

The Professor and the *Paramahansa*: Martin Luther and Ramakrishna Compared

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Abstract

The spiritual odyssey of the sixteenth-century German religious reformer Martin Luther and the nineteenth-century Hindu priest of Goddess Kali of colonial Calcutta Ramakrishna *Paramahansa* reveals some intriguing contrasts and convergences. Both were radically different personalities in respect of their cultural background, social outlook, and theological consciousness, especially in their understanding of human-divine relationship. Luther's Judeo-Christian conception of God as a transcendent and absolutely sovereign and yet a merciful deity was markedly different from Ramakrishna's Vaisnavic image of God as a loving and playful companion of the devotee. Yet their spiritual experiences in their quest for the divine show a similar reliance on faith [*fiducia*] and devotion [*bhakti*]. This comparative exercise thus seeks to show an interesting convergence between Protestant faith and Hindu devotion.

Keywords: *Bhakti*, *Fiducia*, Kali, Luther, *Paramahansa*, Ramakrishna, *Samadhi*, Vaisnava

Prolegomena

This paper begins with two events occurring in South Asia and Central Europe—late colonial Bengal in what would shortly be the British Indian Empire and Electoral Saxony in the Holy Roman Empire—in two distinct and distant time periods. In 1856 at the newly built shrine of the Goddess Kali at Dakshineshvar, an obscure suburb of north Calcutta, a twenty-year old nearly crazy Brahmin priest, presumably naked, was seen trying to offer ritual food to the deity while feeding a feline and cajoling the stone idol to eat. On another occasion, he was seen placing the ritual food in the mouth of the idol and then biting part of the sacred food himself and again trying to feed the image (*LP*, 1 [Sadhakabhava]: 121; Barman, 2003: 163). Sometimes he would hug the idol or climb on its shoulders or hold jocular *tête-à-tête* with the idol of Shiva lying prostrate under the deity's feet. Though the temple owner, the dowager Rani Rasmani (1793-1861), widow of the great landowner Rajchandra Das (1783-1836), and her son-in-law, the shrewd temple manager, Mathuranath Biswas (1817-71), were initially scandalized by the report of the shocking behavior of the temple priest, they later came to terms with his behavior deeming it an act of intense devotion (Mitra, 1304 B.E.: 103-6). He thus continued in temple service with impunity as dismissing him would severely importune the low caste owner and manager in procuring another Brahmin priest to perform the daily worship of the temple deity. The name of this eccentric and nonchalant priest is Gadadhar Chattopadhyay (nickname Gadai, 1836-86), who would assume his popular moniker Ramakrishna *Paramahansa* and acquire celebrity as a fully realized saint of late colonial India. (Note 1)

Almost 350 years earlier, sometime around 1507-8, in the little university town of Erfurt in the Electoral duchy of Saxony, Holy Roman Empire, a manic depressive but stupendously gifted young monk named Martin Luther (or Luder, 1483-1546), while reading at the choir of the Augustinian monastery Christ's cure of a young man possessed by a dumb spirit in the Gospel of Mark (9:14-29), suffered a sudden seizure, raving and roaring like a raging bull: "*Ich bin's nit*" "*Ich bin's nit*"—"it's not me" "it's not me." He had so identified himself with the bedeviled youth of the Gospel that he turned maniacally fearful of devil's possession of his soul and so sought to deny his identity to save himself from the wrath of God (Erikson, 1958: 92). (Note 2)

These two instances from across time and space illustrate two radically different experiences of human-divine encounter—in the case of Hindu Ramakrishna an affectionate filial relationship while in Christian Martin's case a moral-legal relationship between a judge and a sinner. Although comparison, especially facile comparison,

could often be invidious, yet Ramakrishna's life, spiritual struggle, and teachings offer multiple parallels as well as significant contrasts with those of the early modern German theologian Martin Luther. Both men were born in an agrarian society—Gadadhar in Kamarpukur village in a poor Brahmin priest's family and Martin in the home of a modestly well-off copper miner turned businessman of the town of Eisleben, Saxony. (Note 3) Both sought to establish direct liaison with God, albeit in their respective culturally determined way, and both struggled to overcome their human frailties and faults. Both also made a major impact on their societies in a critical period of transition—Luther at the onset of early modern times in western and central Europe triggered by the Renaissance Humanism and Ramakrishna at the advent of modernity in colonial Calcutta inspired by the Bengal Renaissance. And yet the puzzling irony of this comparative analysis is that both were so dissimilar in their personal background, their attitude to human sexuality, their understanding of the divine, and their social consciousness and outlook.

Luther's Devil and Ramakrishna's Evil

Both Ramakrishna and Luther have been credited and discredited respectively with miraculous birth, the former (February 17, 1836) reputed to be conceived by a divine source or force while the latter (November 10, 1483) an offspring of the Devil. As Ramakrishna's mother Chandramani (1791-1876) confessed, she felt herself heavy (pregnant) following the forcible penetration of a draft of wind emanating from the Shiva *lingam* in the temple *sanctum* she had visited for purposes of worship. At this time Chandra's husband Kshudiram Chattopadhyay (1775-1843) had been away from home traveling to Gaya, a holy place in Bihar, eastern India. (Note 4) The remarkable account of Luther's mysterious birth was popularized by his opponents, in particular by Cochlaeus. According to this story, Martin's mother Margaretha (Hanna) Luder née Lindemann (d. 1531), a bath maid at Eisleben, was impregnated by the Devil and Martin was begotten as a result of this ghastly union. Hence, though really human, Martin Luther was but a child of Satan—in Cochlaeus's idiom, "the seven-headed dragon," interestingly somewhat akin to the ten-headed demon king Ravana of the Hindu epic *Ramayana* (Cochlaeus 1529 cited in Oberman, 2006: 4; see also Brooks, 1983). (Note 5) The story of Ramakrishna's "immaculate" conception has been propagated by his devotees and disciples probably with a view to bringing his birth at par with the Christian theology of Immaculate Conception and thereby establishing Ramakrishna's divine connection. Thus we have both men born mysteriously but affected differently—the Saxon an abject victim of salacious canard of his adversaries and the Bengali an object of awe of his admirers.

In spite of such superficial resemblance (miraculous birth) and, as will be seen later, stark contrast between the lives of both individuals, there is yet a tantalizing similarity in their exertion for moral purity and holiness. Both Luther and Gadadhar were assailed by an ontological guilt complex. Luther, we are told, was constantly fighting his devil, the sin of Adam, in order to make himself worthy in the eye of God. A powerful argument has it that the Satan in fact contributed significantly to the ultimate resolution of Luther's spiritual crisis and thus to his theology of cross that was inspired by his awareness of the diabolical presence of the power of anti-good and anti-God Satan. As Heiko Oberman observes,

there is no way to grasp Luther's milieu of experience and faith unless one has an acute sense of his view of Christian existence between God and the Devil without a recognition of Satan's power, belief in Christ is reduced to an idea about Christ—and Luther's faith becomes a confused delusion in keeping with the tenor of his time (Oberman, 2006: 104).

To the Devil's demand that Luther acknowledge the "fact" that he was a sinner, the reformer would declare at the resolution of his existential-spiritual struggle that, indeed, he was one, but he was also a sinner who knew that all his sins belong to Christ. "This wonderful gift of God I am not prepared to deny (in my response to the Devil), but want to acknowledge and confess," he averred (Oberman, 2006: 105-6). (Note 6)

Ramakrishna constantly professed his ongoing struggle against his twin external devils, *kamini-kanchana* [lust and lucre], and an internal devil, the *papapurusa* [sinner man or *homo peccator*] within him in order to realize the divine. He strove to overcome the former while, to his utter relief, he had a vision of the *papapurusa*—"a jet black person with red eyes and a hideous appearance"—emanate from his body and killed by another apparition also coming out of his body, a veritable *sangfroid*—"a serene person clad in ochre-colored robe holding a trident" (*LP*, 1 [Sadhakabhava]: 128)—most probably Ramakrishna's intended vision of Shiva, his divine father. As to *kanchana*, literally gold and symbolizing lucre, he had little qualms in leading a comfortable life or even buying personal property or gold ornament for his wife, while making a public confession of his adverse physical reaction at touching coins or sermonizing on the worthlessness of money: "money-mud, mud-money"

[*taka mati, mati taka*] (*LP*, 1 [Sadhakabhava]: 158; *KM*, IV: 255 [GR: 845]. Diary of September 2, 1885). Far from being a case of Ramakrishna's unique demonstration of aversion to riches, this was a well-known medieval practice of the Hindus—"an application of the Sankara Vedantic formula of *Brahman satyam jaganmithya* ["Brahman is real and the world an illusion"] to acquire absolute indifference to the temptations of worldly wealth" (Pal, 1964: 29).

Luther's Spiritual Crisis and its Resolution

The story of how Luther and Ramakrishna arrived at a resolution of their respective spiritual crisis offers striking parallels. Actually Luther's career in religion was inspired not by any premeditated decision thoughtfully arrived at, but literally by a concatenation of accidents. A brilliant student since his childhood, Luther obtained the *Magister Artium* in 1505. Then he turned toward the study of law in April 1505, as his father Hans Luder (1459-1530) had wished. However, during the middle of the spring semester of Luther's first term at the law school in Erfurt he suddenly dropped out and entered the Order of St. Augustine (354-430) close to the university, on July 17, 1505 to train as a monk. As Luther explained later, his change of mind was prompted by his obligation to honor his vows made to St. Anne (the presiding saint of the Saxon copper miners as well as the grandmother of God) and Virgin Mary in 1503 and 1505 respectively. On both occasions he had confronted deadly situations and sought protection from these divine figures.

He was ordained a priest at the monastery on May 2, 1507 and in the same year was selected by his prior Johannes von Staupitz (1460-1524) to study theology (Hillerbrand, 1982: 25). In Erfurt the Augustinian Hermits had introduced for their members a course of studies that included the works of a number of scholars belonging to the fourteenth-century *via moderna*, the last major school of medieval scholasticism. The *via moderna* debunked Thomas Aquinas's (c. 1225-74) *via antiqua* with its recognition of reason as an ally of faith and instead contended, as did William of Occam (c. 1285-1347), that God's existence and attributes "can be proved in theology only under the supposition of faith" (Occam 1957 cited in Skinner, 1978, 2: 24). Luther was deeply influenced by the Nominalist theologian of Erfurt Johann Wessel Gansfort (c. 1419-89), whose letter of 1489 to Jacob Hoeck condemning the practice of indulgence, read in 1522, prompted him to exclaim: "If I had read this before, it could well have left the impression with my enemies that I copied everything from Wessel—so much are our two minds at one" (cited in Oberman, 1966: 18). However, Augustine's *corpus* proved to be Luther's most cherished intellectual and spiritual *pabulum*. As he would aver in the Preface to his *German Theology* (1516): "No book except the Bible and St. Augustine has come to my attention from which I have learnt more about God, Christ, man, all things" (Skinner, 1978, 2: 26).

