The Empty Throne: Religious Imagery and Presence in Byzantine and Buddhist Art, by Thomas Cattoi

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the theological and spiritual import of the image of the empty throne in early Buddhist and Christian iconography. While Byzantine representations of the Last Judgment and early Indian depictions of the Buddha's teaching resort to the image of the empty throne, this iconic *topos* has a very different significance in the two traditions. The exploration of the points of contact as well as of the differences between the two iconographic traditions will help us uncover the particularity of Buddhist and Christian claims as to temporality, subjectivity, and the salvific value of the material order.

In his work *Satyadvayavibhanga* (*Commentary on the Two Truths*), the eighth century Mādhyamaka scholar Jñānagarbha offers an extensive reflection on the dialectical relationship between conventional and ultimate truth.[1] Jñānagarbha, like all adherents of the Middle Way, distinguished between a conceptual and a non-conceptual understanding of ultimate truth. While later followers of the later Prasangika school would make no assertions at all about ultimate reality, Jñānagarbha espoused the Svatantrika school of Mādhyamaka, and was thus less reluctant to make use of philosophical definitions in the course of his reflections about the nature of the two truths.[2] While Jñānagarbha's disciple Śantarakśita would blend the teaching on conventional and ultimate reality with elements from the Mind-Only school, Jñānagarbha's focus is on the tension between the conventional world of duality that is controlled by the subject-object dichotomy, and the dimension of ultimate truth, where all dualities dissolve in the inexpressible insight of enlightenment. In this perspective, both speech and sight are sensory props that are destined to pass away, and all manifestations of the *dharma* that resort to verbal or visual supports can only introduce us to a meta-linguistic or aniconic reality. Quoting from *Satyadvayavibhanga* in the translation by Malcolm Eckel,

> When the Buddha takes no notice of subject, object or self, no signs of cognition arise in his mind. His concentration is firm, and he does not get up.
> The place where he sits is a locus (*sthāna*) of every conceivable virtue. It is incomparable, worthy of worship, a guide, and utterly beyond thought.

> This is the Dharma Body of the Buddhas (*dharmakāya*), because it is the body of all the qualities (*dharma*) [that constitute a Buddha], the locus (*āśraya*) of every inconceivable virtue, and rational in nature.[3]

The Buddha, we are told, does not get up. Once you have entered the enlightened state, you will no longer be distracted by the world of duality and sound; rather, you will be able to use discursive thought to teach other sentient beings and help them move beyond the suffering of *samsāra*. The seat of the Buddha is symbolically invested with every conceivable virtue; indeed, it is the seat, rather than the Buddha, that is said to be a guide.[4]

Nāgārjuna's *Vajrachchedika* contains a similar passage when it mentions the spot of earth where the Buddha was enlightened, and it says that it should be honored by circumambulation, and it is "worthy of worship by all the gods."[5] The reason why this is the case, however, is that the seat is associated with the *dharmakāya*, the body that encompasses all excellent qualities, and at the same time is utterly empty. The seat of the Buddha has no visible occupant. How does this dovetail with Mādhyamaka's overall understanding of the relationship between the *dharma*, on one hand, and Buddhahood, on the other?

In the early Buddhist texts of the Pāli canon, we find references to the fact that the Buddha refused to discuss certain philosophical questions, such as the eternity of the world or the relationship between the soul and the body; apparently, he regarded them as unnecessary for liberation, and he thought that devoting time to these issues would hinder progress towards awakening.[6] Occasionally, however, we find texts supporting a more radical claim, namely that the Buddha, after achieving *nirvāna*, ceased to speak at all, [7] or—in other versions—only uttered a single syllable, which in the ears of his disciples turned into a fully articulated teaching.[8] These extraordinary statements do not contradict the tradition that has the Buddha wander around as an itinerant preachers for whole decades following his awakening; rather, they resort to paradox to remind us that all manifestations involving speech or sight—and thus the whole Buddhist literary tradition, no less than the manifestations and images of the Buddha—are pointers to the realm of emptiness, which no image or sound can presume to capture. In the same paradoxical manner, one can then say that the Buddha was seen in human form and walked the paths of Northern India, while at the same time Buddhahood never became "visible" at all. The worship of the empty throne can only be understood against this dialectic of visibility and invisibility: the teaching—and the body—of the Buddha are mere pointers towards ultimate emptiness.

