention chapter number followed by aphorism number, e.g. YS 1.17 refers to the seventeenth aphorism of the first chapter. In citing the *Yoga-Sūtra*'s aphorisms for the reader, I have chosen Bernard Bouanchaud's translation (see Works Consulted at the end of this study). While his translation presents certain problems, it also offers the most accessible English rendition for someone unversed in the technical vocabulary of Yoga. The issues pertaining to Bouanchaud's translation are succinctly summarized in Christopher Chapple's book review, "Four Recent Books on Yoga," *Religious Studies Review* 27.03, pages 239-242. Conversely, for my exegesis I use Chapple and Viraj's *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* and Wood's translation *The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali*. Interpolation mine.

[35] Interpolation mine.

[36] Interpolation mine.

commonly accepted that these aphorisms describe two classes of practitioner that achieve acognitive contemplation. This common understanding is derived from Vyāsa's commentary, YB 1.19 and 1.20, where Vyāsa makes the two classes explicit. According to Vyāsa, the subject of YS 1.20 is "the others,"[37] a comparative pronoun specifically used to designate one thing from a second thing. Further, Vyāsa informs us that the second aphorism pointing to the "others," is in fact referring to the *yogin*.[38] Therefore, YS 1.20 is commonly believed to define the *yogin*.

According to YS 1.20, the attributes of the *yogin* are faith, energy, mindfulness, *samādhi* [contemplation] and wisdom.[39] Vyāsa describes faith as mental approval that accepts the goal of Yoga (as an abstraction) until it becomes like a "loving mother protecting the *yogin*."[40] This mental approval is also understood as "tranquility (with a feeling of reverence) of the mind or certitude in the desire for the object of pursuit."[41] Here Vyāsa elaborates on Patañjali's idea of faith in YB 1.20 by telling us that the *yogin* is identifiable by his or her certitude regarding the results Yoga promises to deliver.[42] This is not an intellectual aid to doctrinal belief, but rather faith that a process will result in the desired end. Following this faith is energy. Vyāsa's commentary indicates that energy comes from faith. This energy is a consequence of faith, and it is necessary for the *yogin*'s progress into mindfulness. Despite movement in the world and the movement of worldly thoughts, the spiritual goal is always present in the *yogin*'s mind. This is mindfulness. This mindfulness leads to contemplation as the *yogin* furthers his or her progression in Yoga. Ideally, the object of contemplation remains present to the

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[37] Chapple and Viraj, 41.
[38] Patañjali, *The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali*, trans. James Haughton woods (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927; reprint, Mineola: Dover Publications, 2003 *Woods*, 46.
[39] Chapple and Viraj, 41. Interpolation mine.
[40] Patañjali, 46.
[41] Swami Hariharananda Aranya, *Yoga Philosophy of Patañjali*, trans. P. N. Mukerji (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1963; revised, Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1983), 50.
[42] Interior silence and stillness are the results promised by Yoga's transformative process. This is defined in YS 1.2, and recapitulated in YS 1.12. This definition deals specifically with Yoga's aim and stands in contradistinction, though inextricably linked, to Yoga's goal. In the next sub-section this aim is dealt with in greater detail.

yogin even when the experience of contemplation passes.[43] Over time this leads to wisdom, the final attribute. Wisdom preceded by contemplation, mindfulness, energy and faith mark the *yogin*. And when all are present, these attributes identify the *yogin* as one who has achieved the goal of Yoga. These attributes differentiate the *yogin* as the "other" of YS 1.20. Consequently, these attributes identify the *yogin* as such.

Vyāsa describes the acquisition of these attributes in a specific sequence that moves the *yogin* progressively forward until Yoga's particular goal is achieved. Further, this sequence produces a clear transformation of the practitioner. Vyāsa's commentary, YB 1.20, clearly notes that throughout this process, the *yogin*'s mind shifts from its obfuscated involvement and identification with a phenomenal, changing world to recollection, self-possession, and concentration on a desired aim. The character and nature of the *yogin*'s mind becomes refined, or as Chapple indicates, reaches equipoise. Acquisition of the *yogin*'s faith, energy, mindfulness, contemplation, and wisdom is only possible through the transformative process. For that reason, the process of personal transformation fundamentally identifies the *yogin*. Consequently, YS 1.20 reveals the attributes of the *yogin* as a process of personal transformation, and this personal transformation in turn identifies the *yogin* as such.

While most commentators do not dispute that YS 1.20 refers to Patañjali's *yogin*, some do dispute that this aphorism is the defining feature of the class *yogin*. For example, Chapple argues that YS 1.19 and 1.20 do not establish Patañjali's classes; rather the classes are defined in YS 1.22. He argues that the *Yoga-Sūtra* identifies three classes (in opposition to Vyāsa's two classes) distinguished as a mild, moderate, and an ardent practitioner. By Chapple's reasoning, the process indicated by YS 1.20 cannot

[43] *Ibid.*, 50-51.

be a feature of the *yogin* as such because it describes a particular type of practitioner and cannot be associated to all *yogin*-s.[44]

On the *Yoga-Sūtra*, most commentators by contrast, follow Vyāsa's lead in identifying two classes of practitioner that achieve acognitive contemplation. They also follow his commentary in interpreting YS 1.20 as the second of the two classes, specifically referring to the *yogin*. Their arguments for two classes follow from Patañjali's use of the comparative pronoun "other." By most accounts, including that of Monier-Williams, this pronoun must imply two classes for comparison.[45] The first class is discreet followed by its complementary, defined simply as the other. Given that the language internal to the text seems to support a two-class scheme, I can only conclude that Patañjali envisions two classes. Patañjali identifies the *yogin* as a practitioner engaged in personal transformation specifically generating faith, energy, mindfulness, contemplation, and wisdom. This allows us to identify the *yogin* by his or her personal transformation (*yogasādhana*) with these specific attributes.

3. Striving and the Yogic Practitioner

Observing YS 1.20 describes the *yogin*'s attributes and understanding these attributes as the result of personal transformation, we then identify process as the thing pointing to the *yogin* as such. But is there something more, or is personal transformation the sole identifier of the *yogin*? To answer these questions we turn to YS 1.12 – 1.16:

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[44] Although I disagree with Chapple regarding YS 1.20, I do agree with the larger argument he presents in "Reading Patañjali Without Vyāsa: A Critique of Four Yoga Sūtra Passages" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62.01. In summary, Chapple observes all subsequent readings of the *Yoga-Sūtra* are influenced by Vyāsa. This influence forces an atomistic reading of individual aphorisms at the expense of broader ideas contained within larger pericopes. Specifically, YS 1.19-1.23 represents one such pericope that is impacted by this atomistic reading. Chapple then argues that after the goal of Yoga is broached (YS 1.18), Patañjali gives a series of aphorisms dealing with those who achieve Yoga's goal. Moreover, he sees in this pericope of aphorisms (YS 1.19 – 1.23) a "hierarchic triad of yogic practitioners" (89). With the above mentioned aphorism (YS 1.20) on faith, energy, contemplation, and wisdom being descriptive of one of the three classes, or as sub-attributes of what Chapple argues is the moderate class of yogic practitioners (89). If this is true, then faith, energy, contemplation and wisdom as indices of a process marking a *yogin* as such is problematized because they cannot then represent all *yogin*-s.

