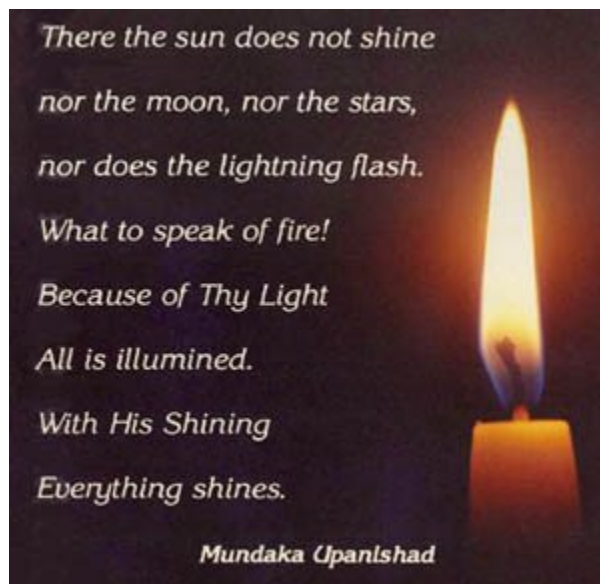


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RENEWING CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY IN TERMS OF KASHMIR SHAIVISM

JOHN DUPUCHE

Introduction

My good friend Bettina Bäumer¹ relates the following story:

“It was a seminar in Vienna University where [Karl Rahner] also spoke and I gave my first ever paper on KS [Kashmir Shaivism] on anupāya. After listening very attentively, he took me aside after the discussion and said [Wir sind nur Waisenkinder] [which she glosses as] “we are orphans compared to what these Indians have discovered!” (Waisenkinder means we are far behind or more primitive, spiritually).”²

The first generations of Christians moved out of the Jewish framework into the thought-world of the Greeks and reinterpreted their faith in a new way. Now with the end of the colonial era, where the East was interesting only if it was exotic, we are witnessing a massive new shift. Rahner’s comment to Bettina Bäumer reflects his awareness that the Hindu thought must profoundly affect Christian theology, making Christians qualify categories and images that are so familiar as to be unquestioned.

¹ Prof. Dr. Bettina Bäumer, Institute of Religious Studies, University of Vienna.

² Personal communication, 9 April 2004.

Christian anthropology, as presently understood, is profoundly dualistic: God and man, heaven and earth, nature and grace, faith and reason, Church and State, sin and grace, good and evil etc. But St Paul says: “all are one in Christ Jesus”.³ New anthropologies are needed.⁴

The method of this paper is to present some aspects of Indian and Christian thought. I will weave between Christianity and Kashmir Shaivism ending not with syncretism but reinterpretation. I will speak of consciousness in place of the word ‘God’, of emanation in place of creation, of ignorance in place of sin, recognition in place of redemption, of identity instead of faith, of universal bliss instead of eternal life.

These pairs of terms – consciousness / God etc. – are not deemed to be equivalent. Neither are they being compared but only connected. What light can one throw on the other? What questions are posed? Can the Christian experience be expounded – not falsely – in these terms, given, as we know, that Christian vocabulary cannot adequately express Christian experience? Can these Sanskrit terms become the vehicle for a theology which leads to the knowledge of the Christ who exceeds all that can be said of him?

This attempt will be the beginnings of a Shaiva Christianity or a Christian Shaivism. It is part of the future task of theology. In the opinion of David Tracy “the inter-religious dialogue will become an integral part of all Christian theological thought.”⁵

God and consciousness

In the Shaivism of Kashmir, consciousness, also called ‘Śiva’, is pure awareness without any object of awareness. However, consciousness is not ignorant of itself. Awareness is self-aware not dividedly but identically. This auto-illumination of consciousness is the Supreme Word (*paravāc*) and is expressed as “I am” (*aham*). This consciousness is not the impersonal Brahma as in the famous phrase “Thou art That” (*tat-tvam-asi*) which is found in the reflections of Raimon Panikkar. Rather, in Kashmir Shaivism the ultimate reality is supremely personal but not individual, always Subject and never object.