Speculative reflection on the relationship between embodiment and Buddhahood developed slowly over the course of many centuries, giving rise to a number of quite

distinct philosophical traditions. In the Tibetan cultural region, Nāgārjuna's ideas on the relationship between the two truths would become part of a vast speculative system, where the notion of the bodies of the Buddha offered a conceptual *trait d'union* between philosophical speculation about different levels of reality and the notion of an all-encompassing Buddha nature. Earlier schools of Buddhism had tended to view *nirvāna* in opposition to the ordinary condition of delusion of suffering known as *samsāra*, and had claimed that sentient beings experiencing enlightenment would forever leave *samsāra* behind. The Mahāyāna tradition, on the contrary, had gradually come to view *nirvāna* as the true nature of *samsāra*, and indeed as ontologically identical with it.[9] As *nirvāna* was eventually conflated with the very nature of the Buddha, the universe in its entirety came to be seen as a manifestation of the wisdom and the compassion of the Buddha. [10] Once this understanding of Buddhahood was interpreted through the lenses of Mādhyamaka philosophy and the teaching on the Buddha bodies, a distinction could be introduced between the body of *dharma*, which is nothing but *śūnyatā*, or emptiness, and the different bodies of form (*rūpa*). In this perspective, the Buddha was ultimately *dharmakāya*, emptiness without limit, but he was also a plurality of *rupakāyāh*– a term which encompasses all manifestations of Buddhahood in the realm of form.[11]

The theme of the empty throne reminds us that in the Buddha one encounters the nirvanic in the samsaric, and yet the samsaric is only a conventional pointer that gestures towards a horizon of emptiness. The speeches of the Buddha used certain words and sentences, and yet ultimately they were no different from silence. His body walked the dusty roads of Northern India, and yet he was never there at all. In other words, the experience of awakening is rigorously apophatic and aniconic, but at the same time it becomes manifest in certain locutions and images.[12] On one hand, even as Buddhahood may be attained by all sentient beings, it is also true that for the majority of them Buddhahood may remain beyond reach for not a few lifetimes. On the other hand, the teaching and the practices that lead one to enlightenment take place through the medium of conventional circumstances. As such, the empty seat of the Buddha serves as a locus of revelation, and its emptiness makes it even more worthy of veneration, because it constantly reminds us that Buddhahood is never captured by any facet of ordinary reality. The empty seat points beyond itself, towards the realm of ultimate emptiness.

A Christian audience might find this rather odd, perhaps alluring in its exoticism, but in fact this is not so exotic at all. Why is it, after all, that so many European Christians were ready to lay down their lives to ensure Christendom's control of the Holy Sepulcher? We all know that the Sepulcher is nothing but an empty tomb, a chrysalis that has been shed. One finds nothing, there. And yet, no other place is so redolent of the presence of the one who was there, and now is no longer with us. Malcolm Eckel reminds us that in the *Abhidharmakośa*, Vasubhandu pauses to reflect

on what it means to take refuge in the Buddha. The answer to this question is that one does not really take refuge in a physical body, but rather in the qualities that constitute Buddhahood. Indeed, these are qualities that pertains to one who "no longer needs training", because has attained the highest spiritual condition that is available to sentient beings.[13] If devotees were to focus entirely on worshipping relics of the Buddha's earthly body, their behavior would merely show that they have entirely missed the point: the Buddha's "real body" is his insight that alone make him unique. Mādhyamaka philosophy differed from Nyaya logic as it insisted that emptiness could not be grasped directly by the human mind, but could only be perceived through attendant contingent circumstances: for instance the absence of a house that used to stand on a particular plot of land is based on the perception of the empty spot of land.[14] This instrumental value of conventional reality in bringing about an insight into emptiness reminds us that the whole of conventional reality is the theater of the Buddha's compassionate activity seeking to bring sentient beings to liberation. Again, a Christian reader might be reminded of the encounter between the risen Christ and Mary Magdalene described in the twentieth chapter of the Gospel of John: Christ tells Mary not to touch him, or perhaps, according to more accurate translations, not to hold on to him (John 20: 11-8). It is not by hanging onto Christ's physical body that one attains salvation, but by letting him ascend to the Father.