From fall 1508 to fall 1509 Luther was sent by Staupitz to the newly established (in 1502) university at Wittenberg, where the latter was a professor of theology. (Note 7) At his request Luther took up a temporary lecturer's position to teach *Nicomachean Ethics* (350 BCE) of Aristotle (384-22 BCE). He was, however, getting more interested in studying theology rather than philosophy. In one of his classes at Wittenberg he remarked that theology "penetrates to the kernel of the nut, the germ of the wheat, and the marrow of the bones" (cited in Kittelson, 1986: 67). In 1509 Luther was called back to Erfurt to lecture on Peter Lombard's (c. 1100-60) *Sentences* (c. 1150). Sometime in 1510-11, he accompanied an older fellow friar on a trip to Rome in winter 1510/11, where the latter was engaged by his order to settle some business with the curia. (Note 8) In the summer of 1511 Luther moved to Wittenberg where he received the special license to become a candidate for the doctorate on October 4, 1512. He formally obtained the doctorate on October 19. Two days later he was formally received into the Senate of the Faculty of Theology. He began teaching the Bible (Genesis) in the early hours of the morning of Monday, October 25. (Kittelson, 1986: 85). (Note 9)

He also continued his ascetic practices, prayers, and repentance to earn the righteousness demanded by his God as well as his search for certainty of God's merciful judgment. He tried all the means at his disposal to pacify his troubled conscience. His Occamist studies taught him that man's salvation was simply the arbitrary choice of God. (Note 10) In order to overcome his spiritual conflict he began practicing the rigors of monasticism all the more vehemently. As he recalled: "In the monastery, I did not think about women, or gold, or goods, but my heart trembled, and doubted how God could be gracious to me. Then I fell away from faith, and let myself think nothing less than that I had come under the Wrath of God, whom I must reconcile with my good works" (cited in Rupp 1951: 29). He felt alienated from his God and underwent an "agonizing struggle"—*Anfechtung*, or in Latin, *accidie*, depression and despair (Bayer, 2003: xiii; see also Pearson, 1983: 304). From the winter semester of 1513-14 he was engaged in reading, research, and reflection, concentrating primarily on the Bible and the Augustinian *corpus*—a study that would continue until 17 November 1545.

The reading and re-reading of the Psalms with their familiar phrase *in justitia tua libera me* ["emancipate me in your justice"] disturbed Luther profoundly. He had been convinced that any meeting of his sinful self with God would result only in a catastrophic confrontation. Following multiple readings the monk noticed Christ's *Anfechtung* on the cross in the twenty-second Psalm: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Note 11) Why did a pious and pure personality like Jesus suffer from *Anfechtung*? The only answer must be that he had taken to himself the sin of man. Instead of a terrible judge on the rainbow Luther beheld a bleeding Christ on the cross. This new view of Christ was also a new view of God. The divine pantocrator now appeared as a God of mercy. Thus Luther read St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans 1:17: "The justice of God is revealed there, from faith to faith, as it is written. The just man liveth by faith." (Note 12) Luther saw the absentee deity, who had tormented him so long, become a revealed God in the scripture—the Word become Flesh—through intellectual reflection and mystical imagination. Overwhelmed by this epiphany the monk wrote in ecstatic joy:

Now I felt as though I had been reborn altogether and had entered Paradise. In the same moment the face of the whole of Scripture became apparent to me. My mind ran through the Scriptures, as far as I was able to recollect them, seeking analogies in other phrases, such as the work of God, by which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God, by which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God (Hillerbrand, 1982: 27; see also Hoffman, 1976).

Ramakrishna's Spiritual Crisis and its Resolution

Ramakrishna's early manifestation of spirituality was predicated on his losing consciousness temporarily. He earned respect and accolade of his neighbors for what was widely believed to be a rare spiritual performance—his unpredictable lapses into *samadhi*—temporary loss of consciousness—since his childhood (*LP*, 1 [Sadhakabhava]: 44, 48, 53). Following his father's death in 1852, Gadadhar accompanied his elder brother Ramkumar to Calcutta where the latter had taken up part-time job as priest in several households in the northern part of the city. Ramkumar also started a *tol* or *chatuspathi* [traditional institution teaching Sanskrit grammar and religious literature]. Gadai took the priest's chore thereby enabling his elder brother to concentrate on the *tol*. Here he elicited the attention and adoration of the women of the neighborhood for his melodious voice and friendly disposition. He, of course, remained impervious to education, as usual. His ingenious plea in this respect was his protestation that he was not interested in a priestly training for the sake of bundling up *prasad* of rice and banana [*chalkala-bandha vidya*].

Sometime in 1856, the two brothers were introduced to the owners of the Kali temple at Dakshineshvar, who were looking for a priest for their newly founded temple (1855). Their low caste status (*Rani* Rasmani, the dowager proprietress of the temple, belonged to the *Shudra* caste of Kaivarta, that is, the caste of fishermen) was a hindrance to obtaining the services of a Brahmin priest, but Ramkumar, pressed by the *Rani*'s solicitations as well as by his personal need for an income to maintain his family, agreed to accept the priest's job. (Note 13) After his sudden death Gadadhar was approached by the temple manager Mathuranath who had been impressed by the young man's devotion for the River Ganges (Hooghly River), his expertise as a clay modeler, his musical skill, and above all, his charming personality. Though thus importuned (he had no desire to work as a priest) he, being totally innocent of ritual worship, needed to be initiated into the Kali *mantra* by an experienced priest.

However, when his initiator Kenaram Bandyopadhyay (1832-1928) whispered the sacred *mantra* into Gadadhar's ears, he instantly gave out a loud scream and leapt on the idol of Shiva (lying at the feet of the Goddess) and squatted on it (Barman, 2003: 163). The maverick *pujari* showed his indifference to rituals as he was by nature averse to any disciplined routine and he began to treat the stone idol as a living and loving mother and hold conversations with it. Gadadhar probably figured out a strategy to prove that he was so intimate with the Goddess that he did not have to follow any ritualized worship. He thus made use of his repertoire of song, *samadhi*, and unabashed unconventionality. The outcome of his apparently creative deviancy was that he came to be regarded as a wacky holy man who had special access to divinity.

There is, however, a dubious (albeit popular) account of Ramakrishna's experience of epiphany. We are told by his disciple biographer Swami Saradananda (*alias* Sharatchandra Chakravarti, 1865-1927) that the Master's desire to meet his Ma (Kali) was so vehement that he one day flung himself violently on the ground, rubbing his face against it and filling all corners with piteous wailings. He took no notice of the fact that his whole body was cut, bruised, and bloodied (*LP*, 1 [Sadhakabhava]: 131). The Swami cites Ramakrishna's personal recollection of the incident:

I suffered intolerable agony for not being able to meet my Ma...I became very restless and feared that I might never realize her in this life...Life seemed not worth living. Suddenly my glance fell on the scimitar that was kept in the Mother's *sanctam*. When resolving to put an end to my life just then I jumped up like a madman and

seized it, suddenly Ma revealed herself wonderfully and I fell down unconscious....I felt a dense flow of bliss I never experienced [before] as I realized Ma's revealed presence....I beheld an infinite effulgent ocean of consciousness. As far as I could see, the glittering billows were rushing at me in great speed from all sides with a terrific roar, to swallow me up! Soon they fell upon me and pulled me somewhere down below. I panted for breath, and collapsed, unconscious. I had no idea of what was happening in the world outside, but inside me there was a steady flow of undiluted and unprecedented bliss and I felt the presence of the Divine Mother (*LP*, 1 [Sadhakabhava]: 113-14). (Note 14)

Arguably Ramakrishna's realization of the Divine Mother was clearly visual, rather than visceral, more magical and anagogical, than metaphysical or metaphorical. What is not so clear is the authenticity of the report of his experience. In fact his diarist ShriM had no clue as to its veracity (Bhattacharya 1397 B.E., 232). Ramakrishna's clear admission "once I had a mental derangement and I attempted to slash my throat with a knife" makes the entire incident a veritable hagiographical fabrication (Majumdar, 1987: 81).

Puzzlingly enough, even after his vision of the Goddess Kali, Ramakrishna complained to his Brahma visitor Trailokyanath Dev that he was harassed by that deity, who for a long time had been giving him a run around without pointing to the right path. That is why, he said further, he had stopped visiting the sanctum and seeing the effigy of the Goddess. He even called her "*Shali*" [somewhat akin to "bitch" in the Western sense]. This attitude of the Master might have betrayed his intimacy with the Goddess as his boon companion as well as a mother figure. Ramakrishna's belittling an idol also could be his way of appropriating (that is, realizing) the Brahma concept of abstract (*nirakar*) Godhead such as *Brahman* with a view to endearing himself to his visitor. In fact he told Trailokya that one night he was summoned by a voice to go to the bank of the Ganges where he beheld an "unprecedented lighted apparition" filling his "soul [*pranman*]" with a blissful ray." This was believed to be a perfect *Brahman* (or Brahma) vision, and quite appropriately, Ramakrishna's Brahma visitor was awestruck and considered the *paramahansa* a great man and a fully realized *yogi* [*yogasiddha mahapurush*] (Dev, 1979: 57).

Luther the Man of God and Ramakrishna the Godman

A most profound disparity between Luther and Ramakrishna is that the latter was regarded by his devotees and admirers and above all by himself as God in human form. The idea of a human being, the descendant of Adam, as God would have struck Luther with horror. This difference is as much personal as cultural. A devout and learned Christian, Luther believed in God's immanence as well as transcendence. According to him, there is only one being who is simultaneously fully human and fully divine, and he is the second person of the Holy Trinity—Jesus, son of God—and the rest of the lesser beings descending from Adam and Eve may harbor God in the interiority of their heart through faith but can never arrogate themselves to divinity. Luther had little patience with the idea of direct personal, not to mention sensory, experience of the divine. For him, God was the inscrutable other marked by absolute righteousness as well as gratuitous mercy as contrasted with the finite and frail humans. He regarded himself as but a "miserable pygmy" whom God has "deigned to join ... as a forsaken man bleeding and dying on a cross" (Strohl, 2003: 151). Reputedly, Gadadhar was a Godman, an *ishvarakoti* [one on the level of the divine] (Sil, 2009: ch. 3), whereas Martin a man of God and a religious reformer.

The two men also diverged in their individual intellectual background and in their social ideas. Luther was a trained theologian and an intellectual as well as a social activist. He was quite self-conscious about his university education. His *Doktoratsbewusstsein* [doctor consciousness] obliged him to expound "the Scriptures for all the world and teaching everybody" (Gerrish, 1983: 6). He was not only a prolific writer—his total *oeuvres* comprise over one hundred volumes—he was also deeply and regularly involved in community work. As early as 1512 he reflected on his busy life in Wittenberg in a letter:

It almost seems that I need two secretaries or scribes, for I do nothing all day but write letters....I am preacher at the convent and reader during meals. I am also daily in demand as preacher in the parish church, regent of studies, and vicar of our order. This entails the supervision of eleven convents. I also administer the fish pond at Leitzkau and administer the Herzberg affairs at Torgau. I lecture on Paul and collect material for a lecture on the Psalms. In addition there is my correspondence which, as I already mentioned, consumes the greater part of my time. Rarely do I have time for the prayers of the breviary or for saying mass. And besides all that I have to contend against the temptations of the flesh, the world, and the devil. There you see what a lazy-bones I am (Hillerbrand, 1982: 26).