The divine Subject cannot, therefore, ultimately be the object of fitting discourse but transcends all that can be said. Discourse about God gives way to silence and union, not as subject to subject but as identity, one Subject, “God who is all in all.”⁶

Creation and emanation

a. Like the mirror which can reflect any object precisely because it does not necessarily portray any particular object, so too the Supreme Word contains every expression and is limited to none. Out of freedom (*svātantrya*), indeed out of a sense of play (*līlā*) the Word is expressed in the multiplicity of the universe. This universe is

³ Gal. 3.28.

⁴ Cardinal Ratzinger, in the recent *ad limina* visit of the Australian Catholic Bishops “spoke of the need for the Church to present a Christian anthropology which opens out to the world a deeper understanding of the human condition A positive vision of what it means to be a human being...” Letter of Archbishop Hart, dated 1 April 2004, to all priests of the Archdiocese.

⁵ David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other; The inter-religious Dialogue*. Louvain, Peeters Press, 1990. p.94.

⁶ I Cor.15.28.

therefore the expression of Consciousness who both transcends the expression and is the expression; just as the dancer is the stance he adopts and is not confined to that stance. Śiva is his work, yet at the same time transcends his work. The universe is the dance of Śiva Naṭarāja ('Lord of the Dance').

This dance is at the same time emanation (*śṛṣṭi*), maintenance (*stithi*) and dissolution (*saṃhāra*) since all is flux and change in this vibrating universe.

b. A few words now, on the Judeo-Christian idea of creation, which may at first seem totally different from the Hindu view.

The Hebrew word *ōlām* first meant both heaven and earth. It is only in later Hebrew that it came to mean the 'world'. The Greek word *kosmos*, for its part, refers to the order of the universe formed out of pre-existent chaos.⁷ The Septuagint, therefore, in choosing the word *kosmos* to translate the Hebrew *ōlām* colours the meaning of this latter term.

The term *kosmos* occurs most frequently in the Johannine writings, some 105 times, which is two and a half times more frequently than in the rest of the New Testament.⁸ It can have a quite neutral meaning in itself⁹ although it is full of possibility because the *kosmos* proceeds from the *logos* and is essentially linked to it.¹⁰ The word *kosmos* can also have a positive meaning because God loves the world.¹¹ Later in the Gospel it acquires a negative meaning when the world is seen as hostile to Jesus.¹²

c. It is against this Greek view of *kosmos* formed out of *chaos* that Athanasius teaches the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.

"Prior to the debates of Athanasius with Arius, the theory of *creatio ex nihilo* was propounded, if at all, with uncertainty ... [but] with this assertion of *creatio ex nihilo* came a recognition by Athanasius of a clear and substantial distinction between God and the created order, between the uncreated, non-contingent and asomatic Creator and the contingent and somatic creation, called into being from nothing by the will of God."¹³

This Athanasian view has become dominant even though an emanationist interpretation of creation is available in the neo-Platonic Christian tradition.¹⁴

The seeming opposition between Hindu emanation and Athanasian creation may not, however, be insuperable. In Hindu thought there is a distinction between the expresser and the expression but not a separation. The term 'mantra' can refer both to the deity and to the phonic expression of that deity, to the reciter and to the mantra she recites. The speaker

⁷ Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John*. New York, Doubleday and Company Inc. 1966, Vol.1, p.508.

⁸ N.H. Cassem, "A Grammatical and Contextual Inventory of the use of *kosmos* in the Johannine Corpus with some Implications for a Johannine Cosmic Theology," *NTS* 19 (1972-1973) 81.

⁹ Jn. 3.16. See also Jn 11.9 ; 17.5, 24; 21.25.

¹⁰ Brown, Raymond *The Gospel according to John*. New York, Doubleday and Company Inc. 1966, Vol.1, p.25.

¹¹ Jn 1.29; 3.16; 4.42; 6.51; 8.12; 9.5.

¹² See 12.31; 14.17, 22, 27, 30; 15.18-19; 16. 8, 11, 20, 33; 17.6, 9, 14-16.

¹³ Alwyn Pettersen, *Athanasius and the Human Body*, Bristol, The Bristol Press, 1990. p. 5.