The image of the empty throne is thus a synthesis of Mahāyāna cosmology and soteriology, but I would now like to add yet a third component, which is eschatology. Some may raise up in arms and say that Buddhists, with the exception of some crack-pot Tibetans of the Nyingma persuasion, have no eschatology at all: sentient beings move up and down eternally on the wheel of Mara, until their karma offers them the opportunity of a human birth, and perhaps the even rarer opportunity to hear the *dharma* and escape from the cycle of reincarnations. If Jesus' disciples asked him "Master, what shall we do to have eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16), eternal recurrence is exactly what Buddhist practitioners are eager to avoid. And yet, we saw that for Mahāyāna Buddhists *nirvāna* cannot be characterized as a spiritualizing flight from the senses- it is also the beginning of an ever more active engagement of conventional reality, done for the sake of sentient beings. As one realizes that one is empty of self, one can act with even greater wisdom and compassion, and in fact continue the work of the Buddha. In other words, we also do not get up. In teaching, we do not speak; in walking, we are not there. We are yet another empty seat, a locus where Buddhahood is presents because of its utter absence. Or in fact, we are *the* empty seat of the Buddha, the locus of an absence that is forever present in every act of compassion. Yogacara Buddhism uses the term *aśrayaparavrtti* (overturning of the basis) to talk of the moment when our propensity to think within the subject-object paradigm is overcome. When we undergo *aśrayaparavrtti*, we are able to step out of spatial and temporal categories and experience oneness with the utterly

formless *dharmakāya*. All the objects are then perceived as the nature itself of the mind, and the mind itself becomes the locus of the all-enveloping emptiness.[15] If the empty throne is the mind of the Buddha that simultaneously manifests in the conventional realm, those that worship at this throne are those that no longer need the support of the world of form. To resort to a term from Johannine scholarship that may even suffer from over-use, this is an instance of realized eschatology, where what is ultimate irrupts into the present: the practitioners are the emptiness that sits on the throne, here and now, and to them, as to the Buddhahood that is in them, is due all honor and praise.

I already mentioned the encounter of Mary Magdalene with the risen Christ, whose lineaments were so utterly transfigured that she could not initially discern him. If we turn to another passage in the corpus of writings that are traditionally ascribed to the pen of the Apostle John, Revelation Chapter 7, one finds a passage that uncannily resonates with what we have encountered so far:

> 9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;
> 10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.
> 11 And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,
> 12 Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.[16]

At the end of human history, the Book of Revelation presents us with the image of the heavenly court prostrate in worship at the throne of the divine Lamb, who with his sacrifice has defeated death and opened the doors of eternal life. All those who will be present at this moment of glory are those that washed their garments in the blood of the Lamb, and as such have come to share in his victory over sin and Satan. This throne is not empty, since the one who sits on it is the one over whom death and dissolution no longer have any power. The sacrificed victim has triumphed over his executioners, and like a Roman general entering the Forum on his, he is acclaimed by the shouts of the throng of saints. And yet...

Visitors to Venice who venture beyond the usual tourist haunts and visit some of the islands scattered across the lagoon might discover the small settlement of Torcello, a village that is the permanent home of no more than twenty people. For about four

hundred years, however, after the Langobards and the Franks forced many inhabitants from the mainland to seek refuge in the relative isolation of the lagoon, Torcello was the largest settlements in the area, far larger even than Venice. In 639, the Byzantine Exarch of Ravenna founded the Cathedral of the Assumption of the Virgin, which would remain the see of the Bishop of Torcello until the suppression of the Diocese in 1818. The cathedral is one of the most interesting specimens of the Byzantine-Venetian style, testifying to the cultural and commercial ties that linked the Venetian polity and Constantinople before the Fourth Crusade. The counter-façade of the Cathedral is entirely covered by a mosaic representing the Last Judgment in the Byzantine style, a work that surprises visitors for its proportions but even more so for its incorporation of iconographical themes that are rather unusual in the West. One of such themes is the so-called *etimasia*, the preparation of the throne which Christ will occupy on the day of the last judgment.[17] In Torcello, Christ sits in a mandorla flanked by the Virgin Mary and the Apostle John- under his feet two cherubs and two wheels, hinting at the vision in Ezechiel, surround a river of fire that flows from Christ's feet. But underneath the mandorla two angels with their majestically spread wings indicate an empty throne on which is folded the mantle worn by the Roman judges. On the mantle is a closed book, and behind the throne one can see the insignia of Christ's victory, the cross.[18]