Gadadhar was sent by his father to the village school but there the boy earned his teacher's kudos not for his studies but for his songs and talent for playacting and mimicry. In fact he was often requested by his teacher to mimic his style of teaching. Reportedly, he participated in a debate with some *pandits* and priests on the

scriptures and provided such a powerful commentary on complex scriptural questions that everyone was awestruck by his beauty and intellectual acuity. However, he did never learn arithmetic because of his aversion to career oriented education. Also, as noted earlier, he never studied at his brother's *tol* in Calcutta, but became very popular with the neighborhood women for his charming voice and visage.

Swami Prabhananda tries to explain away the Master's indifference to formal learning and argue for his real knowledge of the divine *arcana*, nonetheless. However, the Swami foregrounds the Master's penmanship, melodious songs, and sweet manners and talks as evidence of his scientific attitude [*vaijnanik dristibhangi*] as well as his monumental [*sumeruvat*] intellectual power (Prabhananda, 1997: 19-55). Ramakrishna's favorite disciple and his veritable Saint Paul Narendranath Datta (later Swami Vivekananda, 1863-1902) declared: "It takes many, many births to reach the pinnacle of a single *bhava* [ecstatic state]. Our Master, the prince of the *bhava* realm, realized eighteen such states" (Mukhopadhyay in *VS.*: 145). The *Paramahmsa's* other hagiographers have written about his magical power by which he subdued a couple of leading theologians such as Padmalochan *Tarkalankar*, the court scholar of the Maharaja of Bardhaman and the tantric scholar Pandit Gaurikanta *Tarkabhusan* of Indesh. He secretly removed Padmalochan's sacred brass cruet and napkin, his magical accessories to his forensic powers, and thus stole his scholarly wind so to speak and the *Tarkalankar* declared the Master an incarnation of God (*LR*: 162). Gauri *Pandit* called for a public debate to test Ramakrishna's spiritual knowledge before he could acknowledge his incarnational status or identity. Gauri was a champion debater and he entered the arena selected for the debate uttering "*ha re re re*" (a ritual noise of wrestlers before the commencement of fight), whereupon Ramakrishna uttered those syllables more loudly than his contestant. This verbal duel went on for a couple of times and at the end the *Tarkabhusan* yielded to the *Paramahmsa* in view of the latter's louder yells (*LP*, 2 [Gurubhava-Uttarardha]: 36-37). (Note 15)

Ramakrishna had his own method of "studying" the scriptures. As he said, "many believe that one cannot learn without reading books. But hearing it is better than reading and seeing is even better than hearing as [for example] reading about Kashi [Varanasi], hearing about [Kashi] and seeing Kashi are not the same (*KM*, 1: 216 [*GR*: 863]. Diary of October 22, 1885). "A mere scholar without discrimination and renunciation," he observed, "has his attention fixed on *kamini* and *kanchana*" (*KM*, 2: 45 [*GR*: 228]. Diary of June 2, 1883). He of course provided a powerful account of his real knowledge. As he deposed:

Though I read nothing myself, ... I have heard the *Vedas*, the *Vedanta*, and the *Darshanas*, and the *Puranas* from good and reliable scholars. Having heard them and understood what they contained, I made a garland of them with a string and hung it around my neck and offered it at the lotus feet of the Mother [Goddess Kali] saying, "Take all your scriptures and *Puranas*. Just give me pure devotion (*LP*, 1 [Gurubhava-Purvvardha]: 67).

Reportedly, the Goddess Kali taught him that "the essence of the *Vedanta* is that *Brahman* is real and the world an illusion" (*KM*, 4: 175 [*GR*: 544]. Diary of September 19, 1884).

Actually, Ramakrishna was acutely conscious of his lack of education in the urban society of Calcutta where he was gaining recognition as a living Godman for his dances, trances, and amusing talks. He once confessed to his devotees candidly: "I am unlettered and yet educated people come here. How amazing! You must admit that it is the play [*lila*] of God" (cited in Diwakar, 1970: 204). "Does he call me a *jnani* [a knowledgeable and wise person]," the Master once asked ShriM to find about one skeptical visitor named Tejchandra Mitra (*KM*, 3: 100 [*GR*: 662]. Diary of November 9, 1884). At another time he asked his devotee: "Is there any resemblance between me and a scholar or a monk?" He was delighted to hear M's reassuring response: "God has fashioned you with his own hands. He has made others mechanically, as everything else, according to law" (*KM*, 3: 34 [*GR*: 261]. Diary of July 21, 1883). He ingeniously defended his erratic ecstatic behavior as a special case for an *ishvarakoti's* [on the level of the divine] *bhava* (*KM*, 4: 191 [*GR*: 587]. Diary of October 2, 1884). He was almost dumbfounded when Ashwini Kumar Datta (1856-1923), a distinguished intellectual and patriot from eastern Bengal, was asked to give his preference between Ramkumar of Kotrang and Ramakrishna of Dakshineshvar as a scholar and stated that there could be no comparison between them as Ramkumar was a scholar whereas the *Paramahmsa* was not. Only when he was told that though not a scholar like Ramkumar, he was a fun loving guy, did the Master regain his usual affable self and remark with a smile: "Well said! Well said!" (*LR*: 406-7).

He was glad and gratified to learn from Vivekananda that according to the Scottish philosopher Sir William Hamilton (1788-1836), "a learned ignorance is ... the end of philosophy, as it is the beginning of theology" (*KM*, 1: 101 [*GR*: 278]. Diary of August 19, 1883; see also Hamilton 1865: 1: 4). In fact Vivekananda himself provided a powerful testimony to his *guru's* profound learning. In his letter to his monastic brother Swami Ramakrishnananda (premonastic name Shashibhusan Chakravarti, 1863-1911) from the United States (1895),

Vivekananda wrote: “His [Ramakrishna’s] life alone made me understand what the Shastras really meant, and the whole plan and scope of the old Shastras” (Vivekananda, 1394: 341. English as in original). The ebullient Vivekananda even claimed that “basketfuls of philosophical books can be written on each single sentence spoken by the Master” (*LP*, 1 [Gurubhava-Purvardha]: 1). (Note 16)

Luther the Learned Theologian and Ramakrishna the Realized Saint

Another fundamental difference between Luther and Ramakrishna has to do with the methods and sources of their spiritual insight. Luther’s “discovery” of the power of *fides*, that is, his solifidianism, was as much intellectual as existential, even revolutionary. His “Reformation Discovery [God is absolutely sovereign as well as bestower of grace to sinful creatures] was first of all a hermeneutic insight,” Markus Wriedt has written (Wriedt, 2003: 91). However, for Oswald Bayer, Luther’s theological insight could also transcend intellection. Thus, *pace* Luther, the righteousness of faith is passive “in that we allow God alone to work in us and we ourselves, with all our powers, do not do anything.” Faith being the work of God can only be received and suffered. Faith thus constitutes, as Bayer has it, “not knowledge and not action, neither metaphysical nor moral, neither *vita activa*, nor *vita contemplativa*, but *vita passiva*” (Bayer, 2003: 43).

Ramakrishna’s emphasis on devotion to and love of God [*premabhakti* or *parabhakti*] was derived not from reading or reflecting on the relevant scriptures but from his inherited heterodox *bhakti* culture of the Vaisnava sects such the Kartabhajas, Sahajiyas, or Bauls as well as from his boyhood memories of the recitations of the *kathaks* (reciters of religious lores and legends). According to him, his God realization was due to his inner illumination, *vijnana* [real knowledge], claimed to be superior to book learning, *jnana*. He insisted that he “was not in the least sorry” for not being literate enough to study the *Vedanta* and other scriptures (*KM*, 5: 191 [GR: 587] Diary of December 2, 1884).

He justified his scriptural innocence by arguing that “scriptures merely give hints and therefore it is not necessary to read a few scriptures.” He exclaimed on one occasion: “Mere knowledge of Advaita! *Hyak thoo*—I spit on it!!” and actually spat on the floor denouncing rationality (*KM*, 4: 43 [GR: 358]. Diary of December 23, 1883). He further observed: “A mere scholar without discrimination and renunciation has his attention fixed on woman and gold” (*KM*, 2: 59 [GR: 368]. Diary of December 27, 1883). Even *bhakti* or devotion is not efficacious if it is “tinged with knowledge” (*KM*, 2: 45 [GR: 228]. Diary of June 2, 1883). Though Ramakrishna’s concept of “realization” [*upalabhdhi*] of the divine and *vijnan* might agree with Luther’s idea of theology as an experiential wisdom [*sapientia experimentalis*] (Bayer, 2003: 30), we never get to learn any depth or details of Ramakrishna’s spirituality since our only source in this regard remains eyewitness reports of his casual conversations and amusing didactic tittle-tattle.

On the other hand, even a cursory reading of Luther’s *Ninety-five Theses* (October 31, 1517) inviting an academic debate on the sale of *indulgences*; *Resolutions* (1518), that is, transcripts of disputation at Heidelberg (March 26, 1518); interview with the papal legate Cardinal Thomas de Vio Cajetan (Cajetan, 1469-1534) (October 12, 1518); debate with the Ingolstadt theologian Johann Eck (1486-1543) at Leipzig (July 4-13, 1519); *The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ: Against the Fanatics* (1526); and above all, his celebrated treatise *The Freedom of a Christian* (November 20, 1520), demonstrate his erudition and forensic skill (energized by his humanistic learning and readings of the patristic *corpus* as well as Occamist philosophy and German mystical literature) about the efficacy of faith and his insistence on the duties for a Christian. He repudiates the rigid Catholic morality on the basis of the righteousness of faith and asserts that “a Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none” and, at the same time, “a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” He cites Paul’s *dictum* “Owe no one anything, except to love one another” (Romans 13: 8) to conclude that “Love by its very nature is ready to serve and be subject to him who is loved” (Hillerbrand, 2009: 33).

By contrast, Ramakrishna exhibited his utter uneasiness while paying a visit to Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar (1820-91), a renowned Sanskrit scholar and social reformer (*KM*, 3: 3, 6-7, 10 [GR: 109]. Diary of August 5, 1882). He also found it embarrassing and problematic dealing with Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-94) and could only impress the intellectual with his dances and trances (*KM*, 5, 205 [GR: 673]. Diary of December 6, 1884). His situation became truly pathetic when he came face to face with Michael Madhusudan Datta (1824-73), the flamboyant and the most celebrated poet of the time. The *paramahansa* failed to converse, lost consciousness, and upon waking up sang a few songs dedicated to the Goddess Kali (*LP*, 2 [Gurubhava-Uttarardha]: 85). His plight before the famous scriptural scholar *Pandit* Shashadhar *Tarkachudamani* (1850-1928) was revealed in his effort to impress the great scholar with his tales and talks. He, however, brought Shashadhar under control by his *samadhi* and song and later boasted about his conversations

with the *Tarkachudamani* by remarking how that “dry” scholar had been “diluted” and humbled (*KM*, 3: 90 [*GR*: 488]. Diary of June 30, 1884). In his characteristic way Ramakrishna overwhelmed a reputed Vaisnava *pandit* of Kalna, eastern Bengal, Bhagavandas Babaji, by standing naked in front of the latter and rebuking him sharply for his presumption to teach people (Akshaychaitanya, 1401B.E.: 132-33).