¹⁴ Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other*. p.86.

both transcends her word and is her word. When the speaker fully communicates herself, she and her word are not dual but identical, distinct but not divided. The one leads to the other; the one is the other and, even if our minds construct a separation, in reality there is none. The analogue for understanding the formation of the world, therefore, can be the dancer or the poet or prophet rather than the architect. Indeed, the first account in Genesis sees creation as a prophetic act. God is his word and transcends his word. But word is work and work is word. The work of creation is God and is not God. This is all the more true in the Indian philosophical system, which is based on the word rather than on objective reality, on revelation rather than on being (*esse*).

Sin and ignorance

Similarly, in the Shaivism of Kashmir the human being is the expression of Śiva and in that sense is Śiva. The human being is, therefore, essentially Śiva who in the inmost depth of human consciousness speaks the primordial Word and proclaims, “I am” (*aham*). To quote Jacques Dupuis,

“God has been reached from both ends, as the “Father in heaven” and as more intimate to myself than I am“ (*interior intimo meo*) (St Augustine, Confessions III.6.11).”¹⁵

However, the expression is also a limitation. The emanation of the world is both an expression of the divine Light (*prakāśa*) and a concealment (*tirodhāna*) of that Light which continues to diminish until it reaches the state of inertia (*jaḍatā*), just as the ripples in the pond eventually peter out. Thus Śiva delights to be his opposite, consciousness being reduced to ignorance, light being completely obscured.

The human being who does not understand these things sees herself as merely human. The individual says: ‘I am this person and not that person. I am such and not otherwise.’ This divisive attitude is an error, an ignorance (*avidyā*), which is not a lack of information but an absence of wisdom. It is even a lie, since in the depths of one’s being the truth is always known. This failure to understand is the primary fault or stain (*mala*) confusing the individual self (*ahamkāra*) with the universal Self (*aham*), either to inflate the importance of the individual self or to reduce the universal self to the human level.

It is said, in classical Catholic moral theology, that for a sin, either of commission or omission, to be perpetrated there must be sinful matter, knowledge and consent. The sin is grave if all three elements are grave and full; the sin is venial if one of the elements is partial. Knowledge would seem, therefore, to be a constituent part of the sinful act. However, there are many texts in the Gospel which also describe sin as ignorance. Not only the famous ‘Father, forgive them; they do not know not what they are doing’ (Lk 23.34), but also: ‘Blind? If you were, you would not be guilty, but since you say, “We see”, your guilt remains.’(Jn 9.41) Or again: ‘The [servant] who did not know [what his master wants], but deserves to be beaten for what he has done, will receive fewer strokes.’ (Lk 12.48) The ‘strokes of the lash’ are given, even though there is no conscious act of disobedience.

¹⁵ Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*. Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 2002. p.123.

Ignorance (*avidyā*) in Kashmir Shaivism is a failure to know the truth; an absence of enlightenment which means that the individual cannot but perform acts which are disastrous both personally and for others. Revelation is not only concerning the good but also concerning the true nature of evil.

The acknowledgment of the Self (*ahaṃ*) does not involve the elimination of the individual self (*ahaṃkāra*). Absorption (*saṃhāra*) does not mean annihilation but reinterpretation: understanding that the limited self is an expression of the true self and that one is really “I am”. It is extremely difficult to cease identifying with the individual self. Indeed, in Scriptural terms it is a ‘dying to oneself’.¹⁶ This is more than the elimination of unrighteous thoughts and actions, the abandonment of selfishness. It is a fundamental change of perception, a rebirth, and regeneration.

Even if the soul is declared to be immortal¹⁷ it is not absolute and does not necessarily exist. It could, if God so willed, simply cease to exist. No ultimate reliance can be placed upon the soul or the will. The individual self is indeed real and not imaginary, but is essentially contingent and in this sense profoundly unreal. Only God is truly real.

This ignorance leads to acts that are absurd and divisive, bearing a harvest of unfortunate consequences (*karma*), which may take lifetimes to redress.