If we look at the relief of the empty throne from Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh we find not a few points in common, down to the pillow resting on the throne. Of course we will not find a cross there, but a tree, marking the Buddha's victory over *samsara*. In Torcello we do not see crowds of worshippers bowing down at the throne, but at the feet of the two angels one sees Adam and Eve as representatives of humanity, begging for mercy from the judge who is yet to come and who will open the Book of Life. Much as the Buddha's empty throne, the *etimasia* is the reminder of an absence. The resurrected Christ is gone, "he is not here" (Matthew 28:6); he will return at the end of times to judge the living and the dead. The empty throne is a reminder that we now live in the end times, but also in a time of respite; the judgment will come, the angels appear to say, and yet Christ is deferring the moment when there will be no more mercy, but only justice. One may perhaps imagine that the Virgin and John in the upper tier are begging for more time, on behalf of the sinners that will face the judgment of God. The worshippers at this empty throne do not experience just awe; they also experience fear. The river of fire that exits the mandorla descends into the bowels of the earth and torments the damned, but it is angels, rather than demons, that marshal the damned with their spears.[19] Unlikely bureaucrats of the divine justice, God's messengers almost conspire to make damnation aesthetically pleasing. Adam and Eve kneeling at the throne are the paradigm of humanity lured by the mystery that is simultaneously *tremendum* and *fascinans*—awesome and yet alluring.[20]

In her acclaimed study *Fragmentation and Redemption*, Caroline Walker Bynum notes that medieval images of the eschaton often gesture towards a reconfiguration of bodily wholeness, where the resurrection of the flesh reverses the ravages of mortality and decay.[21] At the edges of Torcello's mosaic, one sees animals that devoured human beings on this earth vomit the fragments of their victims, who are made, once more, whole. The damned, on the other hand, have lost all appearance of corporeality- heads without bodies emerge from a see of flames, and skulls and bones punctuate the margins of their place of torment. Spectators of Lars von Trier's 2009 movie *Antichrist* will recall how the descent into hell of the two protagonists entails not a few instances of mutilation and even self-mutilation, which turn two beautiful and sexually desirable bodies into paradigms of repulsion and decay.[22] In Torcello, however, the blessed at the right hand of the throne stand upright, clad in wonderful garments. Those that are chosen no longer lie in the earth- they have regained the verticality which is a defining feature of the human condition. Bynum shows that the theme of resurrection as reversal of fragmentation is actually a recurrent theme in Medieval and Renaissance art, and mentions a few more examples; for instance, in the chapel of Orvieto Cathedral where one finds the -appositely titled- Antichrist cycle by Luca Signorelli, angels descend to cloth with skin the bodies of the blessed that are being gathered from the ends of the earth.[23]

In the iconography of Torcello, the very absence from our sight of Christ's bodily frame is presented to the on-looker as a provisional reality, a transient phase of human history, which will cease on the day when emptiness will be replaced by glory. On that day, the throne will no longer be empty. This is very different from Buddhist practice, where emptiness and form are not two distinct realities replacing each other at different times in the history of salvation –indeed, this last concept would be utterly foreign to a Buddhist worldview- but are both always simultaneously present. In addition, for a Buddhist, the world of form enjoys no monopoly over 'glory': the emptiness of Buddhahood is itself described as endowed with the most excellent and luminous attributes.[24]

Christians, however, must wait for the eschaton to be transfigured by the divine glory; indeed, the difference between the sufferings of this world and the glory of the last day could not possibly be greater. In his recent study *The Reign and the Glory*, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben uses the theme of the empty throne as a cipher to develop a philosophical analysis of modern political theory. For Agamben, the Trinitarian configuration of the Christian God that emerges from the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, and that affirms the ontological equality between the eternal Father and the incarnate Son, can be seen as a theological map to chart the dialectical relationship between the "glorious" and the "active" dimension of government.[25] The former enjoys precedence over the latter, and yet the latter is in no way relegated to an

ontologically subordinate position in relation to the former: government –or "the reign", to use Agamben's terminology- allows "glory" to be manifest in the world. This is not all that different from Gregory of Nazianzos' claim in the Trinitarian orations that the Father is the cause (*aitia*) of the Trinity, but it is only through the mediation of the fully consubstantial Son that the Father's plan for the universe unfolds in time. Instead of talking of "reign" and "glory", the Cappadocians would have talked of *oikonomia* and *theologia*.[26] In Victorian England, Walter Bagehot would juxtapose the "dignified" and the "efficient" forms of government.[27] In the *Satyadvayavibhanga*, however, Jñānagarbha would have talked of *rupakāya* and *dharmakāya*. The body of *dharma* is the glorious face of Buddhahood, the very structure of the cosmos within which we all exist, and yet Buddhahood becomes present—economically, efficiently, "governmentally"—through its various manifestations.