Luther’s Activism and Ramakrishna’s Quiescence

For Luther, a Christian’s soul (“spiritual, inner, or new man”) “needs only the word of God for its life and righteousness, so it is justified by faith alone and not any works” (Hillerbrand, 2009: 33, 35). However, even though “a person is abundantly and sufficiently justified by faith inwardly, in his spirit...yet he remains in this mortal life on this earth...[where] he must control his body and have dealings with others. Here the works begin.” As Luther explains, “a person cannot be idle, for the need of his body drives him and he is compelled to do many good works to reduce it to subjection (ibid., 46-47). He proclaims further: “The world would be full of worship if everyone served his neighbor, the farmhand in the stable, the boy in the school, maid and mistress at home” (Lindberg, 2003: 166). In one of his famous *Invocavit* sermons delivered at Wittenberg (March 9-17, 1522) Luther proclaimed: “Dear friends, the kingdom of God, and we are that kingdom, does not consist in talk or words but in activity, in deeds, works, and exercises. God does not want hearers and repeaters of words but followers and doers, and this occurs in faith through love” (Hillerbrand, 2009: 61). As Robert Fischer observes, for Luther “the Christian life is a life in community” and his “faith thus is no unbridled spiritual individualism” (Fischer, 1983: 78). Nevertheless, “the works themselves do not justify him before God, but he does the works out of spontaneous love in obedience to God.” Thus Luther concludes *contra* Aristotle’s notion that good works make a good man: “Good works do not make a good person, but a good person does good works” (Hillerbrand, 2009: 47). As Hillerbrand observes, “Luther’s tract aimed to show how a vibrant and dynamic faith makes this possible” (Hillerbrand, 2009: 32: editor’s introduction to *The Freedom of a Christian*; see also Strohl, 2003: 149-64).

Ramakrishna adamantly opposed working for a living or doing social work because, as he believed, these were distractions for man whose sole purpose and exertion ought to be the realization of the divine. When he came to know that his devotee Nityaniranjan Ghosh (later known as Swami Niranjanananda, 1862-1904) had obtained an employment, he felt aggrieved and was heard to say, “I feel more pained to hear that he had taken up employment than if I had heard of his death” (*LP*, 1 [*Sadhakabhava*]: 93). He thought Vidyasagar was merely wasting time trying to reform society (*KM*, 1: 89 [*GR*: 267]. Diary of July 1883). When his patron Shambhucharan Mallik (d. 1877) decided to build hospitals, dispensaries, schools, roads, and public reservoirs, his Master admonished him: “You should discharge only those obligations which come first and are absolutely unavoidable—and that too in a spirit of detachment.” He advised a Brahmo devotee: “It is not good to be involved in too many projects. You will forget God that way.” “You people talk of doing some good for the world. Is the world a small place?” Ramakrishna asked his audience angrily. “And who the hell are you to do some good for the world? Meet him [God] by means of spiritual discipline. Realize him if he gives you strength, then you can do good to everybody; otherwise not” (*KM*, 1: 50-51 [*GR*: 142]. Diary of October 27, 1882).

In similar vein he admonished Krishnadas Pal (1839-84) who dared to posit that the proper goal of human life should be to exert for the betterment of the world. The Master quipped irritatingly that Pal was a nitwit possessing the intelligence of a whore’s son” (*KM*, 5, 168. Appendix [*Parisista*]; see also *KM*, II: 157 [*GR*: 605]. Diary of October 11, 1884). On another occasion he exclaimed: “Compassion for living creatures! Compassion for living creatures! Get the hell out, you bugger! A tiny worm you dare show your kindness for the living creatures! No, no, not compassion, but service to them as if they are gods!” (*LP*, 2 [*Thakurer Divyabhava O Narendranath*]: 240). (Note 17) However, in his meetings with devotees and visitors, Ramakrishna would have little qualms contradicting himself if only to insinuate his intimacy with the divine. He is reported to have supplicated the Goddess Kali: “O Ma! Please save me from this blissful state (*samadhi*). Let me remain in my normal mood so that I could do more good for the world” (Mukhopadhyay in *VS*: 163). Ramakrishna’s personal preference was extreme quiescence in all aspects of life except thinking and talking about God. As to assuming the role of a preacher or teacher he confessed to his friend, the Brahmo Samaj leader Keshabchandra Sen (1838-84) that he was not interested in lecturing to people. “I’ll eat, sleep, and shit, and that’s all. I can’t do any other things” he added emphatically (*KM*, 1: 261 [*GR*: 1022]. Appendix, ch. 2 [undated letter from Ashvinikumar Datta [1856-1923] to ShriM). (Note 18)

Luther the Married Monk and Ramakrishna the Married Celibate

Following the resolution of his spiritual dilemma, Luther abandoned the monastery in 1524, married a former nun (Katharina von Bora, 1499-1552) on June 13, 1525, and led a most contented family life. He in fact

maintained that human sexuality is a gift from God. “Whoever is ashamed of marriage is also ashamed of being and being called human, tries to improve on what God has made,” Luther averred (cited in Oberman, 2006: 272). He loved the simple pleasures of life. He would have avoided the later Puritans with horror and disdain. He was noted for his physicality, especially “the materiality of his body.” In a letter of February 1, 1546 to his wife, the dying reformer unabashedly admitted to “his inability to be sexually aroused by the sight of prostitutes and blamed Jews for his *illness*” (Roper, 2010: 353. Emphasis added). Though as a trained monk Luther could consider “sex as sinful...he nonetheless had a remarkably frank attitude toward it, and to flesh itself.” Thus he could assert “If you want to reject your body because snot, pus, and filth come out of it, you should cut your head off” (ibid.: 384, 383). He loved his wife, sired six children, and raised a number of nieces and nephews and maintained a large and busy household comprising servants, university students, and very often guests from out of town—a noisy and crowded homestead—an unlikely abode for a famous theologian (Robinson, 2010: 78-79). Despite his multiple health problems and physical discomfort (especially constipation and kidney stone), he lived a contented conjugal life, happily surrounded by students, professors, admirers and followers.

For his time, Luther had an elevated estimation of women. He declared unequivocally: “One has to have women. If one did not have this sex, womankind, housekeeping and everything that pertains to it would fall apart; and after it all worldly governances, and order. In sum, the world cannot dispense with women even if men by themselves could bear children” (Karant-Nunn & Wiesner-Hanks, 2003: 125: Luther, “Marriage and the Family”). He could very well have sung the popular German couplet “Who loves not women, wine, and song will stay a fool his whole life long.” (Note 19) His encouragement for women’s active role in the life of the church elicited a bitter invective from his contemporary Catholic scholar and his hostile biographer Cochlaeus:

Lutheran women, with all womanly shame set aside, proceeded to such a point of audacity that they even usurped for themselves the right and office of teaching publicly in the Church, despite the fact that Paul openly speaks against this and prohibits it. Nor were they lacking defenders among the Lutheran men, who said that Paul forbade the right of teaching to women only in so far as there were sufficient men who knew how to teach and were able to do so (Cochlaeus, 2002: 2).

After his vision of the Goddess, his realization of the divine, Ramakrishna continued to caution his young devotees, those pure souled boys [*shuddhasattva*], against marriage and encourage them to lead an ascetic life. Though himself a married man, he dreaded and despised the idea of or a suggestion for consummating his marriage. As he confessed to his physician Dr. Mahendraalal Sarkar (1833-1904): “If my body is touched by a woman I feel sick. The touched part aches as if stung by a hornfish” (*KM*, 2: 231 [*GR*: 965]. Diary of April 22, 1886). He was paranoid about procreating children (Gambhirananda, 1977, 34). Ramakrishna thus remained a married celibate. He also harbored a misogynistic attitude toward women—quite typical of his class and caste in his time. According to his niece Lakshminani Ghatak (1863-1926), her uncle strongly objected to his brother Rameshvar’s (1825-73) installing a window facing the street at the latter’s home lest the women of the family might be attracted to or even seduced by good looking men passing by. He was suspicious of young mendicants taking advantage of young women. He even frowned upon his wife Saradamani’s (1853-1921) closeness to his nephew and factotum Hridayram Mukhopadhyay (1840-99) who, reportedly, plucked some grey hair from her head at her request (Sengupta, 2003: 536-38).

Luther and Ramakrishna: Somatic Consciousness

Unlike Ramakrishna and the stereotypical saints and clerics noted for their emaciated frame as renunciants and austere ascetics, Luther’s somatic solidity was projected by his admirers as a magisterial reformer like the massive Moses (1513-14) sculpture by the Renaissance artist Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) or the magnificent Henry VIII as in Hans Holbein’s (c. 1465-1524) popular portrait. In a significant way, moreover, Luther’s monumental stature made him like a Renaissance St. George, the vanquisher of the dragon-like devil, “the most embittered enemy of the human being, who attacks and oppresses ... human beings ... everywhere” (Bayer 2003, 210). (Note 20) In fact, as Lyndal Roper observes astutely, Luther’s “monumentality [was] part of the positive image of Lutheranism.” It was also meant to project a preternatural powerful patriarchal figure—an amazing amalgam of the spiritual and the somatic (2010: 361).

Even though Ramakrishna claimed to be a chubby and cuddly child in his boyhood, who was completely possessed by the Divine Mother (*KM*, 4: 201 [*GR*: 593]. Diary of October 5, 1884), he grew up to be a sickly male suffering from chronic alimentary ailments (due perhaps to his unbridled gluttony), and nervous disorder, manifested in his frequent bouts of *samadhi* or seizure. The description of his physique as *sabal o sutham* [“strong and well-built”] by his admirers is a well-intentioned hyperbole at best (Prabhananda 1396 B.E.: I, 129). He also appeared to be a victim of functional impotence such as premature and involuntary ejaculation,

exacerbated, most probably, by ritual masturbation in his youth. As one can glean from Ramakrishna's story during his advancing years, he used to play with the boys' cocks and worship his own deeming it as *Shivalinga* [phallic icon of Lord Shiva] by decorating it with a pearl, something he confessed being unable to do now (see Sil, 2009, 70; see also *KM*, 4: 106 [GR: 491]. Diary of July 3, 1884. Nikhilananda omits a complete sentence in his translation). (Note 21)

According to Ramakrishna's wife Saradamani, her husband "suffered very much from digestive troubles at Daksineshvar and said 'Pooh! The stomach is a store of filth which keeps on flowing out!'" "All this made the body repugnant to him," she continues, "and he took no further care of it" (Gambhirananda, 1977: 35). (Note 22) Ramakrishna's diarist ShriM as well as his acquaintances such as Shivanath Shastri (1847-1919), Protap Mozoomdar (1840-1905), and Keshabchandra Sen considered his body "naturally frail," "pitifully pale and shrunken," and "delicate" (Shastri, 1979, I: 98; Diwakar, 1970, 266; *KM*, 5: 9-10 [no corresponding translation in *GR*. Diary of April 2, 1882. But *GR*: 464 prints the translation of Keshab's remark in the diary of June 25, 1884 which is non-existent in the *KM*). Saradananda writes that "the Master's body became very tender like that of a child or a woman" as a result of his frequent ecstatic states (*LP*, 1 [Gurubhava-Purvardha]: 193). Ramakrishna's most popular photograph shows his pronounced gynecomastic development, that is, quite well-formed and firm breasts. Vivekananda's younger brother Mahendranath Datta, who had seen his *Paramahamsamashai* [Mr. Paramahansa], remarked about some men harboring "both male and female features—beard as well as breasts—in the same body" (Datta 1396:, 149). Ramakrishna quite candidly described his feminine behavior and attitude (Sil, 2009: 40). In fact, he considered "effeminate and clumsy movements" constituted the hallmark of a *paramahansa* (*KM*, 2: 67 [GR: 297]. Diary of September 26, 1883; 2: 14 [GR: 188]. Diary of March 11: 1883; IV, 214 [GR: 798]. Diary of July 13, 1885). His androgynous attitude, as the Indian psychiatrist Sudhir Kakar observes, illustrates "the respect and reverence Indian society pays to the ontogenetically motivated, religiously sublimated femininity in a man," and Ramakrishna's behavior is "when viewed culturally and historically, an accepted, representative phenomenon in the tradition of Krishna worship" (Kakar, 1978: 112).

