

**Dr. John J. Thatamanil**  
**Vanderbilt Divinity School**  
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### **Education**

Boston University Division of Religious and Theological Studies, Boston, MA.

**Ph.D. in Religious and Theological Studies.** January 2000. Dissertation Title: "Nonduality and Ecstasy: Sankara and Tillich on Theological Anthropology."

Boston University School of Theology, Boston, MA.

**Master of Divinity.** 1991. *Full Merit Scholarship and Stipend. Magna Cum Laude.*

Washington University, St. Louis, MO.

**Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy & Religion.** 1988.

### **Teaching and Research Positions**

*Assistant Professor of Theology.* Vanderbilt University Divinity School. 2003-

Teach Comparative Theology, Tillich and the Future of Theology, Hindu-Christian Dialogue, Buddhist-Christian Dialogue, Theology of Religious Pluralism, Constructive Christian Theology, and a wide variety of other courses in Christian theology.

*Assistant Professor of Religious Studies.* Millsaps College. 1998-2003.

Taught Comparative Religion with special emphasis on Religions of the East. Taught global religious history in core curriculum course called "Western Heritage in World Perspective." Taught History of Christian Thought and Modern and Contemporary Theology courses.

*Researcher. Comparative Religious Ideas Project.* Boston University. 1995-1998.

Co-participant with comparativists and tradition specialists in three-year research study comparing religious ideas from the world's major traditions. Research Assistant for Professor M. David Eckel.

*Instructor. Religions of the East.*

Taught course providing a philosophical and historical introduction to the religious traditions of India, Sri Lanka, China and Japan focusing on Hinduism, Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. Emerson College: Fall 1994, Spring 1995 and Fall 1995. Boston University: Spring 1994 and Summer 1994.

### **Publications**

#### **Books:**

*Religious Diversity after 'Religion': Rethinking Theology of Religious Pluralism.* Under contract with Fordham University Press. Projected publication date: Fall 2009

*The Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and the Human Predicament.* Fortress Press. September, 2006.

*Mission in the Marketplace: Metropolitan Chrysostom on the Identity and Mission of the Mar Thoma Church.* Thiruvalla, Kerala: CSS Press. 2002. Co-editor, coauthor of introduction, and interviewer of

Metropolitan Philipose Mar Chrysostom, chief bishop of the Mar Thoma Church and leading Indian Christian thinker and churchman.

### **Scholarly Publications:**

“Spiritual Transformation and Transethical Life: Thinking from Advaita.” *Educations and Their Purposes: A Conversation Among Cultures*. Edited by Peter Hershock. University of Hawai’i Press. Forthcoming.

“Tillich and the Postmodern.” *Cambridge Companion to Tillich*. Cambridge University Press. Forthcoming.

“Against the Mystical as Exceptional: A Response to Rob James's *Tillich and World Religions*.” *Bulletin of the North American Paul Tillich Society*. Volume 30:4. pp. 25-28. Fall 2004.

“Toward a Christian Advaita: Sankara, Tillich and Neville in Dialogue.” *Theology in Global Context: Late Modernity, the Religions, and the Future of Christian Theology. Essays in Honor of Robert Cummings Neville*. T&T Clark International. 2004.

“Beyond Number: On the Relational Possibilities of Tillich’s Symbolic and Speculative Trinitarianism.” *Trinity and/or Quaternity: Tillich’s Reopening of the Trinitarian Problem*. Proceedings of the IX International Paul-Tillich-Symposium Frankfurt/Main 2002. Gert Hummel, Doris Lax, eds. Lit-Verlag: Muenster, 2003.

“Liberation.” *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*. Edited by J. Wentzel van Huyssteen. Macmillan. 2003. A comparative analysis of South Asian (Buddhist and Hindu) and Christian perspectives on liberation and their meaning for the relationship between religion and science.

“The Reason-Revelation Dichotomy: Tillich and Milbank on the Relationship between Philosophy and Theology.” *The North American Paul Tillich Society Newsletter*. Volume XXVII, Number 3. Summer 2001.

“Managing Multiple Religious and Scholarly Identities: An Argument for a Theological Study of Hinduism” in special thematic volume “Who Speaks for Hinduism?” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. December 2000, Vol. 68:4. pp. 791-803.