[45] *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (2003 ed.), s.v. "itara."

> Control over the mind's fluctuations [yogic stillness] comes from persevering practice and nonattachment.[46] (1.12)
>
> Persevering practice is the effort to attain and maintain the state of mental peace. (1.13)
>
> Such a practice is firmly established only if one engages in it seriously and respectfully over a long and uninterrupted period. (1.14)
>
> Nonattachment is the mastery of desire for perceived external objects, as well for internal spiritual objects, heard or revealed. (1.15)
>
> At its highest level, nonattachment means having no desire for any of the constituent qualities of nature [material phenomenon], because one has become conscious of the spiritual principle.[47] (1.16)

With YS 1.12, Patañjali defines the aim of Yoga, yogic stillness, as resulting from practice and dispassion.[48] According to the commentary, YB 1.15, dispassion is itself a result of practice and this result is indicative of the maturing relationship between the *yogin* and the material world. Practice that does not produce dispassion cannot lead to yogic stillness, because the two together necessarily conduce this aim. Practice, therefore, becomes instrumental in understanding Yoga and its practitioner. According to YS 1.13, practice is effort directed towards a particular state of mental peace. In the commentary, YB 1.13, Vyāsa defines this particular state of mental peace as the yogic stillness referred to in YS 1.12. Consequently we can read practice as the *yogin*'s effort aimed at yogic stillness.

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[46] Interpolation mine.
[47] Interpolation mine.
[48] The aim of Yoga (control over the mind's fluctuations) is here interpolated as yogic stillness. This derives, in this instance, from my assessment of Patañjali's language as descriptive and not prescriptive. The subject of this aphorism is *nirodha*, further delimited in compound by the adjectives *citta* and *vrtti.* As a nominal sentence, this aphorism can be read as: *citta-vrtti-nirodha* [is] *yoga*. Therefore, Patañali is describing the state of subjective interiority "*citta-vrtti-nirodha*" as Yoga. *Citta* is most often translated as "mind" or the interior faculty of cognition, affection, and conation. *Vrtti* is most often translated as "fluctuations" or mental activity distracting the mind from contemplation (samādhi). Indeed, *vrtti* implies a turning or whirl much like a vortex. Applying this to *citta-vrtti*, we can think metaphorically of a lake (*citta* or mind) ruffled by whirlpools and vortices of thoughts and feelings. *Nirodha* establishes the opposite of this disturbed state. Continuing with the metaphor of a lake, *nirodha* is the lake unruffled. Here the metaphor is conducive to images of still water, calm and reflective like a mirror. This leads to my interpolation of *citta-vrtti-nirodha* as yogic stillness.

According to the commentary, effort is further defined as the pursuit of the right course of action, whose sole desire is to affect a permanent state of mental peace.[49] The same commentary informs us that this "right course of action" is in fact a series of actions, connected by the *yogin*'s intention to achieve yogic stillness. This reading of the Text discloses practice as the act of striving towards the aim of Yoga; thus, the Text intimately links striving to personal transformation. If striving is intimately linked to personal transformation, and personal transformation fundamentally identifies the *yogin*, then striving is inherent to identifying the *yogin*. Therefore, striving and personal transformation fundamentally identify the *yogin* as the practitioner of Yoga.

The idea that striving and personal transformation identify the person finds little credence to someone engaging the *Yoga-Sūtra* from a Vedānta philosophical position. Identity is something already possessed and identification is based on something other than this world. For that reason, the conclusion that striving and personal transformation fundamentally identify the *yogin* is not a given. Some interpretations of the *Yoga-Sūtra* suggest otherwise; among these interpretations Vedānta dominates the discourse. In *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Surendranath Dasgupta notes:

> This comprehension of my self [*ātman*] as the ultimate truth is the highest knowledge, for when this knowledge is once produced, our cognition of world-appearances will automatically cease....At once he becomes the truth itself, which is at once identical with pure bliss and pure intelligence; all ordinary notions and cognitions of diversity and of the many cease; there is no duality, no notion of mine and thine; the vast illusion of the world process is extinct in him, and he shines forth as the one truth, the Brahman. All Hindu systems believed that when man attained salvation, he became divested of all world-consciousness, or of all consciousness of himself and his interests, and was thus reduced to his own original purity untouched by all sensations, perceptions, feelings and willing, but there the idea was this that when man had no bonds of karma and no desire and attachment with the world and had known the nature of his self as absolutely free and unattached to the world or his psychosis, he became emancipated from the world and all his connections with the world ceased,

[49] Patañjali, 35.

> though the world continued as ever the same with others. The external world was a reality with them; the unreality or illusion consisted in want of true knowledge about the real nature of the self, on account of which the self foolishly identified itself with world-experiences, worldly joys and world-events, and performed good and bad works accordingly.[50]

Dasgupta illuminates the Vedānta philosophical position on the self as such, and what fundamentally identifies the self as such.[51] In this view anything short of this pure, free, untouched state, is unreal. Likewise, anything associated with world-experiences or good and bad works is also unreal. Therefore, the only real indices for fundamentally identifying the *yogin* as such are the characteristics of *ātman*: pure being, pure blessedness, and pure intelligence. Therefore there is no striving involved because the subject is immutably pure being, pure blessedness, and pure intelligence, and these things *alone*. While this is primarily descriptive of Vedānta it also illustrates how the Sāmkhya philosophical position might respond to identifying a *yogin* by these attributes. Though Sāmkhya envisions a dualistic cosmology, it still posits a self (*puruşa*) other than the subject that could experience personal transformation. The individual self as it appears is an appearance only and not real.[52] Dasgupta is not alone in asserting that Yoga philosophy bears this same attitude towards identity and identifying quoted above for Vedānta and Sāmkhya.

It is important, though, to place Dasgupta's assessment in context. The attributes he uses – pure being, pure blessedness, and pure intelligence – are realized *because* of liberation. Pure being, pure blessedness, and pure intelligence come after employing the means for liberation. The *Yoga-Sūtra*'s main concern is with this means; therefore, these attribute follow upon the concerns of our Text. With this in mind, we

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[50] Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1975; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2004), 439-440. Interpolation mine.
[51] Here I refer the reader back to Section III, Subsection 1: Contextualizing the *Yoga-Sūtra*. Vedānta and Sāmkhya, along with Yoga, comprise three of the six major Indian philosophical systems. Most often, Yoga and the *Yoga-Sūtra* are read through the lens of Vedānta or Sāmkhya. This occurs despite Yoga's status as an independent philosophical system with its own view of liberating the practitioner. See also note 34.
[52] Dasgupta, 438.

shift the emphasis away from pure being, blessedness, and intelligence as all defining. Placing them in context, pure being, blessedness, and intelligence identify the liberated self while there are other attributes to identify the self in relation to this world. In so doing, Dasgupta's position no longer conflicts with this thesis' claim. Recent scholarship on the *Yoga-Sūtra*, in principle, supports such a move. In *The Integrity of the Yoga Darśana*, Ian Whicher outlines a different way of thinking about the *Yoga-Sūtra*. He moves the emphasis of liberation from the ontological to the epistemological. Whicher's argument grapples with certain questions he believes to be part of the *Yoga-Sūtra*'s context:

> One will naturally ask how practitioners who attempt to obey any teachings resulting in death to their minds would have the capacity to comprehend or carry out any further instructions. Perhaps, more importantly, how could one function practically as a human being without the faculties of thinking, memory, discrimination and reason, and an individual I-sense with which one can distinguish oneself from other people and the world?...If all the great yoga masters of the past had obliterated or so thoroughly suppressed their minds in order to become liberated, how did they speak, teach, reason, remember, empathize, or even use the word "I"?[53]

The move away from an ontological argument of liberation is a move away from thinking that liberation ontologically separates the practitioner from the material world, including the world of thoughts and ideas. What is worth noting here is that Whicher sees the implications of the ontological argument and asks whether it is believable. Given his answer that the implications of an ontological emphasis seem irreconcilable, he sets about reframing the *Yoga-Sūtra* in an epistemological argument. In presenting liberation epistemologically, Whicher advances the notion that the problem is not association with the material world but a "specific state of consciousness or cognitive error evidenced in the mind and not the mind itself."[54] How does this facilitate our argument? It allows a

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[53] Ian Whicher, "Cessation and Integration in Classical Yoga" *Asian Philosophy* 5.1 (1995), 48.
[54] *Ibid.*, 48.

relationship to exist between a *yogin* and the material world even in a liberated state. This relationship, then, can point to a *yogin* as presented by this study.

In moving the emphasis on the *Yoga-Sūtra* from the ontological to the epistemological and locating Dasgupta's assertions about the *yogin*'s identity in their proper context, we can advance the claim that striving and personal transformation identify the *yogin*. The way the Text speaks about the *yogin* makes this even more likely. We see the *yogin* through his or her acquiring faith, energy, mindfulness, contemplation, and wisdom. Through Vyāsa's commentary we discover these attributes are indicative of personal transformation and this process is fundamental to identifying the *yogin*. Further, we know the centrality striving plays in personal transformation, thereby linking the *yogin* to striving. Concluding our exegesis of the *Yoga-Sūtra*, we now know that striving and personal transformation (*yogasādhana*) fundamentally identify who a *yogin* is within the *Yoga-Sūtra*'s textual tradition. But of particular interest at present is that striving and personal transformation are meaningful as a practical experience; that is, through the experience of faith, energy, mindfulness, contemplation, and wisdom do we understand yogic transformation. Moreover, this signifies differences important to our comparative analysis.

III. READING THE TEXT: THE *LIFE OF MOSES*

1. Contextualizing the *Life of Moses*

Gregory of Nyssa wrote the *Life of Moses* towards the end of his career. "The work comes from a time when Gregory was acknowledged by the ascetics of Asia Minor as a master of the spiritual life, even as he had earlier been recognized by council and

emperor as a master of Christian doctrine."[55] Known as one of the "Cappadocian Fathers,"[56] Gregory was a significant defender of Nicene orthodoxy at the First Council of Constantinople, as Bishop of Nyssa, and through his prolific writing on matters of Christian faith and practice. The *Life of Moses*, written most likely in the early 390s, comes from the time of his retirement. He was no longer concerned with doctrinal and ecclesial matters, but was devoting more time to writing on the spiritual life.[57] Because of this by some accounts it expresses his fullest, most spiritually mature thought.[58] It doubtlessly is one of his most famous spiritual treatises.[59]

The translator's introduction to the text explains how Moses' life becomes a symbol of the soul's spiritual journey to God.[60] This "spiritual journey" of the soul to God is none other than Gregory's counsel to sincere Christians who are seeking the friendship of God through the perfect life. In his counsel, though, Gregory significantly redefines the prevailing idea of perfection. He notes that perfection as a static goal is unattainable because the goal, God, has no limit. But if the Christian is called to friendship with God, and if friendship, as Gregory believes, is participation in God through the perfect life in virtue, he asks how such friendship is possible. With a remarkable turn of thought, Gregory proposes:

> We should show great diligence not to fall away from the perfection which is attainable but to acquire as much as is possible: To that extent let us make progress within the realm of what we seek. For the perfection of human nature consists perhaps in its very growth in goodness.[61]

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[55] Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, introduction to *The Life of Moses*, by Gregory of Nyssa, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1978), 3.
[56] Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 1.
[57] Malherbe and Ferguson, 1.
[58] Malherbe and Ferguson, 2.
[59] Ronald E. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2.
[60] Malherbe and Ferguson, 5.
[61] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1978), 31.

Perfection for the Christian, according to Gregory, is no longer something achieved as a static goal or a state of knowledge. It is now a process of "growth in goodness" and a faith response to God's grace.

Gregory is convinced that Christian excellence (friendship with God) is ethical as well as mystical, more progression than achievement. It requires constantly straining toward an ever receding goal.[62] In this way, moral progress, which in Gregory's thought is both "preparation for and a response to enlightenment, is never arrested."[63] Ethical living and spiritual knowing define the perfect life in virtue, especially as a faith response. Knowledge is a product of grace and a result of progression. It deeply influences the Christian. In Gregory's thought, constant pursuit in faith defines the Christian just as much as the knowledge bestowed by such a pursuit. "The aim of the Christian life is moral perfection, considered above all as likeness to God, who...is himself regarded not simply as virtuous but as virtue."[64] Because God is virtue the perfect life in virtue must then entail participation in God, and for Gregory this is none other than friendship with God. The preface to the *Life of Moses* notes this well. John Meyendorff remarks:

> In his [Gregory of Nyssa] *Life of Moses*, using the biblical account as a parabola of the Christian spiritual ascent, he describes how this meeting with God occurs "in the cloud," i.e., without the help of created vision, since God is totally invisible and incomprehensible to the created eye, and inaccessible to the created mind. He is, nevertheless, seen and perceived by man, when man, by baptismal [grace] and ascetic purification, by effort and virtues, is enabled to acquire spiritual senses," which allow him to perceive, through communion in Christ and the Holy Spirit, the One who is beyond creation.[65]

Moral, contemplative, and ascetic living are all deeply interrelated in Gregory's thought on perfection.[66] It is significant to the *Life of Moses* that the process of personal

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[62] Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 69.
[63] *Ibid.*, 75.
[64] *Ibid.*, 81
[65] John Meyendorff, preface to *The Life of Moses*, by Gregory of Nyssa, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1978), xiii. Interpolation mine.
[66] Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 61

transformation (perfect life in virtue) is more important than being-something. This personal transformation, Anthony Meredith rightly notes, localizes around Moses' illumination during the three principal theophanies.[67] The Text, then, speaks of these theophanies reflecting a changing (spiritual) knowledge of God and growth in the perfect life towards Christian excellence. The theophanies and the faith response to them become central to the *Life of Moses*. Their privileged place points to the central role God plays in the transformative process; furthermore, this theme points to the inherent differences meaningful to this study.