Where the Western mind distinguishes in order to understand, the Hindu mind absorbs in order to perceive the essential nature of things. The Western mind says ‘one is not the other’; the Hindu mind says that one is essentially the other: *sarvaṃ-sarvātmakaṃ*

Redemption and recognition

The purpose of the teachings of Kashmir Shaivism is to lead the disciple to the act of recognition (*pratyabhijñā*) where he recognises his essential truth and concomitantly understands the relative nature of his individual self. He comes to see that his individual self is essentially an expression of the divine self and that his essential reality is divine. St Paul puts it perfectly: “I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me.”¹⁸ According to Kashmir Shaivism, the saving moment is essentially a change of perception. The practitioner turns away from idolising all limited things and recognises the essential nature of reality. This dying to oneself is not just a moral attitude, but also a profound change of perception, a new ontology. The individual self ceases to be the centre of focus and is reabsorbed (*saṃhāra*) into its origin.

Faith and identity

If faith implies devotion, and if devotion is understood to mean separation, there is no place for that sort of faith in Kashmir Shaivism. If, however, faith implies identity (*tādātmya*) then Kashmir Shaivism is profoundly concerned with faith, for its aim is to acquire identity with Śiva, indeed to attain the very state of Śiva (*śivatā*). It is a resting; not

¹⁶ Cf. Mk 8.35.

¹⁷ Ecumenical Council Lateran V, Bull “Apostolici regiminis”. In Denzinger H and Schönmetzer A. *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, no.1440. Freiburg im Breisgau, Herder, 1967. p.353.

¹⁸ Gal.2.19.

in a separate self but in one's own true self (*sva-ātma-viśrantī*) identified with the divine Self.

Panikkar puts it well:

The Christian identity is to be identified with the Firstborn of the Cosmos. ... To be a catholic, for me, means the conviction, the belief that the Divine Spirit ... has descended upon me ...making of me not another Christ (*alius Christus*) but the same Christ (*ipse Christus*) ...¹⁹

Eternal life and universal bliss

The act of recognition leads to the divine state which is not self-absorption but universal bliss (*jagad-ānanda*); a state beyond action (*kalpa*) and thought (*vikalpa*), a state transcending thought (*nirvikalpa*) and which all thoughts and actions only partially express. The practitioner is not aloof from the world but fully present. The panoply is not something apart from her but is indeed her very self, the expression of her own being, and is therefore welcomed as she welcomes her own self.

This is the 'attitude of Bhairava' (*bhairava-mudrā*), where, if the meditator looks within, into his own heart, he sees the whole world; if he opens his eyes and looks upon the world, he sees himself, for the world and he are one. Whether the eyes are open or shut he sees the same. His eyes are both open and shut, for he is in the world as in his own body but not defined by it.

It is not a state available only after death but can be achieved in time. The practitioner is liberated while alive (*jīvan-mukti*), so that his every word is mantra and his every act is ritual.

St Augustine, on seeing a drunken man, said in all humility and against the Pelagians, "There but for the grace of God go I". The outlook proposed by Kashmir Shaivism would add: 'He is not apart from me, someone other than me. He is my very self.'

Indeed, true knowledge of an object is possible only by identification with that object. I can truly know the mountain only if I am the mountain. Only God can truly know God, only God can fully worship God.²⁰ That is why Jesus, the true High Priest, must be "God from God, Light from Light". Furthermore, if God wishes to speak to humans it is only by means of the divine Word being also human. Again, if God is to be worshipped by humans it is only by humans being divine. The Christian can truly know God only by being God in a profound sense, by means of *theosis*,

The means of coming to recognition

In order to achieve that result, Kashmir Shaivism proposes four means (*upāya*), which are based on four forms of knowledge.

a. The forms of knowledge:

¹⁹ Raimon Panikkar, "On Christian identity" in Cornille, Catherine (ed.) *Many Mansions.*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 2002. p.139.

²⁰ This is a commonplace of Hindu thought.

The simple statement ‘I see the mountain’ distinguishes clearly between three forms of knowledge: firstly the object of knowledge, the mountain; next, the means of knowledge, the seeing; and lastly the knowing subject, the viewer, ‘I’. Thus there is object (*prameya*), means, (*pramāṇa*) and subject (*pramātr*). However this division into three is transcended by a fourth: where all are unified as one; where the object known, the means of knowledge and the subject are one and the same, namely the knower (*pramiti*).²¹ In other words, the Self sees the Self by means of the Self. Indeed, all is simply the Self, “I am”. All is light.²²

b. The four means (*upāya*), which was the topic of Bettina Bäumer’s paper that so impressed Karl Rahner, are based on those four forms of knowledge and each can lead to the ‘attitude of Bhairava’.