Review of Thangaraj, Thomas. *A Common Task: A Christian Theology of Mission*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999. Reviewed in *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin*, Volume 12, 1999.

Review of King, Richard. *An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought*. Edinburgh University Press. 1999. *World Faiths Encounter*. Fall 2000.

Review of Puligandla, R. *Reality and Mysticism: Perspectives in the Upanisads*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 1997. *International Journal of Hindu Studies*.

### **Op-Ed Pieces, Television Appearances, and Other Publications:**

“War on Christmas: Seattle Background.” An interview with JuJu Chang of ABC News. December 12, 2006. See <http://abcnews.go.com/Video/playerIndex?id=2720028>

“On Becoming a ‘Real American.’” Op-Ed column. Washington Post. August 27, 2006. This piece has appeared in numerous papers across the country including the Alameda Times-Star, Amarillo Globe News, Anniston Star (AL), Contra Costa Times, The Eagle (College Station, TX), Houston Chronicle, Virginian Pilot, and the Wilmington News-Journal among others.

“Working Toward Tenure.” Editor and contributing writer for Chapter 4 of the online *AAR Career Guide for Racial and Ethnic Minorities*. 2005. <http://www.aarweb.org/about/board/rem/careerguide/04.asp>

“Against Explanation and For Consolation: Faith in the Wake of the Tragic A sermon on theodicy in the wake of the South Asian earthquake and tsunami. *The Spire*. Published by Vanderbilt Divinity School. Fall 2005.

“Recommit to Christmas' Reversal of Fortune.” Op-Ed column. Atlanta-Journal Constitution. December 23, 2004.

“Religious fervor envelops politics.” Op-Ed column. Atlanta Journal-Constitution. October, 15 2004.

“Execution Will Add to State's Bad Reputation.” Op-Ed column. Clarion-Ledger. Monday, January 13, 2003.

“The Cries That Bind.” Op-Ed column on anniversary of 9/11. Los Angeles Times. Monday, September 30, 2002.

“Is God on Our Side? Or Is He on Theirs?” Op-Ed column on 9/11. Los Angeles Times. Tuesday, September 25, 2001. This piece has appeared in numerous papers across the country including in Sacramento, CA, Louisville, KY, Youngstown, OH, and Wilmington, DE. The piece was also republished on a number of Muslim websites as well as on the Christianity Today website.

“Casting the First Stone: Reflections on Christian Character and Presidential Politics.” Published in commentary section entitled, “Barbs, Brickbats, and Picking the Best on the Ballot.” *Los Angeles Times*. Sunday, November 5, 2000.

### **Courses Taught**

“Buddhist-Christian Dialogue.” Spring 2006. Vanderbilt Divinity School. Seminar for masters and doctoral students focusing on a close reading of primary Buddhist texts and Christian theological engagements with those texts. Students and instructors practiced several forms of Buddhist meditation and used those practices as sites of theological reflection. The course was co-taught with Rev. Gordon Peerman, an expert with over a decade of experience in Buddhist meditation.

“God and the Other in Relational Theology.” Spring 2006. Vanderbilt Divinity School. This advanced seminar for masters and doctoral students engaged two themes central to contemporary continental philosophy and theology namely “the other” and “relationality.” Figures engaged included Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, Nagarjuna, Charles Hartshorne, Joseph Bracken, John Zizioulas, and Catherine Keller.

“Tillich and the Future of Theology.” Fall 2004 and Fall 2005. Vanderbilt Divinity School. Advanced seminar course for masters and doctoral students focusing on a close reading of Tillich's three volume *Systematic Theology* with an eye to Tillich's possible contribution to the future of constructive Christian theology.

“Comparative Theology.” Fall 2004. Vanderbilt Divinity School. Graduate course introducing comparative

theology with special attention to Hindu and Buddhist traditions of nonduality.

“Eastern Orthodox Theology and Spirituality.” Spring 2004. Vanderbilt Divinity School. Theology Seminar that focused on the theme of *theosis*. Considered the development of the creeds and studied primary texts by key Orthodox theologians including Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory Palamas, and John Zizioulas.