2. Personal Transformation and the Practicing Christian

Turning to the Text, and how the Text identifies the practitioner, we begin our reading with the three principal theophanies. The first theophany, the burning bush, is recounted as follows:

> After he had passed some time in this kind of life, the history says an awe-inspiring theophany occurred. At high noon a light brighter than the sunlight dazzled his eyes. Astonished at the strange sight, he looked up at the mountain and saw a bush from which this light was flaming up like fire. When he saw the branches of the bush sprouting up in flame as if they were in pure water, he said to himself, "I will go and see this strange light." As soon as he said this, he no longer received the marvel of the light with his sight alone, but (which is most astounding of all) his hearing too was illuminated by the rays of light. The light's grace was distributed to both senses, illuminating the sight with flashing rays and lighting the way for hearing with undefiled teachings. The voice from the light forbade Moses to approach the mountain burdened with lifeless sandals. He removed the sandals from his feet, and so stood on that ground on which the divine light was shining.[68] (1§20)

[67] Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 102.
[68] All references to the *Life of Moses* use the convention book number followed by paragraph number as found in The Classics of Western Spirituality edition, e.g. LM 1§20 refers to the twentieth paragraph of the first book. In citing the *Life of Moses*' paragraphs, I have chosen Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson's translation as it remains the only complete translation of the manuscript into English. See Works Consulted at the end of this study.

In the second theophany, Moses ascended Mount Sinai into the divine darkness:

> The people as a whole were incapable of enduring what was seen and heard. Therefore, a general request from all was brought before Moses that the Law be mediated through him, on the ground that the people would not doubt that whatever he commanded in keeping with the teaching from above was a divine command. So when all went down to the foot of the mountain, Moses alone remained and showed the opposite of what was expected of him. Whereas all other men feel confidence in the face of fearful things when in the company of their associates, Moses was more courageous after he had been left by himself. From this it became clear that the fear which had encompassed him at the beginning was experienced out of sympathy for those who were terrified. (LM 1§45)
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> Since he was alone, by having been stripped as it were of the people's fear, he boldly approached the very darkness itself and entered the invisible things where he was no longer seen by those watching. After he entered the inner sanctuary of the divine mystical doctrine, there, while not being seen, he was in company with the Invisible. He, teaches, I think, by the things he did that the one who is going to associate intimately with God must go beyond all that is visible and (lifting up his own mind, as to a mountaintop, to the invisible and incomprehensible) believe that the divine is *there* where the understanding does not reach.[69] (1§46)

In the third and final theophany, Moses requests to see God face to face, truly, as a friend of God:

> While following these things in the sequence of our investigation, we were led to a deeper meaning in contemplating this passage. Let us return to the subject. How does someone who Scripture says saw God clearly in such divine appearances – *face to face, as a man who speaks with his friend* – require that God appear to him, as though he who is always visible had not yet been seen, as though Moses had not yet attained what Scripture testifies he had indeed attained.[70] (2§219)
>
> The heavenly voice now grants the petitioner's request and does not deny this additional grace. Yet again He leads him to despair in that He affirms that what the petitioner seeks cannot be contained by human life. Still, God says there is a *place with himself* where there is a *rock with a hole in it* into which he commands Moses to enter. Then God placed his hand over the

[69] Translator's emphasis.
[70] *Id*.

> mouth of the hole and called out to Moses as he passed by. When Moses was summoned, he came out of the hole and saw the back of the One who called him. In this way he thought he saw what he was seeking, and the promise of the divine voice did not prove false.[71] (2§220)

Moses' transformation, and consequently Christian transformation, is characterized by the way the understanding of God changes through these theophanies.

The Text puts forward Moses as the example for the perfect life in virtue.[72] It concludes, "These things concerning the perfection of the virtuous life, O Caesarius, man of God, we have briefly written for you, tracing in outline like a pattern of beauty the life of the great Moses so that each one of us might copy the image of the beauty which has been shown to us by imitating his way of life."[73] From this we can assert that, according to Gregory, Moses' life is an analogy for the life of the Christian and identifies the practicing Christian. As noted by Meredith, the three theophanies form the heart of Moses' experience and represent that which fundamentally identifies his transformation into a friend of God. Therefore, the theophanies that mark Moses' life become the attributes of the Christian.

For how these theophanies identify the Christian, we turn to Gregory's spiritual interpretation of them. Gregory remarks in LM 2§23 that the first theophany represents the acquisition of the knowledge of truth, and that is the "sure apprehension of real Being."[74] A Christian's realization "that none of those things which are apprehended by sense perception and contemplated by the understanding really subsists, but that the transcendent essence and cause of the universe, on which everything depends, alone subsists" is the outcome of the first theophany.[75] This theophany represents the movement from error to truth as the Christian is illuminated by the "light of the thorny

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[71] *Id*.
[72] Gregory of Nyssa, 33.
[73] *Ibid.*, 136.
[74] *Ibid.*, 60.
[75] *Ibid.*, 60.

bush." The second theophany represents the attainment to a new and greater knowledge of God, "to the contemplation of the transcendent nature."[76] Gregory tells us in LM 2§164 that this knowledge of God is to apprehend that "what is divine is beyond all knowledge and comprehension."[77] Gregory notes with the first theophany knowledge begins in the light and with the second, knowledge deepens in the darkness upon entering the place where God is. This knowledge of God knows n*o one has ever seen God*, thus asserting that the divine is unattainable not only by men but also by every intelligent creature.[78] The third theophany represents the highest mark of the Christian: that is, after attaining to knowledge that true Being is true life and this Being is inaccessible to knowledge, the Christian learns that the Divine by its very nature is infinite.[79] Gregory draws this out, showing how the Christian attains to this knowledge in LM 2§239:

> This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him. But one must always, by looking at what he can see, rekindle his desire to see more. Thus, no limit would interrupt growth in the ascent to God, since no limit to the Good can be found nor is the increasing of desire for the Good brought to an end because it is satisfied.[80]

Clearly, the theophanies are indicative of transforming knowledge concerning God; the question remains if, in fact, it is a process of personal transformation. In each case, the theophany is preceded by an important act or series of acts intended to purify and illuminate thereby facilitating the epistemological transformation. This purification and illumination co-operate intimately with God's grace forming an intimate union between the will of the Christian and God's will. For the first theophany, LM 2§22 tells us that "to stand within the rays of the true light: Sandaled feet cannot ascend that height where the light of truth is seen, but the dead and earthly covering of skins, which was

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[76] *Ibid.*, 92.
[77] *Ibid.*, 95.
[78] *Ibid.*, 95. Translator's emphasis.
[79] *Ibid.*, 115.
[80] *Ibid.*, 116.

placed around our nature at the beginning when we were found naked because of disobedience to the divine will, must be removed from the feet of the soul."[81] This represents purifying opinions concerning nonbeing. For Gregory, nonbeing represents the objects of the senses and of the mind. The Christian now understands that these objects do not exist independent of the Divine. Knowing this, the Christian realizes that the Divine alone is the source and fulfillment of life. Approaching the second theophany entails purifying the sense perceptions and abandoning any preconceptions of the Divine. The necessary condition for this transformation of knowledge is another act of purification. But instead of purifying opinions about what is real and what is not, or what gives life and what cannot, this theophany centers on knowledge itself.