Ramakrishna maintained that "knowledge of Brahman is impossible without the destruction of body-consciousness" (*KM*, 1: 141 [GR: 468]. Diary of June 25, 1884). He in fact regarded his own body as quite separate from the Self (*KM*, 4: 26 [GR: 870]. Diary of October 23, 1885). There is a vague parallel between Ramakrishna and Luther in this respect. Luther Maintains that "the Spirit cannot be with us except in corporeal things such as the Word, water, and Christ's body and in his saints on earth," though he also believes that "there are spiritual and fleshly acts, not spiritual and fleshly things" (cited in Edwards, 1983: 141). Curiously enough, Ramakrishna disparaged and debunked his own physicality but claimed to have **real**-ized the abstractly conceived divinities such as Brahman and Sachchidananda or the anthropomorphic gods Kali and Krishna as well as prophets such as Christ, Chaitanya, or Muhammad as material and physical human beings conversing, cavorting, or playing with them. He stated firmly: "It is my nature to see the form of God, to touch and embrace Him. God is saying to me 'You have assumed a body; therefore enjoy God through His human form'" (*KM*, 5: 122 [GR: 432]. Diary of May 24, 1884). He saw Kali's "entire form as She spoke to him and directed him in his daily work." He even "saw Her partake of the food even before it was offered ritually. Formerly, he regarded the stone image of Kali as possessed of consciousness; now the image disappeared, and in its stead there stood the Living Mother Herself, smiling and blessing him. 'I actually felt her breath on my hand,' the Master used to say later on" (*LR*: 75). Reportedly a male God laughed and played with him, popped his knuckles, and "then He talked" (*KM*, 4: 238 [GR: 830]. Diary of August 9, 1885).

We are told that "during his practice in Islam the Master first had the vision of an effulgent, impressive personage with a long beard"—presumably Allah or Mohammed of popular Hindu imagination (*LP*, 1 [Sadhakabhava]: 309). Seeking identification with Gautama Buddha, he wanted his disciple Narendranath to tell him about the Buddha's teachings. After listening to his disciple's peroration he came out with a single query: whether Narendra had seen a tuft of hair on the Buddha's head. Then he inquired about the Buddha's eyes and was told that they were fixed (*KM*, 3: 257 [GR: 949]. Diary of April 9, 1886). Likewise, upon beholding a reproduction of Raphael's *Madonna and the Divine Child* (1505) at his patron Yadulal Mallik's (1844-98) home, Ramakrishna had a vision of Jesus come out of the canvas and enter his body (*KM*, 3: 212 [GR: 826]. Diary of July 28, 1885). To his query about Christ's physical features he was told that as he was of Jewish extraction he must have been fair complexioned with large eyes and an aquiline nose. Whereupon the Master remarked: "But I saw that his nose was a bit flat—who knows why!" (*LR*: 255). The Semitic (or, as in popular polychrome, European) features of Jesus was thus modified if he was to be identified with his Bengali incarnation!

Reportedly, Ramakrishna's idiosyncratic somatic insights accounted for his ability to discern human character. He in fact claimed to possess an expertise in some sort of moral phrenology. Thus he could figure out the moral potential of a woman, particularly a widow, by the size of her breasts and buns or by the style of her hairdo (*LP*, 2 [Thakurer Divyabhava O Narendranath]: 163). In his ecstatic state he once had as vision of a middle-aged prostitute with enormous buttocks lifting her *sari* squatting with her back on him and "defecating profusely and noisily," thus signifying to him the truth that occult powers are nothing but whore's shit (*KM*, 3: 140 [*GR*: 745]. Diary of April 12, 1885; *KM*, 4: 261 [*GR*: 871]. Diary of October 23, 1885). But he acquired a reputation for the magical power of his touch. His touch was reputed to function as a cleanser and purifier of men's mind and vision (*GR*: 47: Ni.khilananda's Introduction). Akshay Sen created the popular mythology of the Master as the saint whose touch tamed turbulent souls such as the college educated young skeptic Narendranath, the arrogant *Pandit* Shashadhar, the famous Brahma leader Keshab Sen, or the flamboyant and temperamental playwright Girish Ghosh (Sen, 1398 B.E.: 3ff). Ramakrishna, however, was quite disinclined to demonstrate that he could overcome the pain from his cancerous throat by projecting his concentrated thought on it. His reason was that his mind was too preoccupied with the thoughts of *Sachchidananda* to be diverted to his body that was a "dilapidated cage of bone and flesh" (*KM*, 2: 115 [*GR*: 550]. Diary of September 21, 1884).

Ramakrishna's ascetic identity was predicated upon his public expression of contempt for carnality. As he stated: "I see the body to be like a pumpkin with the seeds scooped out. Inside this body there is no trace of passion or worldly attachment." (*KM*, 2: 237 [*GR*: 969]. Diary of April 21, 1886). He disparaged lust through his plea for eschewing *kamini-kanchana* that became the *leitmotif* of his spiritual and moral sermons. For him, the female body is made up of nothing but "such things as blood, flesh, fat, entrails, worms, piss, shit, and the like" (*KM*, 3: 19 [*GR*: 113]. Diary of August 24, 1882). Interestingly enough, he created a very personalized moral anatomy of the female physique indicative of women's sexual proclivities such as their oversize breasts and bulging buttock (steatopydia) (*LP*, 2 [Thakurer Divyabhava O Narendranath]: 163). A contemporary account describes Ramakrishna's sexual arousal after staring at the curves of a full-figured young woman on the bank of the Ganges in wet *sari* through which "the beauty of her body had become acutely accentuated" and then his bolting back home like a madman and praying to the Goddess Kali to calm him down (Mitra, 2003: 85). It is to be noted that in the *GR* the phrase *kamini-kanchana* becomes a veritable ideogram occurring about 224 times with twenty-one references to sex and sexual organ (Whitmarsh, 1985).

He also claimed to have an insight into men's mental attitudes and their character by studying their physical features. As he said: "I can see everything in people's mind like articles in a glass case" (*LP*, 1 [Gurubhava-Purvardha]: 78). Thus "a fraud has a heavy hand. A flat nose is not good. Pigeon-breast is not a good sign. The same goes for one who is bony with protruded elbow-joints and unshapely hand, and having light brown eyes like a cat's. Mean nature is marked by lips shaped like a *dom's*" [a *dom* belongs to the scavenger caste in Hindu society]. He had little qualms in considering his patron Shambhu Mallik (d. 1877) a crook because his nose was flat. He also suggested that a circumcised penis, like that of a Muslim, is a sign of bad character (*KM*, 4: 206-7 [*GR*: 597. Nikhilananda omits the reference to Muslim's penis]. Diary of October 5, 1884). The Master took special interest in examining the chests and even the genitals of a few devotees and at least in one instance the chest of a grown up man (Devendranath Tagore, 1817-1905) at the first meeting (*KM*, I: 177 [*GR*: 650-51]. Diary of October 26, 1884; *LP*, 2 [Thakurer Divyabhava O Narendranath]: 166; Ghosh, 1993: 191 [see also 79-80, 184-86]).

Luther and Ramakrishna: Scatology

Both Luther and Ramakrishna bore the distinct stamp of their unsophisticated rustic characteristics. Both had a penchant for scatology in their expression—words such as shit, piss, fart, wit of a whore's son, swine, ass, and the like. "But if that is not enough for you, you Devil," Luther roared at the Satanic fiend in his celebration of Christ as the bastion of Christianity, "I have also shit and pissed; wipe your mouth on that and take a hearty bite." He regarded a slanderer as the Devil incarnate and hurled his verbal venom at him. "A slanderer does nothing but ruminate the filth of others with his own teeth and wallow like a pig with his nose in the dirt. That is also why his droppings stink most, surpassed only by the Devil's" (cited in Oberman, 2006: 107).

On hearing that a pastor of the *Adi* Brahma Samaj (founded by Devendranath Tagore) had married for the second or third time, Ramakrishna called him a "shit *guru*" and his flock "fart disciples" (*KM*, 4: 182 [*GR*: 580]. Diary of October 2, 1884). He once admonished an unsuspecting young man who refused to wash his feet after the toilet: "If I piss standing, you buggers have to do it dancing around. You must do my bidding for your own good" (cited in Sil, 2009: 116). He was so irritated by some educated and independent minded Brahma women visitors "talking like men" that he burst out: "When I see your behavior and hear you speak, I feel that God had made a terrible mistake. It would have been proper for him to have endowed you with penis rather than vagina"

(Mitra, 2003: 112). Ramakrishna in fact considered curse words as meaningful as the *Vedas* and *Puranas* and was particularly fond of performing *japa* [ritual counting of rosary] by muttering the word “cunt” [*yoni*]. He told his devotees: “The moment I utter the word ‘cunt’ I behold the cosmic vagina, which is Ma Brahmamayi, and I sink into it.” (Sanyal, 1390 B.E.: 79).

He was also an adept at rendering his allegorical sermons salacious and saucy, such as his fox-and-bull anecdote, in which the sly fox craving for the big bovine’s sumptuous and succulent balls befriends the latter and becomes his constant companion hoping they would drop off any moment, but leaves in despair as he never gets to have bite of his tasty windfall. The point of Ramakrishna’s parable was to teach his devotees about the cautious and shrewd strategy of the rich but parsimonious patrons to frustrate the demands of their covetous clients and cronies, though its impact on the listeners was instant roaring laughter (*KM*, 5: 93 [*GR*: 349]. Diary of December 18, 1883). On noticing a devotee’s enlarged testicles (most probably a hydrocele condition) he sang merrily “It’s something that swings without a shove” and drove his devotees into a swooning laughter (Sanyal, 1390 B.E.: 111). Even Protap Mozoomdar, who admired the *paramahansa*’s “child-like tenderness” and “unspeakable sweetness of expression” (Mozoomdar, 1912: 72-73), observed in his letter to Max Müller in 1895 that Ramakrishna’s “speech was abominably filthy” (Max Müller, 1975: 62).