The *dharmakāya*, like God the Father, *règne, mais ne gouverne pas*, leaving the delineation of *oikonomia*—an authentic "divine housekeeping"— to the *rupakāya*, or the eternal Word. It would almost seem that the various bodies of form, or the incarnation of the Word, may mirror Agamben's own concept of bio-power, articulating the presence of Buddhahood or of the Triune God in the sphere of *bios*. In his work *State of Exception*, Agamben views state interventions as occasional manifestations— indeed, "exceptions"— of an underpinning reality of "glory".[28] The empty throne of the Buddha reminds Mahāyāna practitioners that the *dharmakāya* and the *rupakāya* are not merely flowing from each other: ultimately, between the two of them there is no distinction, because form is emptiness and emptiness is form. To use Agamben's terminology, it is the *rupakāya* of the historical Buddha which could then be seen as a 'state of exception', over and against the glorious emptiness of the *dharmakāya*. As you achieve enlightenment, you come to realize that you are yourself poised between the world of emptiness and the world of form— indeed, you belong to both at the same time. The emptiness on the throne is nothing but an iconic reminder that all conventional reality is fundamentally empty.

Of course, looking up at the top tier of the Torcello last judgment, the story ends quite differently. Let us listen to an excerpt from the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 19: 25-8):
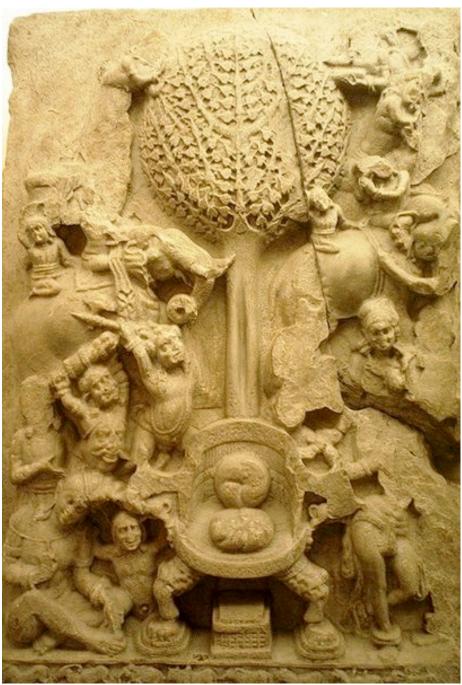
> **25**When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"
> **26**Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."
> **27**Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

28Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel

The Byzantine *etimasia*, unlike the throne from Amaravati, is an intimation of future glory— a glory which, according to the Christian promise, shall come at the end of time, and will embrace and transfigure for all eternity everything that is provisional and mortal.

Buddha's Throne, Amaravati

The Torcello Etimasia

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Notes

[1] For a full English translation, see Jñānagarbha, *Commentary on the Distinction Between the Two Truths: An Eighth Century Handbook of Mādhyamaka Philosophy* (trans. by Malcolm Eckel)

(Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1987). Jñ*ā*nagarbha appears to have been active in the second half of the eighth century CE, but the dates of his life are uncertain.

2 For a discussion of the different schools of M*ā*dhyamaka, see Sarah McClintock and George Dreyfus, *The Svātantrika-Prāsangika Distinction: What Difference does a Difference Make?*(Boston, MA: Wisdom Publication, 2002).

3 Jñ*ā*nagarbha, *Satyadvayavibhanga* (*Commentary on the Two Truths*), 101, in Malcolm Eckel, *To See the Buddha: A Philosopher's Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 65. For an extensive discussion of the theology of the Buddha bodies, see Paul Williams, *Mahayāna Buddhism* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 167-84; for a discussion of the controversy on the number of Buddha bodies, John Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied: Sources of Controversy in India and in Tibet* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1997).

4 May Jacques, *La Philosophie Bouddhique de la vacuité*, *Studia Philosophica* 18 (1958): 102-11.

5 N*ā*g*ā*rjuna, *Vajrachchedikaprajñāpāramitā sutra* (*The Diamond Cutter 'Perfection of Wisdom' sutra*), (trans. from the Chinese version by A.F. Price and Wong Mou-Lan) (Boston, Mass.: Shambala, 2005). The traditional attribution to N*ā*g*ā*rjuna, however, is contested.

6 John Hick, "The Buddha's Doctrine of the 'Undetermined Questions'", in John Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), 105-18.

7 This is apparently the claim made by N*ā*g*ā*rjuna in his *Niraupamyastava*; see Giuseppe Tucci, "Two Hymns of the Catuh-stava of N*ā*g*ā*rjuna", *JRAS* (1932), 314, and the English translation of the passage in Malcolm D. Eckel, *To See the Buddha,* 66.