> He who would approach the knowledge of things sublime must first purify his manner of life from all sensual and irrational emotion. He must wash from his understanding every opinion derived from some preconception and withdraw himself from his customary intercourse with his own companion, that is, with his sense perceptions, which are, as it were wedded to our nature as its companion. When he is so purified, then he assaults the mountain.[82]

Attaining to the final theophany, we see Moses straining to the furthest limits, to see God, "face to face, as a man speaks with his friend."[83] Preceding the third theophany, LM 2§230 tells us that the Christian must constantly thirst for that which has already filled him or her to capacity. As if never having partaken of God, the Christian beseeches God to appear that he or she might partake of them not according to human capacity, "but according to God's true being."[84] In the final theophany we see Moses' desire is completely transformed by his incessant longing and desire for more and more of God. In this way, the Christian must embrace his or her longing for God if he or she wishes to grow into the friend of God. We see in Gregory's commentary, then, an

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[81] *Ibid.*, 59.
[82] *Ibid.*, 93.
[83] *Ibid.*, 111.
[84] *Ibid.*, 114.

epistemological transformation where acts of purification and illumination precede transformation. Gregory is in fact describing personal transformation (perfect life in virtue) with the *Life of Moses* and this, then, identifies the practicing Christian.

3. Striving and the Practicing Christian

Observing that the three primal theophanies are indicative of personal transformation, we see how this process identifies the practicing Christian. But is there something more, or is personal transformation the sole identifier of the practicing Christian? To these questions we turn to Gregory's Prologue to the *Life of Moses*:

> At the horse races the spectators intent on victory shout to their favorites in the contest, even though the horses are eager to run. From the stands they participate in the race with their eyes, thinking to incite the charioteer to keener effort, at the same time urging the horses on while leaning forward and flailing the air with their outstretched hands instead of with a whip. They do this not because their actions themselves contribute anything to the victory; but in this way, by their good will, they eagerly show in voice and deed their concern for the contestants. I seem to be doing the same thing myself, most valued friend and brother. While you are competing admirably in the divine race along the course of virtue, lightfootedly leaping and straining constantly for the prize of the heavenly calling, I exhort, urge and encourage you vigorously to increase your speed. I do this, not moved to it by some unconsidered impulse, but to humor the delights of a beloved child. (1§1)

And, we must also consider what precedes the theophanies. In the case of the second theophany, Gregory's commentary has this to say:

> For leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intelligence thinks it sees, it keeps on penetrating deeper until by the intelligence's yearning for understanding it gains access to the invisible and incomprehensible, and therefore it sees God. This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness. Wherefore John the sublime, who penetrated into the luminous darkness, says, *No one has ever seen God*, thus

> asserting that knowledge of the divine essence is unattainable not only by men but also by every intelligent creature.[85] (2§163)

Finally, the commentary discloses this about the third theophany:

> Since what is encompassed is certainly less than what encompasses, it would follow that the stronger prevails. Therefore, he who encloses the divine by any boundary makes out that the Good is ruled over by its opposite. But that is out of the question. Therefore, no consideration will be given to anything enclosing infinite nature. It is not in the nature of what is enclosed to be grasped. But every desire for the Good which is attracted to that ascent constantly expands as one progresses in pressing on to the Good. (2§238)
>
> This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him. But one must always, by looking at what he can see, rekindle his desire to see more. Thus, no limit would interrupt the growth in the ascent to God, since no limit to the Good can be found nor is the increasing of desire for the Good ever brought to an end because it is satisfied. (2§239)

From the beginning, Gregory establishes striving as fundamental to personal transformation. In attaining to the second theophany we see Moses, and thereby the Christian, confronting the imagery of a mountain steep and difficult to climb.[86] This mountain symbolizes attaining to the knowledge of God. Effort is required to attain this knowledge, and thereby striving within the process of personal transformation is required. We see this clearly in subsequent commentary, LM 2§163, where Gregory tells us, "For leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intelligence thinks it sees, it keeps on penetrating deeper until by the intelligence's yearning for understanding it gains access to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God."[87] The "intelligence's yearning," according to LM 2§163, is necessary to the experience of the second theophany, without it there would be no penetrating the divine darkness.

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[85] Translator's emphasis.
[86] Gregory of Nyssa, 93.
[87] *Ibid.*, 95.

In fact the movement from the first to the second theophany is described by Gregory: "But as the mind progresses and through an ever greater and more perfect diligence, comes to apprehend reality, as it approaches more nearly to contemplation, it sees more clearly what of the divine nature is uncontemplated."[88] There are necessary steps – acts of purification that contribute to the transformation of knowledge – but also, and more fundamentally, it is the yearning underlying the actions that propels the Christian from one theophany to the next. The commentary on the third theophany brings this point home with exacting clarity. Gregory tells us, "If nothing comes from above to hinder its upward thrust (for the nature of the Good attracts to itself those who look to it), the soul rises ever higher and will always make its flight yet higher – by its desire of the heavenly things *straining ahead for what is still to come*, as the Apostle says."[89] And,

> Although lifted up through such lofty experiences, he is still unsatisfied in his desire for more. He still thirsts for that with which he constantly filled himself to capacity, and he asks to attain as if he had never partaken, beseeching God to appear to him, not according to his capacity to partake, but according to God's true being.[90]

Here from start to finish, we find the images of straining forward, yearning, and an effort to attain what is steep and difficult. All are indicative of the striving required for personal transformation. From this, then, we find that striving and personal transformation mark Moses' journey to become the friend of God. Consequently, the practicing Christian – who would be the friend of God as well – is identified by his or her striving and personal transformation (perfect life in virtue). Our exegesis also makes clear that striving and personal transformation is meaningfully understood in relation to the transcendent. The role of the theophanies and the faith response to the theophanies point to the

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[88] *Ibid.*, 95. Translator's emphasis.
[89] *Ibid.*, 113.
[90] *Ibid.*, 114.

importance of the transcendent; moreover, this signifies differences important to our comparative analysis.

An astute reader of the Text might question this generalization, though, especially given that the *Life of Moses* seems to have been written for a specific person:

> These things concerning the perfection of the virtuous life, O Caesarius, man of God, we have briefly written for you, tracing in outline like a pattern of beauty the life of the great Moses so that each one of us might copy the image of the beauty which has been shown to us by imitating his way of life.[91]

Not only is Caesarius the recipient of the *Life of Moses* in certain manuscripts, but two manuscripts name Caesarius and identify him as a monk.[92] If that is the case, then surely its pertinence to all Christians, especially those engaging in worldly concerns, is questionable. Is the *Life of Moses* applicable to all Christians? Is the *Life of Moses* only applicable to the monastic vocation and ascetic life? More provocatively, how is the practicing Christian fundamentally identified by his or her striving, and how is it striving and personal transformation are necessary for friendship with God? Addressing these questions requires us to detour briefly into Gregory's anthropology and his view of humanity.