Both Ramakrishna and Luther were also innately conservative. In spite of his defiance of the Pope and the traditional practices of the Church Universal (i.e., the Catholic Church), Luther was a social and political conservative in general. Lyndal Roper observes that “Lutheranism owed more than it cared to admit to older, Catholic varieties of religiosity, to magic, and even to cults of the saints” (2010: 383). He denounced the Peasants’ Revolt of 1525 (*Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*, 1525) and professed his loyalty to the secular authority for maintaining law and order in society (*To the Princes of Saxony concerning the Rebellious Spirit*, 1524). Luther also found extreme reformism including iconoclasm of some of his associates and colleagues, in particular Andreas Karlstadt (1486-1541) and Thomas Müntzer (1488-1525), and the followers of the Zurich reformer Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) troubling and thus unacceptable. He despised the Swiss Brethren (Anabaptists) for their blatant egalitarianism, communal living, and anti-statist outlook, not to mention their belief in adult baptism. Truly, Luther was, to quote his most recent biographer, “a product of the late Middle Ages, benefited from early humanism, and introduced ideas and emphases new to sixteenth-century society” (Robinson, 2010: 89).

Likewise, despite his eclecticism popularized in his dicta, “*yata mat tata path*,” Ramakrishna remained a diehard religious conservative, a firm believer in the efficacy of *sanatana* [traditional] Hinduism. “The Hindu religion has existed and will exist for all times,” he declared unequivocally (*KM*, 2: 185 [*GR*: 642]. Diary of October 20, 1884). Even though the saint questioned the authority or legitimacy of the brahmanical priestcraft and held some Hindu scholars such as Shashadhar *Tarkachudamani* (*Brahmachari* Akshaychaitanya 1393 B.E.: 367-69; *KM*, 3: 90 [*GR*: 488]. Diary of June 30, 1884) and even Vidyasagar in benign contempt (*KM*, 3: 3, 6-7, 10 [*GR*: 104, 109]. Diary of August 5, 1882), he was a caste conscious Brahmin who was quite vocal about caste discrimination. “Do you know what it means for an ascetic to accept money or to succumb to temptation?” he once asked his devotees. “It’s like a Brahmin widow keeping a *bagdi* [a low caste Shudra] paramour after having undergone penance for long time.” The reporter of this statement records: “Everyone is struck dumb” (*KM*, 4: 182 [*GR*: 580]. Diary of October 2, 1884). His caustic caste-ridden remarks such as calculating and dim-witted often offended his patrons such as Manilal Mallik, most probably belonging to the caste of gold merchants that included others such as Adharlal Sen (1855-85), Shambhu Mallik, and Yadulal Mallik (1844-98) (*KM*, 2: 27-28 [*GR*: 202]. Diary of April 8, 1883; *KM*, 1: 249 [*GR*: 901]. Diary of October 27, 1885). The Master’s public view of casteism was reported by the Brahmo newspaper:

The venerable Ram Kissen of Dakhineswar paid a visit to Pandit Sasadhar Tarkachudamani on Friday last week. In the course of conversation the Pandit asked the Paramhansa’s opinion about the caste system—whether it ought to be abolished or not. The Paramhansa replied—“When the fruit is ripe it falls from the tree of itself. To wrench the unripe fruit is not good” (Bandyopadhyay & Das, 1375 B.E.: 31).

Luther and Ramakrishna: Aesthetic Predilections

Both Luther and Ramakrishna also displayed their artistic predilections. Ramakrishna was a skilled clay modeler, actor, and singer. He first attracted the attention of the manager of the Dakshineshwar temple Mathur Biswas by his expertise in sculpting the images of Radhakanta [another appellation for Krishna] and Shiva (Barman 2003: 161). He was a consummate impersonator and actor. He could easily and entirely lose himself in and completely identified with the character he assumed. In his childhood he had organized a dramatic club in his village and rehearsed devotional plays in the mango grove belonging to a wealthy neighbor Manikchandra Bandyopadhyay

(see Basu, 1981). He once acted the part of Lord Shiva in an open air opera in his native village at the residence of a local worthy Sitanath Pyne (*LP*, 1 [Purvakatha O Valyajivan]: 115). While meditating on Rama, he donned a tail like Hanuman [Rama's simian devotee and factotum] (*KM*, 4: 175 [GR: 543-44]. Diary of September 19, 1884). He was an expert in dressing up as a female. Once one of his women visitors was so startled by seeing the Master imitating feminine and she commented to Ramakrishna's devotee Saradananda that the imitation was perfectly accurate (*LP*, 1 [Grubhava-Purvardha]: 36). In fact Ramakrishna considered mimesis as an essential spiritual exercise for an ascetic or a devotee (Sil, 2009: 38). He of course was widely admired for his melodious devotional song in praise of Lord Krishna or Hari as well as several numbers in praise of the Goddess Kali by Ramprasad Sen (c. 1718-75) and Kamalakanta Bhattacharya (c. 1769-1821) (see Sil 2009a: 5; Prajnananda, 1394 B.E.: 428-41).

For Martin Luther, God is the deity of delight. He knew from his personal experience how depression and dark thoughts are vulnerable to Satan. As he wrote on music: "It has often revived me and relieved me from heavy burdens" (cited in Oberman, 2006: 310). He enjoyed singing as a youth. He could also play the lute and the flute. He revived music as part of his liturgical reforms, especially the priestly chants, the chorals by the choir, and hymns sung by the congregation. At least he set music to ten hymns. He also composed simple melodies. As he wrote:

Music is a fair and lovely gift of God which has often wakened and moved me to the joy of preaching. St Augustine was troubled in conscience whenever he caught himself delighting in music, which he took to be sinful. He was a choice spirit, and were he living today would agree with us. I have no use for cranks who despise music, because it is a gift of God. Music drives away the Devil and makes people gay: they forget thereby all wrath, unchastity, arrogance, and the like. Next after theology I give to music the highest place and the greatest honor. I would not exchange what little I know of music for something great. Experience proves that next to the Word of God only music deserves to be extolled as the mistress and governess of the feelings of the human heart (cited in Bainton, 1977: 266-67).

Luther also enjoyed good food and heady potions. "If our Lord is permitted to create nice, large pike [a species of succulent fish] and good Rhine wine," he remarked, "presumably I may be allowed to eat and drink" (Jeffreys 1992 online). Like Luther, Ramakrishna was a gourmand his preferred fare being fried flatbread made of refined white flour, farina pudding, and sweet cream, though unlike the German, the Bengali was a total teetotaler (*KM*, 3: 100 [GR: 661]. Diary of November 9, 1884; *LP*, 1 [Grubhava-Purvardha]: 35). He would even eat a juicy plum while squatting for evacuation (Jagadishvarananda, 1359 B.E.: 189). Indeed, his idea of an authentic *paramahansa* was a naked boy eating with ass full of shit and after washing offering his naked posterior to people for inspection (*KM*, 1: 214 [GR: 861. Nikhilananda omits the relevant sentence]. Diary of October 22, 1885). The Master's gluttony is interpreted by his hagiographers as his skill in demonstrating the power of human mind to regulate "the functions of the body to meet the demands of the situation" (*LR*: 294). He was duly attended by his wife who happily looked after all his daily mundane needs, cooked for him and his flock every day, and nursed him during his terminal illness. His celibate married life did not seem to bother her. As a pious Hindu woman she regarded her husband as divine, an attitude that was reinforced by his reputation as a Godman.

However, both Luther and Ramakrishna suffered from painful illnesses, their jest for life notwithstanding. Like Luther, Ramakrishna passed his days in the company of devotees, disciples, and scores of visitors singing, dancing, and dining together in the *communio sanctorum* at Dakshinesvar. Unfortunately, however, this "pigeon of pleasure" [*sukher payra*] died of throat cancer (detected since 1884) on August 16, 1886 after having endured incredible pain and suffering (*KM*, 4: 45 [GR: 240]. Diary of June 10, 1883). Though Luther lived a contented conjugal life, happily surrounded by students, colleagues, admirers, and followers, his health began deteriorating from 1527, when he was stricken with tightness of chest caused by "a rush of blood to the heart" accompanied by painful ringing in his ears. In 1537 he suffered from severe kidney stones (Oberman 2006, 320). As his physician Matthaus Ratzeberger (1501-59) reports (*Historia Lutherus*, 1555), Luther "could but pass no water." His whole body became so bloated "that one could do nothing for him but expect the end." On February 27 next year, the stone was dislodged and "he almost drowned in his own water" (Oberman, 2006: 330). Ratzeberger's account gives the impression that the reformer's entire adult life was buffeted by agonizing physical pain and suffering.

Luther's Fides and Ramakrishna's Bhakti

In a substantive sense, however, both Luther of Renaissance Europe and Ramakrishna of Renaissance Bengal claim our attention for their preaching and practice of *caritas*—their love of God—through *fides* and *bhakti*. Luther realized that all anthropological resources are utterly powerless before God. Only the *intellectus* and

affectus of faith and hope can substantiate and confirm man's life in the midst of sin and death. Hence he declared: *Homo spiritualis nititur fide* ["The spiritual man is born in faith"] (cited in Ozment, 1969: 215). Though Luther has often been accused of undermining human dignity by denying the efficacy of anthropological resources, he actually did not debunk the merits and power of man. As he wrote in his comments of Genesis 2:7, the fact of creation is the primary basis of human dignity: God creates him....He does not leave it to the earth to produce him, like the animals and the trees. But he himself shapes him according to His image as if he were God's partner and one who would enjoy God's rest (cited in Spitz, 1967: 37). It may be argued that Luther, in recognizing God's *potentia*, actually reaffirmed the ultimate possibilities of man. Luther's sickness of the soul stemmed from his vision of God's absolute power "in the dread and terror of the *Deus nudus*, the fearful Majesty that can wipe us out, and before which we cannot stand." But "in Christ the word God has a new meaning. 'The Son is the perfect image of God'" (Nagel, 1983: 46)—whom Luther came at last to view as all-merciful and accessible by virtue of faith alone. In fact, the mature Luther maintained that "everything [Christ] is and does is present in us and there works with power, so that we are utterly deified, so that we do not have some part or aspect of God, but his entire fullness" (cited in Jenson, 2003: 281).

Even though Ramakrishna was a priest of the Shakta deity Kali, his spiritual orientation and identity were clearly Vaisnavic. The peasant society of his native village of Kamarpukur was deeply influenced by Chaitanyite Vaishnavism (*LP*, 2 [Gurubhava-Uttarardha]: 285; see also Sil, 2009: 169-74; Sil, 2009a: 1-10). (Note 23) The simple Vaisnavic piety was easily accessible to the hardworking agrarian laborers who had little education and who enjoyed the devotional lores recited by the *kathaks* or enacted by the *yatra* that had tremendous entertainment value as contrasted with dry sermons or complex and costly rituals. Swami Prabhananda described Ramakrishna's *Harilila* [devotional play of Lord Hari] at the village of Sihore sometime in 1880 that inspired even the conservative and puritanical Vaisnava *goswamis* of the region in the spontaneous outburst of devotional eroticism (Prabhananda, 1991: 112-35: "Harililay yena bhelki lege gechhila"). Three years later, he performed a frenzied dance at Peneti (Panihati) on a Vaisnava holy day. After dance, he further stole the show by his sweet *kirtana* in praise of Lord Hari (*KM*, 5 23 [GR: 253-54]. Diary of June 18, 1883). Indeed, one of Ramakrishna's contemporary biographers, Shashibhusan Ghosh, observed: "Judging from his talk we realize that he associated with several sects like the Kartabhaja, Baul, and others, and appropriated and assimilated the spiritual moods of their adepts" (Ghosh, 1960: 166).