Other courses under construction or taught include Doctoral Seminar: Religious Diversity and Theological Method, Many Paths? Theology of Religious Pluralism, Hindu-Christian Dialogue, Process Theology, Constructive Christian Theology, History of Christian Thought, Modern and Contemporary Theology, South Asian Religions, Hinduism, “Religious Autobiographies: Introduction to Religious Studies,” East Asian Religions, and “Sitting and Being: Zen and Phenomenology” (co-taught with Dr. Kristen Brown of the Millsaps philosophy department).

### **Presentations, Papers, and Invited Lectures**

#### **Conference Presentations and Lectures:**

“Comparing Profs. Smith and Tillich.” A response to Prof. Jonathan Z. Smith’s paper, “Tillich Remains...” which contends that Tillich is perhaps the key but also unfortunate and unacknowledged theoretician of the American study of religion. Washington, DC. November 2006.

“Against Heteronomy: Some Tillichian Reflections on the Role of the Ten Commandments in Public Life.” The Law School, University of Wisconsin, Madison. April 8, 2006.

“Why Tillich is Not (Just) an Ontotheologian: On Tillich’s Indebtedness to Apophatic Theology.” American Academy of Religion. Philadelphia. November 2005.

“Spiritual Transformation, Transethical Life and Comparative Education: Thinking from Advaita.” Ninth East-West Philosophers' Conference. East-West Center. University of Hawaii. May 28, 2005.

“Living With and Learning from Other Faiths: A Christian Reflection on Learning from Hindu Traditions.” Lecture and Participant in Muslim-Christian Dialogue. Invited by Dr. Marc Ellis, Director of Center for American and Jewish Studies. Baylor University. January 23-24, 2004.

“On the Conditions for Avoiding Religious Violence: Best Practices.” International Conference on Cultural Diversity: A Conference of Best Practices for Business, Education, Media and Government. October 31, 2003.

“Beyond Number: Trinity as Symbol in the Thought of Paul Tillich.” Invited lecture presented to the 9<sup>th</sup> International Paul Tillich Symposium. Frankfurt, Germany. May 31, 2002.

“Constructive Hindu Theology Panel.” Hinduism Section. American Academy of Religion. Convened and presided over panel of papers I selected. This event marks the first time in which several Hindu thinkers identified themselves as constructive “Hindu theologians” at the AAR. Denver, CO. November 19, 2001

“The Reason-Revelation Dichotomy: Tillich and Milbank on the Relationship Between Philosophy and Theology.” North American Paul Tillich Society. November 18, 2000.

“Conversion and Tolerance: An Indian Christian Perspective” for a panel on “The Conversion Controversy and the Hindu-Christian Encounter in India Today.” Society for Hindu-Christian Studies. Boston, MA. November 20, 1999.

“Going Native: The Comparative Theologian as Ethnographer.” Center For Folklore Studies. Ohio State University. Columbus, OH. May 22, 1999.

“Is Sankara A Mystic? The Question of Mystical Experience in Sankara's Advaita.” American Academy of Religion. Orlando, FL. November 22, 1998.

“Attitudes towards Violence and Nonviolence in Hinduism and Buddhism.” Naval Chaplains School. Naval War College. Newport, RI. January 8, 1997.

“Is Tillich a Christian Perennialist?” Issues in the Thought of Paul Tillich Group. American Academy of Religion. New Orleans, LA. November 23, 1996.

“Dharma and Beyond: Ritual and the Transcendence of Ritual in Hinduism.” Bentley College. Waltham, MA. October 29, 1996.

“Beyond Inclusivism, Exclusivism and Pluralism: A Critique of Mark Heim and a Positive Appraisal of Neville's Theory of Comparative Categories.” Tri-regional American Academy of Religion Conference. Harvard Divinity School. Cambridge, MA. April 1996.

“Attitudes towards Violence and Nonviolence in Hinduism and Buddhism.” Naval Chaplains School. Naval War College. Newport, RI. January 1996.

“A Critique of Mark Heim's *Salvations*.” Society for Comparative Theology. Boston College. Chestnut Hill, MA. October 1995.

“Faith and Freedom in the Thought of Tillich and Tenkalai Srivaisnavism.” Paper presented to the Society for Comparative Theology. Andover Newton Theological School. Boston, MA. October 1993.