In his anthropology, Gregory proposes that humanity possesses an inherent tendency to rise towards God and perfection; however, humanity cannot rise without assistance, even though this natural tendency to do so exists. Gregory claims original sin accounts for this human condition. Martin Laird addresses this in *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith*: "Given appropriate ascetic training, there is in the mind an upward orientation, a dynamic capacity to ascend."[93] The mind, free from its involvement in the senses, would seek out something "other" to contemplate and grasp. In fact, Laird's survey indicates that the impulse to "grasp" is in Gregory's thought an

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[91] *Ibid.*, 136.
[92] *Ibid.*, 2-3.
[93] Martin Laird, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith: Union, Knowledge, and Divine Presence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 43.

inherent function of the mind and something natural to humanity. In its highest form this grasping nature seeks after God, while in its baser form it seeks the pleasures of the world. So, for Gregory, the human impulses or passions are not to be extinguished but purified so the natural tendency to ascend is released and the Christian could then know (grasp) God.[94] Further understanding of this natural tendency to ascend is found in Anthony Meredith's book, *The Cappadocians*. He notes the desire to behold ultimate beauty underlies and enables humanity's upward movement. Gregory assumes desire for ultimate beauty is at the root of human craving for God.[95] Further, for Gregory, the tendency of the created spirit to move toward its creator derives from the fact that it is created by God, like God and for God.[96]

This inherent tendency is offset by Gregory's belief that the mind cannot rise without assistance. Returning to Laird's assessment of Gregory, he notes that the Gregorian mind possesses the capacity to ascend in a natural way from the sensible towards the intelligible order, and eventually to God as the ultimate end. But it cannot do so of its own accord, even though it functions best at this elevated level, above the distracting influences of the sensible world.[97] Without assistance, humanity possesses a "thick mind," bound to look down to the pleasures of the flesh just as cattle look down to their pasture.[98] Gregory also compares humanity to a stream flowing in every direction. He labels this analogy the "dispersed mind."[99] His comparison involves a stream meandering through many differing branches that do not have the same force as one single channel. Forming a single channel, the stream harnesses its potency to great effect. Likewise, without assistance, the mind will disperse itself among transitory

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[94] *Ibid.*, 60.
[95] Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 55.
[96] *Ibid.*, 56.
[97] Laird, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith*, 44.
[98] *Ibid.*, 35.
[99] *Ibid.*, 36.

pleasures, retaining no power for the journey to the ultimate Good.[100] Set against its natural tendency to rise, humanity is stuck in lesser states unless some assistance is given to overcome these thick, dispersed, distracted and wandering mental states.

This brings us to Gregory's explanation for original sin. The inability of humanity to rise above this world comes from the mind's grasping nature and bondage to the sensible world. This is the effect original sin has on humanity. It turns the mind towards the world, sensible objects, and pursuit of pleasures. Not only did the primal fall turn the mind towards the world, it creates a state of bondage for humanity. Knowing the problem, Gregory's conclusion is that the mind's grasping nature must be overcome. Overcoming this grasping nature sets it free to rise as it should. Towards this end, he sees the grace of baptism as the instrument of freedom, and that is common to all Christians. Grace, in Gregory's thought, converts the mind from grasping sensible objects, freeing it to rise in its natural capacity towards God.

> The mind flows in every direction like gushing water, and the love due to God is dispersed among other things. One is alienated from God and unable to use reason properly, notably from distinguishing a beautiful thing from Beauty itself. The mind must be converted from all this, which is precisely, according to Gregory, one of the implications of receiving baptism.[101]

Gregory saw this upward tendency as universal to humanity and the grace of baptism as universal to Christians. However, some might argue the process required for striving to reach its end is meant for a select few. If that is the case, once again we must question the *Life of Moses*' applicability to all Christians. Here we turn to the Text itself where Gregory's commentary calls to mind religious virtue, or virtue attained by striving and personal transformation. In LM 2§166, Gregory proposes: "Religious virtue is divided into two parts, into that which pertains to the Divine and that which pertains to

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[100] *Ibid.*, 36.
[101] *Ibid.*, 58.

right conduct (for purity of Life is a part of religion)."[102] All religious people are called to right conduct; specifically, it is vital for the practicing Christian in Gregory's thought.

Gregory's other seminal work on this subject, the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, addresses these teachings to a lay audience. Richard Norris observes, Gregory undertook a "year or so before his death, to preach a series of homilies on the Song of Songs."[103] Further,

> Indeed his models for the Bride are Moses, who spoke with God face to face, and the Apostle Paul, who as we know "was caught up to the third heaven...and heard things that cannot be told." Each of this pair he explicitly labels a "bride" of Christ. Contrasted with the Bride are the "daughters of Jerusalem" or "maidens" that accompany her and first appear in Song 1:3 and 1:5. These Gregory consistently envisages as the disciples of the Bride, and he further identifies them with the audience to whom his homilies are addressed.[104]

From this we see Gregory addressing the same message as that in the *Life of Moses* to a wider audience. This audience, the "daughters of Jerusalem" and the "maidens," are the lay people whose spiritual lives are less advanced. But Gregory's concern is not necessarily the maidens' engagement in the world but the spiritual welfare of their souls. Namely, Gregory concerns himself with "the daughters of Jerusalem" becoming, like Moses, the friends of God. Clearly, then, in Gregory's thought, the striving and personal transformation the *Life of Moses* calls for applies to all Christians by virtue of baptismal grace and Gregory's exhortation of the faithful to seek a life of perfection in virtue. For this reason, asserting that striving and personal transformation (perfect life in virtue) fundamentally identify the practicing Christian is in line with the Text and its author's line of thought.

This concludes our independent readings of the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Life of Moses*. Before we move onto a coordinated reading of these Texts and our ensuing

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[102] Gregory of Nyssa, 96.
[103] Richard Norris, "The Soul Takes Flight: Gregory of Nyssa and the Song of Songs" *Anglican Theological Review*, vol. 8, issue 4 (Fall 1998), 517.
[104] *Ibid.*, 517-518.

comparative analysis, it would be worthwhile to briefly summarize our findings. The Yoga-Sutra puts forth a process of personal transformation whose referents are the embodied experience of faith, energy, recollection, contemplation, and wisdom. Striving is centrally located in this transformative process; moreover, it fundamentally identifies the yogic practitioner. Likewise, striving fundamentally identifies a practicing Christian; further, this striving is also located in the transformative process. On the other hand, this process refers back to the theophanies. These referents establish an intimate relationship between personal transformation and the transcendent aspect of the *Life of Moses*, namely God's grace. This is of particular interest at present for the privileged role of God in the transformative process speaks meaningfully to our comparative analysis. In the next section we will develop these particularities in greater detail.

IV. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

1. Striving and Personal Transformation

Central to this section is the model for coordination and comparative reading outlined in the subsection titled Methodological Considerations. To recapitulate this model, we proposed it would lead to an extra-textual analysis where the fruit of the comparative study is meaningful outside each Texts' respective tradition. More precisely, this project enters the existing discourse on Yoga and Christian *praxis*, without reflecting theologically on the Texts themselves. Therein lays the obvious mark of the practitioner: a person who is engaged in a process of personal transformation. But as we delve deeper into each Text's respective processes, we discover something more fundamental to each Text: the striving that is part of personal transformation. Following that, we are now ready to juxtapose the Texts and, in so doing, consider the second

claim of our thesis. The *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Life of Moses* point to a similar idea: without *striving* and personal transformation neither the yogic practitioner nor practicing Christian subsists.

First, both the *yogin* and the Christian are striving towards an ultimate identity of liberation or salvation respectively. Both Texts speak of striving in ways that fundamentally interlink it with their respective processes. Following Clooney's "comparative theology" method, a close back-and-forth reading of select passages discloses the nature of this striving and its link to personal transformation. For the yogic practitioner:

> Persevering practice is the effort to attain and maintain the state of mental peace [yogic stillness]. Such a practice is firmly established only if one engages in it seriously and respectfully over a long and uninterrupted period.[105] (1.13 and 1.14)

And, for the practicing Christian:

> Although lifted up through such lofty experiences, he is still unsatisfied in his desire for more. He still thirsts for that with which he constantly filled himself to capacity, and he asks to attain as if he had never partaken, beseeching God to appear to him, not according to his capacity to partake, but according to God's true being. (2§230)

The *Yoga-Sūtra* calls upon the *yogin* to exert "effort to attain," and it notes that this effort is established over a long period of serious engagement. Likewise, the *Life of Moses* speaks of "thirst," the desire to attain more towards the end of beholding God, "face to face, as a man speaks with his friend."[106] We can say this striving is so necessary to yogic transformation (*yogasādhana*) or Christian transformation (perfect life in virtue) that without it yogic practice is never firmly established nor friendship with God ever attained.