The least exalted method is based on the object, i.e. on practices that are varied according to the character of the practitioner. The next is based on the means of knowledge where, by reasoning and reflection, he comes to the act of recognition. The next focuses on the subject where the subject more directly and immediately perceives his own true nature. But that method is still imperfect because the practitioner sees himself as distinct from the means and the object of knowledge.²³

c. The most exalted means is really a non-means (*anupāya*) because in fact there is no path to follow: the goal is reached suddenly and totally, due to an intense descent of energy (*śakti-pāta*), an immense outpouring of grace (*anugraha*). Nothing more is to be done; there is no need for repeated practice or deeper understanding.

“The revelation [of this Light] is given once and for all, after which there is no means.”²⁴

“The reality of Consciousness shines forth by its own radiance. What is the value, therefore of those [means to make him known]?”²⁵

The *anupāya* is described largely in negative terms since the light of consciousness cannot be described by what is less than the fullness of that light:

“The supreme state is neither ‘being’ nor ‘non-being’, neither duality [nor non-duality], for it is beyond the realm of words. It is located on the apophatic (*akathya*) level. It is with energy, it is without energy.”²⁶

²¹ This is fourth in the listing but in fact underlies all three separate forms.

²² This notion of light seeing its light by means of its own light is found in the theology of Gregory Palamas, the last of the Greek Doctors of the Church. He makes a very striking analogy with the eye. After referring to St Paul (II Cor.12.2) he pictures a sun of infinite radiance and size - at the centre of which all stands but now transformed into an eye. Paul, like that eye, is in light and seeing light. There are no limits. “If [the visual faculty] looks at itself it sees light; if it looks at the object of its sight that is also light; and if it looks at the means it uses to see, that too is light; that is what union is: let all that be one.” *Triads*, II.3.36. London, SPCK, 1983. p.66.

²³ “(In this method *śāmbhavupāya* there is still) a conception of a difference between method and goal (*upāya-upēya-kalpanā*), whereas (in the case of *anupāya*) there is not even a trace of any difference. For in the non-way, who is to be liberated, how and from what?” *TĀ* 3.272-273. Bettina Bäumer, ‘The Four Spiritual Ways (*upāya*) in the Kashmir Śaiva Tradition’ in *Regional Spiritualities*, pp.17-18.

²⁴ *sakrt-syād-deśanā paścād-anupāyatvam-ucyate* // *TĀ* 2.2b.

²⁵ *saṃvit-tattvaṃ sva-prakāśam-ity-asmin-kiṃ nu yuktibhiḥ* / *TĀ* 2.10a.

²⁶ *na bhāvo na-apy-abhāvo na dvayaṃ vācām-agocarāt* /

“[The Light of consciousness] is not a mantra, not a divinity whose mantra is recited, nor a reciter of mantras. [The Light] is neither initiation nor initiator nor initiated: It is the supreme Lord.”²⁷

Therefore the usual acts of religion are unnecessary:

“For them there is no mantra, no meditation, no cultic worship, nor visualisation, nor the commotion involved in ordinary initiation, consecration of the master etc.”²⁸

Conflicting emotions also lose their significance:

“[For those who have attained this highest state], notions of pleasure and pain, fear and anguish, disappear completely: the knower has arrived at supremely non-differentiated thought.”²⁹

The practitioner who has achieved this state is not introverted. Rather, universal bliss confers universal bliss.

“They have no other work to accomplish but to confer grace”.³⁰

“The worldly person works assiduously for himself, and does nothing in favour of others, but the one who, having overcome all impurities, has achieved the divine state works solely for the benefit of others.”³¹

d. However, according to the thirteenth century commentator Jayaratha, the term ‘non-means’ (*an-upāya*) can also be understood as ‘a very reduced means’ (*alpopāya*)³² or a ‘subsidiary means’ (*parikaratvam*).³³ He lists a certain number of the reduced means.

“The sight of the Perfected Beings and *yoginīs*, the eating of the ‘oblation’, a teaching, a transition (?) (*saṃkramaḥ*), spiritual practice, service of the Teacher.”³⁴

Any one of these is sufficient to bring a person to full realisation, suddenly and without any need to engage in practices to deepen the realisation.