Ramakrishna grew up in this pietistic milieu and in a family devoted to the worship of Raghuvira or Rama (considered as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu). Indeed most members of the Master's family, whose chosen household deity was Rama, had "ram" as part of their first name: Manikram, Kshudiram, Nidhiram, Ramkanai, Ramshila, Ramkumar, Rameswar, and Ramlal. Even Ramakrishna's nephew was named Hridayram (Basu, 1981, 131-34). According to Saradananda, Ramakrishna was especially devoted to his family deity Rama and he worshiped this god every morning with flowers before taking his first meal of the day (*LP*, 1 [Purvakatha O Valyajivan]: 33). He was obsessed with a brass image of the baby Rama (*Ramlala*), actually a doll presented to him by an itinerant ascetic, and he loved to bathe it, feed it, and put it to sleep every day (*KM*, 4: 38 [GR: 347]. Diary of December 17, 1883). He even believed that "the One who in past ages had incarnated Himself as Ramachandra, Shrikrishna, Shrigauranga [Shrichaitanya (1486-1533)], and others, descended on earth in his own person" (*LP*, 2 [Gurubhava-Uttarardha]: 122).

As a Vaisnava, Ramakrishna was enchantingly personal, in fact quite intimate, in his relationship with the divine. Free from the constraints of ratiocination and intellection, his clarion call as man of God was not *sapere aude* ["dare to know"], but *ludere aude* ["dare to play"]—a wonderful imitation of the divine *lila* or divine dalliance so admired and adored in Hindu spirituality. Ramakrishna, the "mad Master" [*pagal Thakur*], lived in the serene and charming atmosphere of the temple precinct at Dakshineswar in superb comfort, thanks to his caring and trusting employers—singing, dancing, eating good food, and being ecstatic to everybody's wonderment. "This world is a hunk of fun. I eat (and drink) and make merry," he loved to repeat this doggerel often (*KM*, 3: 177 [GR: 478]. Diary of June 30, 1884). In his wonderfully crazy way he told his Brahmo admirer Keshab Sen: "Why should I cry 'Brahman Brahman'! I'll call on Him in every *bhava*—*shanta* [calm], *dasya* [service], *vatsalya* [childlike naiveté], *sakhya* [companionship], and *madhura* [sweet love]—I'll have fun with God" (*KM*, 5: 210 [GR: 1010]. Diary of January 1, 1881).

Ramakrishna maintained that "a man of perfect knowledge and a perfect idiot betray similar characteristics" (*KM*, 3: 191 [GR: 792]. Diary of June 13, 1885). Hence his spiritual battle-cry: "Be mad! Be crazy with love of God!" (*KM*, 2: 169 [GR: 615]. Diary of October 11, 1884). Nearly a century ago, the Protestant missionary and scholar John Nicol Farquhar (1861-1929) observed: "The character of Ramakrishna was singularly simple. He seemed to be capable of only a single motive, namely a passion for God that ruled him and filled him" (Farquhar, 1967,

195). More recently David Kinsley wrote: The lesson of Ramakrishna is that man must approach the divine without guile—openly in wonder, with the simple faith of a child....[I]n man's love affair with the divine he is free to behave...like a child...and finally...that God is like a child [who need to be amused] in superfluous sport and aimless dalliance (Kinsley, 1979: 236-37).

Epilogue

Both Luther and Ramakrishna flourished in a time of transition relative to their time and location: the European Renaissance of the *Quattrocento* and the Bengal Renaissance of the nineteenth century. The European phenomenon signaled a time of renewal of the classical heritage—the Greco-Roman artistic, intellectual, and literary culture of antiquity. The Bengal Renaissance was triggered by colonial contact and impact, especially English education, economy, and administration. British education had kindled a keen desire among the youths of Bengal as well as other cities of India to learn about the history and culture of their native land. At the same time the Christian missionary activities of the time brought home the need to separate the grain of Hinduism from the chaffs of Brahmanical misrepresentation and malpractice.

Luther was formally trained in scholastic as well as humanist learning and was the inheritor of the reformist tradition of the fourteenth century (the Lollard movement of John Wycliffe, c.1330-84 and the Hussite movement of Jan Hus, c. 1370-1415) and the pietistic movement (*devotio moderna*) of the fifteenth. Ramakrishna, on the other hand, never completed elementary education either in his native village or in Calcutta and was thus innocent of the Hindu holy books. He, however, imbibed the simple piety of Chaitanyite Vaisnavism, the Hindu *devotio moderna* of the fifteenth century, from his village, but could not absorb the urban reformist influence of the Brahmo Samaj movement of Raja Rammohan Ray and the Young Bengal movement begun by the students of the young Eurasian teacher of the Hindu College (later the Presidency College), Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-31) in the first half of the nineteenth century. Luther's spirituality harked back to Apostolic Christianity whereas Ramakrishna's devotionism was a continuation of the folk Vaisnavic *bhakti* tradition of the fifteenth century that remained untouched by the cerebral, enlightened, and modernist neo-Hindu movement (the *Adi* Brahmo Samaj) of his day. While the *Adi* Brahmos remained somewhat lukewarm about Ramakrishna's ecstatic devotionism, the renegade faction of the Brahmos, the New Dispensation [*Navavidhan*] under Keshab Sen's charismatic leadership appropriated the *paramahansa's* incarnationist model that attracted a mass following because of its moorings in Hindu culture and thereby conferring a respectable identity on the colonial subjects with which to negotiate with the modernity ushered in by a powerful alien authority. Thus a section of Calcutta's *bhadralok* society—the Keshavite Brahmos and a handful of educated folks mostly from the middle or lower middle class—showed some enthusiasm for the *paramahansa* phenomenon.

And yet one must recognize Ramakrishna's posthumous reputation as a saint and prophet. During the Master's lifetime, his popularity owed to a great extent to his personality and performance (song, *samadhi*, story-telling, and dance) as well as to the ambience of his abode. Ramakrishna's Dakshinesvar was a veritable “mart of bliss” [*anander hatbajar*] where the young found in their older mentor a trusting friend and a compassionate councilor and in his “nurturant environment” a psychologically stable and safe asylum from the demands of the adult world for education, work, or marriage (Schneiderman, 1969: 69). The Master was a charismatic religious leader with an extraordinary capacity for persuasion and control. A la Agehananda Bharati, Ramakrishna could be classified as a “saint,” that is, an “institutionally unaligned ‘leader’... a ‘product’ of the so-called Little Traditions” who became religious leaders due to their personal charisma (Bharati, 1984: 21; see also Storr, 1996: xiv-xv). Ramakrishna's stature and significance were reconstructed, in fact reinvented, by his charismatic disciple Vivekananda, the “Cyclonic monk” and a veritable spiritual superstar. Vivekananda's Ramakrishna was transformed from a devotional ecstatic into a trend setter for subsequent Hindu spiritual leaders who achieved renown as global *gurus* (see Sil, 2009: ch. 9; Sil, 1991: Conclusion). (Note 24)

Though, admittedly, he had his shortcomings—lack of education, conservatism, casteism, superstition, apathy to work for a living, indifference to social service, apolitical quiescence, stubborn self-pity, and pronounced misogyny—Ramakrishna yet made some real contributions to the cultural history of *fin-de siècle* Bengal as well as to that of post-independence India at large. Appearing at a time when Hinduism, weakened by centuries of inertia, faced a two-pronged assault from the Christian evangelical enterprise and the reformist secessionist group, the Brahmos, he reversed the process by popularizing traditional Hindu eclecticism in a simple vernacular idiom: “*yata mat tata path.*” (Note 25) The core of Ramakrishna's spiritual message is startlingly simple. As he said, “the divine could be apprehended through sincerity irrespective of any religious path” (*KM*, 2: 19 [GR: 191]. Diary of March 11, 1882). He thus brought the Brahmos, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, and Sikhs into one grand fold devotionism and, like Luther, announced a simple formula for attaining *moksha* or salvation: “*sola fide, sola gratia*” [“by faith only, by grace only”].

Luther in fact defied four patriarchal/authority figures: his biological father Hans, his intellectual father-figure Aristotle whom he labeled “damned, conceited, rascally heathen” sent by God “as a plague upon us for our sins” (Luther 1520), the Holy Roman Emperor, and, above all, the father of Christian Church, the pope of Rome, whom he famously called Antichrist. Especially, his defiance of the supranational authority of the papal Church proved to be an ideological adjunct to the incipient nationalism in Europe and led directly or indirectly to the emergence of sovereign nation states in countries such as England Bohemia, Hungary, Poland, and Scandinavia. Lutheranism in fact effectively weakened the two traditional symbols of universal authorities of Europe—the Holy Roman Empire and the papacy—that would never be the same after the events beginning in the 1530s through the Treaty of Westphalia ending the Thirty Years War (1618-48). The post-Tridentine (that is, following the Council of Trent, 1545-63, convened by Pope Paul III [r. 1534-49]) Catholic Church reformed its hierarchy, put an end to its abusive practices, reformulated its doctrines, clarified its dogma, established censorship (Inquisition and Index) against heretical opinion, and thus saved itself from further decline. Nevertheless, the papal claim to Petrine inheritance henceforth would be honored more in theory than in actual practice.

In conclusion, despite multiple social, cultural, intellectual, and historical dissimilarities, there is one unmistakable and undeniable parallel in the spiritual and theological experiences of both the Christian and the Hindu religious personalities and it is to be found in their quest for the divine. Luther’s Christ the Son of God and Ramakrishna’s Kali the Dark Mother or Krishna the Dark Lover are no distant deities who demand of humans their ritualized prayers, supplications, and sacrifices but are adorably accessible to the devotees through sheer faith and love. Norman Nagel reminds us that “when Luther came to know God gracious and near in Christ, he cried God is not far but near, so near he could not be nearer” (Nagel, 1983: 44). Rabindranath Tagore’s poem “Vaisnavkavita” elegantly encapsulates the quintessential human-divine relationship in a single epigrammatic verse: “*Devatare priya kari, priyere devata*” [“We endear God as well as endow our dear ones with divinity”] (Tagore, 1969: 147). Both Martin and Gadadhar would have concurred with Tagore, albeit in their own characteristic understanding. Thus while the childlike Gadadhar the *paramahansa* played with his beloved doll *Ramlala*, Dr. Martin the professor and preacher in a sermon in 1530 reminded his audience, particularly those naïve adorers of the Gospel as “a fine, pleasing, friendly and childlike doctrine,” the odyssey of St. Christopher (d. 251), who thought he could easily cross the river carrying the child Jesus on his back, found out “how heavy the little child was [when] he had entered the deepest water” (Strohl, 2003: 151).