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[105] Interpolation mine.
[106] Gregory of Nyssa, 111.

Striving operates similarly in the life of the *yogin* and the Christian. It is the desire, effort, and exertion to attain what is promised by the *Yoga-Sūtra* and *Life of Moses*. Vyāsa's commentary on the *Yoga-Sūtra* tells us that practice is established by effort – energy and persevering struggle – to achieve yogic stillness.[107] Because striving establishes practice, without it, there is no practice. To truly be a *yogin*, a practitioner of Yoga, requires striving and without it there is neither practice nor a practitioner. The *Life of Moses* speaks similarly of striving. From the very beginning of the Christian's life striving is required. Progressing forward in knowledge of God requires striving, and it is required to become the friend of God.[108] To truly be a Christian requires striving. Without striving there is neither knowledge of God nor a practicing Christian. Both Texts point to a similar idea of striving and its necessity to personal transformation. More fundamentally, for the *yogin* and the Christian striving is necessary to be a yogic practitioner or practicing Christian.

This implies that striving functions similarly in the life of the yogic practitioner and the practicing Christian. By contrast, this functional similarity is offset by the way the practitioner's striving is characterized within Yoga or Christian *praxis* itself. For the *Yoga-Sūtra*, striving in the practitioner is necessarily linked to his or her practice. By contrast, the *Life of Moses* links the practitioner's striving to the perfect life. Within Yoga, according to the *Yoga-Sūtra*, the *yogin*'s striving is thought of in terms of yogic practice. According to the *Life of Moses*, Christian striving is thought of in terms of friendship with God, the end and not the means. This implies an embodied similarity (how it operates in the practitioner's life) while maintaining a conceptual difference (how it operates in the systems of Yoga and Christian *praxis*).

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[107] Patañjali, 34-35.

[108] See for instance LM1§1, 2§163, and 2§238-239. Each theophany requires Moses to strain forward like the Apostle Paul, and by his straining forward Moses comes to knowledge of God. More so, striving is the force on Moses' part propelling him to his ultimate end – friendship with God. Without striving, therefore, Moses would never attain to knowledge of God and the exalted position of a friend of God. Moses is a friend of God precisely because of his striving.

According to Clooney, the practice of comparison is more than arranging similarities and differences. A well executed comparative project is greater than these component activities. Because of this, the fruit of the comparison is more than the observation of similarities and differences. We begin to see this in the comparison of striving, whereby similarities and differences are illuminated. Conceptually, these Texts imagine striving differently even as they locate striving in the practitioner and the transformative process. For, according to the *Yoga-Sūtra*,

> Practice is repeated exertion to the end that [the mind] shall have permanence in this [yogic stillness].[109] (1.13)

And, according to the *Life of Moses*,

> We should show great diligence not to fall away from the perfection which is attainable but to acquire as much as is possible: To that extent let us make progress within the realm of what we seek. For the perfection of human nature consists perhaps in its very growth in goodness. (1§10)

These passages signify process – action done to achieve an end – and the need to exert, struggle, progress in the process. Returning to our reading of the Text in Section III, we have already shown how the *Yoga-Sūtra* conceives of practice as the active part of personal transformation. Practice in the *Yoga-Sūtra* generates spiritual maturity in the *yogin*; and, as the active force for transformation it leads to Yoga's aim.[110] In this practice striving operates by necessity, and this occurs as well in the *Life of Moses*. Our analysis in Section IV discloses the Christian perfect life in virtue as a process of personal transformation. This process relies on the yearning desire, the upward tendency of the mind to carry the Christian to a face to face encounter with God. Clearly both Texts point to striving within, and not alongside a process of personal transformation.

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[109] Interpolation mine.

[110] Spiritual maturity or dispassion is the other part of personal transformation complimenting practice. Within the model of personal transformation provided by the *Yoga-Sūtra*, practice is the active part of the model and dispassion is the change of state occurring in the model.

Vyāsa's commentary on the *Yoga-Sūtra* draws this out explicitly:

> Permanence is the condition of the unfluctuating mind-stuff when it flows on in undisturbed calm. Practice is an effort with this end in view, - a [consequent] energy, a persevering struggle, - the pursuit of the course-of-action-requisite thereto with a desire of effectuating this [permanence].[111] (1.13)

In the *Life of Moses*, this is shown explicitly as Moses ascends Mount Sinai for the second theophany.

> For leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends but also what intelligence thinks it sees, it keeps on penetrating deeper until by the intelligence's yearning for understanding it gains access to the invisible and incomprehensible, and there it sees God. (2§163)

The struggle to attain the goal is clear; accordingly striving, whether yogic or Christian is fundamental to the practitioner. Despite the parallel relationship between striving and personal transformation, the characteristics the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Life of Moses* employ for describing personal transformation differ.

In the *Yoga-Sūtra*, we note the *yogin*'s progression from faith to energy, to mindfulness, to contemplation and that brings about wisdom. In the *Life of Moses*, however, the characteristics of personal transformation are all epistemological. It concerns itself with transforming knowledge of God, where the *Yoga-Sūtra* is concerned with a transformation in the *yogin*. The Text of the *Life of Moses* measures personal transformation as it relates the practicing Christian to God. By contrast, the Text of the *Yoga-Sūtra* is less concerned with measuring transformation as it relates to the goal. It concerns itself with measuring transformation of the yogic practitioner in relation to the practical experience. Faith gives rise to energy, energy is the basis for mindfulness, mindfulness leads to contemplation, and persistent contemplation eventually confers wisdom upon the *yogin*, and these are indices of practice. This seems consonant with our earlier observation. That yogic striving roots itself in practice and Christian striving

[111] Translator's interpolation.

roots itself in God seems clear, and here we have the same correlation with the characteristics disclosing personal transformation. This correlation bears further discussion, something we will touch on in the next section.

In summary, our extra-textual analysis has led to four interesting conclusions. (1) Functionally, striving occupies a similar place within the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Life of Moses*, and thereby in the embodied practice of the *yogin* and the Christian. (2) Despite their functional similarity, there is still a conceptual difference as yogic striving is imagined within practice and privileges the role the practitioner plays in the transformative process. The Christian conception of striving is imagined in relation to God and the ultimate goal of God's friendship. In so doing, it privileges the role God plays in the transformative process. (3) Also, it is apparent that striving is part of personal transformation and not something apart from it. Once again, though, we find an interesting difference in the way each Text conceptualizes their respective personal transformations. (4) The yogic process is concerned with measuring progress as it relates to practical experience, anchoring that experience at the practical pole of personal transformation. On the other hand, the Christian process understands progress in relation to the ultimate end, friendship with God and that relates to the transcendent pole of personal transformation. At this point, the differences noted open interesting avenues for further consideration.