### **Select Public Lectures and Adult Education Series:**

Lecturer and Curricular Leader on Interfaith Dialogue and Hinduism for a weeklong “Interfaith Academy for Religious Leaders,” Sponsored by Religions for Peace USA and St. Paul School of Theology. June 13-20. Kansas City, MO.

“What Gandhi and King Can Teach Us about Interreligious Dialogue,” Keynote Lecture for Interfaith Summit. Interfaith Mission Service, Huntsville, AL. February 22, 2007 and Keynote lecture for Tougaloo College’s “Humanities Festival Week,” March 28, 2007.

“Christian Approaches to Religious Diversity,” Brookmeade Congregational Church, January 7, 14, 21, 2007.

“Reimagining Immanence: Toward a Christian Nondualism.” Lecture to doctoral theology seminar. Drew Theological School, Madison, NJ. October 4, 2006.

Convocation Sermon, “Salvation is from the Jews,” and Public Lecture, “Whither Theologies of Religious Pluralism? Demise or Rebirth.” Seabury-Western Theological Seminary. Evanston, IL. October 19, 2006.

“Tillich’s *Dynamics of Faith*.” Six week Sunday School Series. St. Augustine’s Episcopal Chapel, Nashville, TN. September 10-October 15, 2006.

“Christian Approaches to Religious Diversity.” Bellevue United Methodist Church, Nashville, TN. March 19, 26, and April 2, 2006.

### **Professional and Scholarly Societies**

#### *Religious Studies Review*

Comparative Studies Area Editor. Fall 2005-

#### *American Academy of Religion*

Student Director and Member of the Board of Directors. 1993-1995.

Member. 1991-Present.

Chair, Theological Education Steering Committee..

#### *North American Paul Tillich Society*

President. Fall 2003-Fall 2004.

President-Elect and Program Chair. Fall 2002- Fall 2003.

#### *Tillich: Issues in Theology, Religion, and Culture*

Steering Committee: Fall 2001-Present.

#### *Society for Hindu-Christian Studies*

Member of the Board of Directors: Fall 1999-2001.

Member 1995-2004.

### **Workgroups, Committees, and Consultations:**

Chair, AAR’s Theological Education Steering Committee. Fall 2006-2009. This committee is charged with attending to the needs of AAR’s theological constituency.

Workgroup for Constructive Theology. 2004-Present.

Theological Programs Initiative. American Academy of Religion. One of several theological educators invited to talk about what the AAR can do to support the distinctive needs of theological educators. June 29, 2005.

Working Group of AAR’s Racial and Ethnic Minorities Group responsible for writing an Online Career Guide. March 5-6, 2005. I have edited and contributed to one chapter in this Career Guide.

Consultation for Asians/Asian North Americans in Theological Education. February 4-6, 2005.

### **Grants and Awards**

#### *Rhodes Consultation on the Future of the Church-Related College*

Applied for and received an individual grant and an Institutional Renewal Grant (\$5000) for Millsaps College to support conversations and programming about what it means to be a church-related college.

Organized several public lectures, discussions, colloquia, and participated in regional and national

conferences on church-relatedness.

*Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion Grant/Workshop for Pre-Tenure Faculty at Church-Related Colleges and Universities*

Awarded \$3000 competitive grant to participate in three workshops on teaching and learning. Also a follow-up \$7000 Summer Research Grant for Summer 2003.

### **Fieldwork in India**

*Kuppuswami Shastri Research Institute at Sanskrit College, Madras.* Research on Sankara and Advaita Vedanta. April-August 1996.

*Tutorial/Private Study with Swami Paramarthananda*

Regular reading and discussion meetings with Swami Paramarthananda of Madras. Studied key texts by Sankara in Sanskrit. April-August 1996.

*Boston Theological Institute Study of Indian Christianity Tour. Educational Guide. Summer 1995.*

Served as guide for faculty and students from several Boston theological institutions (Boston University School of Theology, Harvard Divinity School, Andover Newton Theological School, etc.) in a study tour of Indian Christianity and its relationship to Hinduism. Visited Madurai, Kottayam, Varanasi, Bangalore, Agra, and other locations of importance.

### **Languages**

Sanskrit: Able to read philosophical Sanskrit.

French: Reading for scholarly use.

Malayalam: Native speaker.