Yet, the ones who receive such an immense outpouring of grace are few in number. The vast majority of beings need to follow one or other of the three lesser paths, according to the measure of grace given to them:

akathya-pada-virūḍhaṃ śaktisthaṃ śakti-varjitam // TĀ 2.33.

²⁷ *na mantrō na ca mantryo ‘sau na ca mantrayitā prabhuḥ /*

na dikṣā dikṣako vā-api na dikṣāvān-maheśvaraḥ // TĀ 2.26.

²⁸ *eṣāṃ na mantrō na dhyānaṃ na pūjā na-api kalpana /*

na samayya-ādika-ācārya-paryantaḥ ko ‘pi vibhramaḥ // TĀ 2. 37.

²⁹ *eteṣāṃ sukha-dukhaḥ-aṃśa-saṃkā-taṃka-vikalpanāḥ /*

nirvikalpa-para-āveśa-mātr-aśeṣatvam-āgatāḥ // TĀ 2.36.

³⁰ *na-anugrahāt-param kimcic-cheṣa-vṛttau prayojanam // TĀ 2.38b.*

³¹ *svaṃ kartavyaṃ kim-api kalayaṃ-lloke eṣa prayatnān-*

no pāra-arthyam prati dhaṭayate kāmcaṇa sva-pravṛttim /

yas-tu dhvasta-akhila-labhava-malo bhairavī-bhāva-pūrṇaḥ

krtyaṃ tasya sphuṭam-idam-iyal-loka-kartavya-mātram // TĀ 2.39.

³² *Tantrāloka* vol.2. p.312, line 13.

³³ *Tantrāloka* vol.7. p.3420, line12.

³⁴ *siddhānāṃ yoginīnāṃ ca darśanaṃ caru-bhojanam /*

kathanaṃ saṃkramaḥ śāstre sādhanam guru-sevanam // Tantrāloka, Vol. 2, p.312 lines 13-14.

“However, those whose consciousness is not utterly pure receive grace only by following one of the paths.”³⁵

Jesus of Nazareth

What sort of Kashmir Shaiva Christology emerges from all this?

On seeing (*darśanam*) Jesus or hearing a teaching (*kathanam*), the disciple experiences his own consciousness expanding. He then knows both Jesus and his own self, and indeed realises that Jesus is his own very self, for only like can see like, only the same can see the same. In fact, not only is the self of Jesus the very self of the disciple but the whole world too is an expression of the one Self. In short, the sight and teaching of Jesus are examples of the “very reduced means” (*alpoṇyā*) noted above.

But more; in contemplating Jesus and so arriving at consciousness, the disciple penetrates to the utterly Transcendent (*anuttara*) so that it becomes clear to him that Jesus of Nazareth is essentially the “I am”, the Supreme Word (*paravāc*), the self-revelation of Consciousness.

Since from that Expression all other expressions derive, Jesus looks upon the world and sees it as the expression of his self. Jesus is the Lord of the Dance.

“He is the image of the unseen God and the first-born of all creation... for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth ... all things were created through him and for him....”³⁶

In the events of the Sacred Triduum Jesus knows both the depths and the height; knowing good and evil, able to descend lower than any because he knows the height. The Paschal Mystery is the moment of supreme revelation. Although the Word of God has been revealed in various ways since the dawn of time, the Word incarnate is best able to reveal to flesh, since flesh needs flesh. Flesh best reveals flesh to itself. In the fullness of his living and dying he is the perfect expression of heaven and earth. Jesus, therefore, is able to provide the knowledge which leads to the utterly Transcendent (*anuttara*). He is the Light that brings all to Light. The Word made flesh makes all flesh Word.

God wanted ... all things to be reconciled through him and for him, everything in heaven and everything on earth.”³⁷

All is non-dual (*a-dvaita*). All is one.

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³⁵ *na-anirmala-citaḥ puṁso 'nugrahas-tv-anupāyakaḥ // TĀ 2.47b.*

³⁶ Col.1.15-16.

³⁷ Col.1.19-20.

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Rev. Dr. John Dupuche is a parish priest and lectures at Monash University at Centre for Studies in Religion and Theology



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