2. Further Considerations

We can now say that yogic striving and personal transformation preferences the practical aspect over the transcendent. In contrast, Christian striving and personal transformation give preference to the transcendent. Underneath the functional correspondence there is a strong dissimilarity in the way each Text speaks of striving and personal transformation. This dissimilarity arises in the way each Text imagines

these ideas and relates them to the practitioner. Whereas some might consider this dissimilarity a weakness in this thesis, I would claim the contrary. The difference in emphasis simply opens the way for deeper inquiry. This is exactly the point made by Clooney's method; the practice of comparison is greater than the observation of similarities and differences.

We observe, according to our opening remarks on the *Life of Moses*, that Gregory is convinced Christian excellence (friendship with God) is ethical rather than mystical. Further, moral progress is both preparation for and response to spiritual illumination and as a process it is never arrested. Taken together, Gregory conceives ethical living, alongside knowledge, as defining the practicing Christian. Yet, our investigation points to the centrality of knowledge in marking the Christian. Is not knowledge of God the feature characterizing the Christian process of personal transformation? The answer to this question is yes! The *Life of Moses* relates more to the transcendent aspect of personal transformation; and, this counters the practical, embodied aspect. But then how are we to think of this in light of Gregory's emphasis on ethical living, an emphasis that is without question embodied and practical? This is precisely what brings us to the importance of this study.

These Texts come together in the comparative discourse because of their treatment of striving and personal transformation. But, here at the end of the project we find their dissimilarity to be the most meaningful aspect of this comparison. The difference is meaningful not because of what it says about the Texts themselves, but because of the potential for deeper inquiry into the meaning of these Texts in a comparative discourse. What is underneath the *Life of Moses*' focus on the transcendent aspect of personal transformation? If our observations about the Text are correct, we might find the embodied dimension of ethical living underneath. With that, a new way of thinking about ethical living unfolds that is not a prescription but a

participation in the Good by virtue of striving and personal transformation. It is at that point the comparative discourse between these Texts opens onto new horizons. It would be fair to say, then, that models of personal transformation do indeed serve as profitable launching points for comparative studies.

V. CONCLUSION

1. Concluding Thoughts

In this brief sketch we by no means exhaust the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Life of Moses* for comparison nor fill the gap of comparative textual studies on Yoga and Christian *praxis*. What we accomplish is a modest beginning. Given the intention to work within context and the boundaries provided by texts, this beginning is profitable. Indeed, the claim this thesis makes – the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the *Life of Moses* point to a similar idea that without striving and personal transformation neither the yogic practitioner nor practicing Christian subsists – is itself a starting point and not a conclusion. Despite the similarity shown between these Texts and how they identify the practitioner, the real potential lies in the differences the similarities contain. It is these differences, perceivable through the comparative discourse, which begs further examination. Unless differences are allowed to speak alongside similarities this would not be discernible.

It is not possible to assimilate fully the *Yoga-Sūtra* into the *Life of Moses*, or the *Life of Moses* into the *Yoga-Sūtra*. Nor is it possible to subsume these two texts into a single, trans-traditional theme like personal transformation or striving. Yes, these texts exhibit correspondences in the way each one thinks about striving and personal transformation. This similarity, when brought together in close proximity (coordinated

reading), discloses an interesting difference that can neither be ignored nor relegated to the background. This difference represents something far more interesting than the similarities unearthed through responsible method and persistent investigation. Indeed, this dissimilarity raises new and more precise questions and effectively deepens the discourse. The concreteness of the comparative project bounded by texts deepens the cross-cultural dialogue in ways mere thematic, experiential, or practical similitude might not. This study is representative of that fact.

In the merging currents of Yoga and Christian *praxis* the need for comparative textual studies is greater than ever.[112] Recent comparisons exhibit the tendency to show the practical and experiential compatibility of these traditions over other concerns. This approach marginalizes the context in which those same practices and experiences are traditionally grounded. Take Ryan's *Prayer of Heart and Body* as an example. As a Christian counselor and guide, Ryan reflects on the experience of yoga practice in light of theological understanding.[113] His book is "written for contemporary Christians who seek a deeper and more satisfying prayer life."[114] But his reflection in "light of theological

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[112] Western culture has heartily embraced India's Yoga. Putting aside questions of the essential compatibility or incompatibility of these traditions, the growing phenomenon of Christian appropriation of Yoga is seemingly here to stay. In a sense, this phenomenon has created an entirely new context for cross-cultural studies. Within contemporary society seemingly distinct traditions are bleeding into one another, effectively blurring traditional lines of inquiry and historically significant contextual boundaries. More specifically, to a modern Christian audience Gregory of Nyssa might be an unknown figure from a distant past whose world and thought may seem irrelevant. That same audience might be well aware, however, of Yoga and the *Yoga-Sūtra* even though this practice is outside the historical boundaries of the Christian tradition. Thus it seems there is no going back to a time when Yoga is not practiced by Christians. In "Dialogue Not Monologue: Benedict XVI & Religious Pluralism" *Commonweal*, 21 October 2005, Francis X. Clooney observes, "But since there is no going back to an age when Catholics did not practice Asian forms of meditation, we need to understand how Asian meditation may help Catholic Christians." Clooney concludes, "Catholics need to engage in the patient practice and careful study of Asian traditions and speak precisely from there" (16). Of central concern here is "what happens when Christians engage in Yoga or Zen without attention to the larger frameworks of philosophy, tradition, and Scripture in which the practices of Eastern meditation have flourished" (16). Because of this, Clooney notes there is a real need to understand these "frameworks" alongside appropriating practices (16). Cross-cultural dialogue should do more than embrace the practices or shared experiences between traditions; it should engage the context (larger frameworks) from which those practices and experiences arise. Arguably texts are one of the richest repositories of yogic philosophy, tradition, and Scripture. If we take Clooney's reflections seriously, then attention must be given to the texts that help define yogic and Christian *praxis*.

[113] Thomas Ryan, 2.

[114] John Vanier, foreword to *Prayer of Heart and Body: Meditation and Yoga in Christian Practices* by Thomas Ryan, 3.

understanding" lacks an attention to context indicative of a critical approach. The imagination and focus of current scholarship is dominated by the need for compatibility and Ryan is emblematic of that need.[115] This need finds expression consistently in transcendent themes, practical application, and common mystical experience.

In pursuing this agenda, current scholarship relegates texts to the margins. This might be attributed to Yoga's attention to practice and lived experience, and the primacy of its oral tradition. On the other hand, this emergent dialogue requires support by critical studies, and among those, text specific studies. Further, these studies must do more than engage practice and shared experience; however, they must engage the contexts out of which these practices and experiences arise. Otherwise, there is danger such scholarship will drive the discourse in the direction of "trans-traditional" similitude without attending to the differences inherent in cross-cultural dialogue. The addition of this study, then, begins to redress the imbalance in the discourse on Yoga and Christian *praxis*. This project, then, suggests how attention to particularity while engaging in a comparative discourse points to a more authentic dialogue: a *dialogue of distinction without separation*. Whereby, the correspondences between these traditions warrant their coming together in dialogue. At the same time, the dialogue's attention to particularity maintains their distinctiveness. This dialogue of distinction without separation offers an alternative for framing these traditions in the comparative discourse.

[115] See note 2 for other examples of comparative studies dealing with Yoga and Christian *praxis*.

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