8 See Étienne Lamotte and Sara Boin-Webb, *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti* (Melksham, U.K.: Pali Text Society, 1976), 11-13.

9 On the gradual emergence of the Mah*āy**ā*na notion of *nirvāna*, see Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: the Doctrinal Foundation* (2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 58-62, 185; John Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied: Sources of Controversy in India and in Tibet* (Albany, N.Y.: S.U.N.Y. Press 1997), 85-7.

10 John Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied*, 90-104.

11 Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 182-6 (which focuses on the dGe lugs' understanding of the Buddha bodies); John Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied*, 23-9 (charting the different meanings of the term *dharmakāya* in different currents of the tradition), 104-8 (exploring the relationship between the body of *dharma* and the different bodies of form).

12 Nagao Madijn, M., 'The Silence of the Buddha and its Madhyamic interpretation', in Gadjin M. Nagao and Josho Nozawa (eds.), *Studies in Indology and Buddhology* (Kyoto, 1955), 137-51.

13 Vasubhandu, *Abhidharmakośa* (*The Treasury of the Abhidharma*) (ed. Prahlad Pradhan. Patna, India: K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975), 216, in Malcolm Eckel, *To See the Buddha*, 67.

14 For a brief overview of the differences between M*ā*dhyamaka and Nyaya, see Peter della Santina, *Mādhyamaka Schools in India: A Study of the Mādhyamaka Philosophy and of the Division of the*

System into Prāsangika and Svatantrika school (New Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass Press, 2008), 41-44.

[15] See Gadjin M. Nagao, *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra: A Study of Mahāyāna Philosophies* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1991), 51-61; also Paul Williams, *Mahayāna Buddhism*, 82-96.

[16] Jn 7, 9-12. This translation is taken from Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (eds.), *The Bible: the Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[17] The use of the term *etimasia* (or the more philologically correct *hetoimasia*) for the scene of the preparation of the throne goes back to the 1867 study *Études sur l'etimasia* by the French scholar Paul Durand. For a survey of early Christian eschatological iconography, see Geir Hellemo, *Adventus Domini: eschatological thought in 4th-century apses and catecheses* (Brill, 1989).

[18] For an English-language overview of the basilicas in Torcello, see Antonio Niero, *Basilica of Torcello and Santa Fosca* (Montelupo Fiorentino: Aedo Edizioni d'Arte, 2003).

[19] The iconography at Torcello is actually reminiscent of a number of Russian Last Judgments from the late Medieval period, such as the one decorating the counter-façade of the cathedral of the Assumption of the Moscow Kremlin. See Michael S. Flier, 'Till the End of Time: The Apocalypse in Russian Historical Experience Before 1500', in Valerie Kivelson and Robert Greene (eds.), *Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice under the Tsars* (Philadelphia, Pa..: Pennsylvania University Press, 2003), 140-1.

[20] There may also be an echo of the Resurrection icons, where Christ lifts Adam and Eve out of the gaping mouth of Hades, as in the *Anastasis* fresco of the Chora Church in Istanbul.

[21] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, N.Y.: Zone Books, 1992), Ch. 7, 239-97.

[22] See Tina Beattie, *Antichrist: The Visual Theology of Lars von Trier*, in *openDemocracy: Free Thinking for the World* (August 13th, 2009), at http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/antichrist-the-visual-theology-of-lars-von-trier.

[23] See Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 285, 292.

[24] See for instance *Chos rgyal kha nor bu*, Preface to The Supreme Source: The Fundamental Tantra of the Dzogchen Semde 'Kunjed Gyalpo' (trans. and comm. by Chos rgyal kha nor bu and Adriano Clemente. Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Pub., 1999), 20. *The rDzogs chen* tradition, in particular, emphasizes the excellent virtues of the "base of primordial purity" (*ye thog ka dag gi gzhi*), which is of course identical with emptiness.

[25] Giorgio Agamben, *Il Regno e la Gloria: Per una Genealogia Teologica dell'Economia e del Governo. Homo Sacer*, II, 2 (Torino: Bollati Beringhieri, 2009), 73-81.

[26] Gregory of Nazianzos, *Or. 29, 30* (PG 36, 73-134).

[27] Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. 38-53.

[28] Giorgio Agamben, *Lo Stato di Eccezione* (Torino: Bollati Beringhieri, 2003), 1-6.