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Abbreviations

B.E. Bengali Era that follows Gregorian calendar by 593 years 3 months 14 days.

GR Swami Nikhilananda 1984 (1942). *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center. [English translation of KM].

KM ShriM (1394 B.E./ 1308-39 B.E.), comp. *Shrishriramakrishnakathamrita, 5 bhagas*. Kalikata: Kathamrita Bhavan.

LP Swami Saradananda 1398 B.E. *Shrishriramakrishnalilaprasanga, 2 vols*. Kalikata: Udbodhan Karyalay. Vol. I in 3 parts.: Purvakatha O Valyajivan, Sadhakabhava, and Gurubhava-Purvardha. Vol. II in 2 parts: Gurubhava-Uttarardha and Thakurer Divyajivan O Narendranath.

LR 1964. *Life of SriRamakrishna compiled from Authentic Sources*. 8th impression. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama.

VS Swami Prameyananda, Naliniranjan Chattopadhyay, and Swami Chaitanyananda (1398 B.E./1394 B.E.). *Visvachetanay Shriramakrishna*. 3rd edition. Kalikata: Udbodhan Karyalay.

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Notes

Note 1. In the text Ramakrishna will be occasionally referred to as "Gadadhar," "Master," or "*Paramahansa*." A *paramahansa* is an honorific title for a person who has attained the highest spiritual state in which he is able to exercise perfect discrimination like the mythical swan (*hansa*) capable of distinguishing the milk substance from water in liquid milk. It is not certain exactly when and by whom Gadadhar was called Ramakrishna and *paramahansa*. Most accounts agree that he was thus called and regarded by his devotees in later years. There are, however, some indications that he was called Ramakrishna and also given the appellation of *paramahansa* by his putative Vedantic mentor Ishvar Totapuri, a naked monk from the Punjab. See Sengupta, 1395 B.E., I: 102. Swami Nikhilananda states that Rasmani and Mathuranath named Gadadhar as Ramakrishna. *GR*: 10: Nikhilananda's Introduction. Ramakrishna's recognition as a *paramahansa* in print first appeared in Sen 1878. For a fuller discussion of this topic see Basu, 1981: 131-34.

Note 2. This "fit in the choir" episode might be a fabrication of Luther's Catholic adversary and hostile biographer Johannes Cochlaeus (1479-1552), who was chaplain to Duke George of Albertine Saxony, cousin of Friedrich, duke of Electoral Saxony. See Roper, 2010: 379.

Note 3. "I am peasant's son, and my father, grandfather, and great grandfather were all common peasants," Luther reminisced. Luther, 1872: xxv. It should be noted here that Luther's *Table Talk* [*Tischreden*] recorded by the Zwickau pastor Conrad Cordatus (1480-1546) has its analogue in Ramakrishna's *logia* recorded by his lay disciple Mahendranath Gupta (1854-1932) in *KM*.

Note 4. The story of Ramakrishna's miraculous birth comes from his own deposition, as we learn from Barman 2003, 145-341. Barman's account was editorialized by Swami Saradananda (premonastic name Sharatchandra Chakravarti, 1865-1927).

Note 5. Though Cochlaeus accepted Peter Sylvius's canard of Luther's devilish origin he did express some doubt about its veracity in his *Commentaria de actis et scriptis Martini Lutheri* (1534-49). Nevertheless, "he remained convinced that as a destroyer of the Church and the German nation, Luther was an agent of Satan himself." Wiedemann, 1983: 198.

Note 6. For a psychological analysis of Luther's spirituality see Erikson, 1958 and an anthology devoted to a critique of this study Johnson 1977. See also Sil, 1982-83.

Note 7. The university of Leucorea (Greek for Witten Berg meaning "White Mountain"), funded primarily by Frederick III the Wise, duke of Electoral Saxony (r. 1486-1525), opened for its business on October 18, 1502. Currently it's the site of Martin Luther Universitat Halle-Wittenberg. See Weber, 1999.

Note 8. Luther had accompanied his cohort at Erfurt to Rome on a business affecting the Saxon Augustinian orders that had been undergoing some reforms. Staupitz wished to unite the Saxon monasteries with a group of Augustinian monasteries in Lombardy, Italy with a view to gaining papal privileges that would free his monastery from Episcopal control like the Lombard orders. Staupitz's plan was opposed by the Erfurt monks who did not wish to join the unreformed Italian monasteries. They selected Luther and another monk, Johann Nathin, to appeal to the Archbishop of Magdeburg. When the Archbishop denied the appeal, the Erfurt monks sent Luther and another monk to appeal to the Augustinian minister general in Rome. Here also the Erfurt appeal was denied. Luther sided with Staupitz. In order to protect the young monk from the wrath of the disappointed Erfurt brothers, Staupitz ordered him to Wittenberg to teach theology there.

Note 9. It should be noted here that Luther did not write a dissertation for his doctorate. His learning observed in classroom discussion and his debates were admired by his teachers such as Dr. Martin Mellerstadt (d. 1513), the Leipzig physician and the rector of Wittenberg. He was thus recognized for the ranks of the Doctor. Melancthon, 2002: 7.

Note 10. The Occamist school specializing in Nominalism is named after the English logician and Franciscan friar William of Occam. Luther's Nominalist mentors at Erfurt were Jodocus Trutvetter of Eisenach (d. 1519), rector of the university and a veritable *doctor erfordiensis*, and Bartholomew Arnoldi of Usingen (c. 1465-1532), a noted humanist, under whom Martin studied the *quadrivium*: geometry, mathematics, music, and astronomy, and additionally, Aristotle's philosophy.

Note 11. The Book of Psalms or Psalter, containing 150 hymnic verses written over a period of about 800 years, has been the chief hymnal of Jews, and subsequently, of Christians. Psalm 22, generally attributed to David (1040-970 B.C.E.), has been interpreted by Christian Church as a revelation of Christ to David in the latter's own time of troubles. The first line of this Psalm is reported by the Apostle Matthew to have been repeated by Jesus on the cross (Matt. 27.46).

Note 12. St. Paul (or Saul), a Jew of Tarsus (c.5-c.67), quotes the Hebrew prophet Habakkuk's (c. 7th century B.C.E.) *dictum*: "The just live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4).

Note 13. Ramkumar was introduced to Rasmani by his village acquaintance Maheshchandra Chattopadhyay, a clerk working in Rasmani's estate. *LP*, 1 (Sadhakabhava): 74.

Note 14. For a discussion of the veracity of this account see Sil, 2009: ch. 8.

Note 15. There is another account by a contemporary biographer claiming for Ramakrishna's superiority over the Prophet Mohammed (570-632) as a spiritual personality. The evidence adduced by the author is that although both the boy Gadadhar and Mohammed lost consciousness while beholding the appearance of Great Energy [*Mahashakti*] in the firmament, Gadadhar's mouth was dry while Mohammed's frothy. Mitra, 2003: 77.

Note 16. Vivekananda's letter to his friend Haramohan Mitra (b. c. 1862) sometime in the 1880s cited in *LP*, 1 (Gurubhava-Purvardha): 1. It is puzzling as well as painful to note how several historians of India make the quasi literate Master a learned theologian with incomprehensible disregard of the common canons of scholarship as well as common sense. See for, example, A. Mukhopadhyay, 1398 B.E.: 141-52 and J. Mukhopadhyay, 1398 B.E.: 153-76. See also the most aggressive and astonishingly naïve and nonchalant attempt to demonstrate Ramakrishna as an adept in Sanskrit and the Shastras in Sen, 2006: 165-77 and Sen, 2000: 100-20.

Note 17. Ramakrishna, however, literally ordered his wealthy patron and devotee Manilala Mallik to build a pond in the village of his beloved devotee Rakhil Ghosh (later Swami brahmananda, 1863-1922). *KM*, II: 27 (*GR*: 202). Diary of April 8, 1883. Dr. Rajagopal Chattopadhyaya argued convincingly that the Master's phrase "*Shivjnane jiver seva*" [service to living creatures regarding them as God] is a fabrication and an interpolation by Swami Saradananda. Ramakrishna never used it nor is it mentioned anywhere in the *KM*. See Chattopadhyaya 1998: 52-53.

Note 18. The Brahma Samaj movement had been started by Raja Rammohan Ray (1772-1833) as a reformist, enlightened, and unitarian version of Hindu religion. Their confession of faith is enshrined in the society's *Trust Deed* (January 1830). According to it, the Brahmos worshipped Brahman, "the Eternal Unsearchable and Immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe." They excoriated Hindu idolatry and acaste system, though their sacred scripture was the collection of Hindu philosophical treatises known as *Vedanta* and the *Upanisads*. The real organizer of the movement was Maharsi Devendranath Tagore (1817-1905), the scion of the house of Tagore at Jorasanko, Calcutta, and father of the poet Rabindranath (1861-1941). In 1868 Keshabchandra Sen separated from Tagore's Brahma Samaj and thereafter the Brahma movement was split into the *Adi* [Original] Brahma Samaj led by Tagore and the Brahma Samaj of India or the Navavidhan or New

Dispensation Society of the Brahmos under Sen. A further schism took place in 1878 after Keshab, in violation of Brahma canons, had married his underage daughter off to a wealthy aristocratic family of Coochbihar. Now Sen's New Dispensation was separated from a new splinter group called Sadharan Brahma Samaj. In spite of these internal dissensions, "the immediate effect of the Brahma movement in Bengal was the checking of the proselytizing activities of the Christian missionaries." *GR*: 41: Nikhilananda's Introduction. See also Dasgupta, 2007: ch. 3.

Note 19. Oberman maintains that this saying does not exist in Luther's writings (2006: 310).

Note 20. As Bayer points out, "there is hardly a page in Luther's works where Luther does not do battle against the devil" (2003: 210; see also Roper, 2010: 371-80). Even his portrait of earlier years by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553) shows him as a "gaunt, hollow-cheeked" but powerfully built young man.

Note 21. I consider the reference to "pearl," something quite an unlikely object for the poor rustic boy to come by, as a hagiographical artifice to transform what could actually have been the case—a drop of semen teased out of the penis through manipulation.

Note 22. This flatly contradicts Romain Rolland's observation that Ramakrishna was "very particular about perfect health" (Rolland, 2004: 180 n.17).

Note 23. Krishnachaitanya (1486-1533), also known as Shrigauranga [Blessed Fairbody] or Mahaprabhu [Great Master], started the devotional Vaisnava movement dedicated to the worship of Krishna, an incarnation of Visnu. See Sil, 2009a.

Note 24. For a frankly apologetic attempt at projecting Ramakrishna's image as a spiritual titan of global proportions, see Tripathy, 1999.

Note 25. It must be noted that this universally acknowledged and acclaimed maxim of the Master as it stands does not really represent his actual words which are "*ananta path ananta mat*" ["infinite are the paths and infinite the opinion"]. *KM*, 5: 21 (*GR*: 158). Diary of November 26, 1882. I used Nikhilananda's translation in *GR*. See also Samaddar, 1989; Halbfass, 1988: ch. 13; Majumdar, 1960: 77; Ghatak, 1991: chs. 1-2, 45, and 10.