The universe as the body of God: Thomas Aquinas, Vedanta Desika, and eco-theology

Author: Dan Scheid
While the Christian churches have long had a doctrine of creation, only recently have theologians begun to realize that human flourishing depends on the harmonious activity of a sensitive and interdependent ecology. In response, theologians are examining their traditions in order to address the question, how should humanity live in relationship with the rest of the earth community? To promote greater ecological awareness, some theologians have proposed innovative symbols designed to counteract centuries of destructive ones. For example, Sallie McFague has offered the image of the Earth as the Body of God as a way to move beyond monarchical or realm-oriented symbols of divine sovereignty and indifference to the Earth: “The world is the bodily presence, a sacrament of, the invisible God.”¹ Through this metaphor, McFague hopes to render God more present, rather than distant; to overcome the hierarchy in the Christian tradition of spirit over body by emphasizing that God loves bodies and bodily wellbeing; and to reveal that God has made Godself vulnerable to us such that “God’s body may be poorly cared for, ravaged and, as we are becoming well aware, essentially destroyed.”

In this paper I argue that this metaphor is not as “shocking” as McFague suggests. In fact, there are voices in the tradition that depict such a profound intimacy between God and creation. In particular, I will look to two medieval theologians, Thomas Aquinas in the Catholic tradition, and Vedanta Desika in a Hindu (Srivaishnava) tradition, to articulate a philosophically and theologically nuanced foundation for understanding the universe as the body of God and hence to encourage the kind of engaged ethical response on the Earth’s behalf that McFague implores. I will focus on a threefold dimension of this relationship between God and creation: God as source; God as constant preserver; and God as telos, or goal. With this background, we
can examine the possibility of viewing the universe as the Body of God and hence the Earth as a profound opportunity for knowing and serving the Lord.

I. Aquinas
A. God, Source of Creation

God as the source of creation has two aspects. First, God stands at the head of creation and its unfolding as its causal origin. This is the God of Aquinas’ first two proofs, the First Mover and the First Efficient Cause. Second, since God is the only necessary being, all others depend entirely on God. The doctrine of creation does not merely account for the world’s origins but underscores our contingent dependence on God; it “imports a relation of the creature to the Creator, with a certain newness or beginning” (I: 45, A.3, ad 3).

For Aquinas, God is extrinsic to the universe. By that, he means that God in Godself does not belong to the order of reality inhabited by transitory and finite creatures. While human beings clearly depend on the Earth for their survival; and, as I would argue, we depend on the Earth for fulfilling our true human calling; God does not rely on creation for existence or fulfillment, according to Aquinas.

To express this concept, Christian theologians developed the non-scriptural formulation “creatio ex nihilo,” creation from nothing. Since God is extrinsic to the universe and is the only necessary being, there is no primordial “stuff” out of which God fashions finite creatures. Ex nihilo underscores the distinction between God and creation and emphasizes that God is prior to any finite entity. Creation describes not only the origin of particular beings, but of universal being, being as such: “Therefore as the generation of man is from the not-being which is not-man, so creation, which is the emanation of all being, is from the not-being which is nothing” (I: 45, A. 1).

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1 All in text citations will refer to the Summa Theologiae, Benzinger Brother Edition, 1947.
Furthermore, God creates not merely by fiat but by emanation. We do not avow a Deist God who created the universe in a one-step causal process. Rather, God allows creation to unfold over time. Aquinas evokes the image of a fountain to describe this relationship: “God could not only produce all things but [God] also has an unfailing flow and a causality for producing things continually without undergoing any change. God is a living fountain which is not diminished in spite of its continuous outflow.”

B. God, Preserver of Creation

We come to the second point, God as Preserver of Creation. While God allows creatures to participate in the ongoing process of creation, God remains the principle of being active at all times and can be said, in this way, to preserve creation, in its totality and in every moment. The distinction, therefore, between God as the source of creation and God as the preserver of creation is not a temporal one: “If things have eternally emanated from God, we cannot give a time or instance at which they first flowed forth from God. So, either they were never produced by God, or their being is always flowing forth from God as long as they exist.” The notion of preservation recognizes that while God generates the power of existence at all times, God preserves particular creatures throughout their individual existence: “God causes this effect [that creatures have being] in things not only when they first begin to be, but as long as they are preserved in being; as light is caused in the air by the sun as long as the air remains illuminated. Therefore, as long as a thing has being, God must be present to it, according to its mode of being” (I: 8 A.1).

God preserves creatures directly, by sustaining the very power of being upon which creatures depend for existence. Everything depends absolutely and totally on God. Otherwise,
everything would fall into nothingness. Since God creates freely and ex nihilo, there is no
intrinsic law that demands the existence of any creature, or of creation as a whole, other than
God’s will. God can freely and willingly choose not to preserve something, at which time it
would be annihilated.

Aquinas quickly tempers the potentially existentially horrifying consequences of such an
idea by cautioning that we can discern from God’s nature that no creature will be obliterated.
God’s goodness, he reasons, is best manifested by the preservation of things, not their
destruction: “God created all things that they may be – not that they may sink back into
nothingness (see Wisdom 1:14).” While reason may not be able to affirm this, Aquinas relies
on the scriptural witness and the experience of the Church to uphold the goodness of God, which
is best manifested by the preservation of things and not capricious destruction or annihilation for
God’s own pleasure.

Interestingly, while Aquinas adduces this comforting news as evidence of God’s
overwhelming goodness, contemporary Christians may recognize it as an injunction against our
current anthropocentric hubris. Aquinas presumes that God in God’s providential care will
oversee the welfare of non-human animals as well as the growth of plants, let alone the
movement of the heavenly spheres. Yet clearly human beings have begun, and increasingly so,
to impact the wellbeing of other animals and all life on the planet. Unlike Aquinas, we can no
longer trust that God will safeguard the conditions upon which life on Earth depends. As
McFague rightly warns, humanity bears the power to drastically and decidedly alter the course of
other life. Moreover, to eradicate an entire species – as we increasingly are doing – is to act
directly against God’s own intentions for creation. Since this spate of species extinction is
arguably the result of human avarice, rather than human need or misunderstanding, we may
rightly label it a disastrous effect of “ecological sin.” Aquinas’ notion of God’s preservation ensures us that God will not annihilate us spontaneously, either out of our sinfulness or God’s pleasure; but we may never presume that God will rescue us from our wanton destruction of life on the planet.

C. God, Telos of Creation

We have seen so far that God is the source of creation; and the constant preservation of creation. Now we come to how everything is ordered to God. Every creature has its end in God because God has arranged the universe according to an Eternal Law, which is the law of God in Godself. Because every creature participates in God, every creature participates in the Eternal Law and thus is guided by this law to its proper end, which is to fulfill God’s purposes. All creatures have a particular nature that can be understood according to its distinctive inclination: “It is common to every nature to have some inclination; and this is its natural appetite or love. This inclination is found to exist differently in different natures; but in each according to its mode” (I: 60). Thus, a rock falls to earth according to a law of gravity [according to a kind of “natural love”]; a plant grows and seeks to preserve and enhance its life; an animal is naturally inclined to reproduce the next generation: all of these exhibit a tendency to act in a particular way that Aquinas explains through the Eternal Law. “Things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result” (I: 2, A.3). For beings without intelligence, God is the designer who directs them to a good end; for rational agents, God draws their will closer to Godself. So, behind these sundry inclinations in nature lies a more fundamental orientation for every finite being, which is toward God as a final end: “God is the universal good, and under this
good both man and angel and all creatures are comprised, because every creature in regard to its entire being naturally belongs to God” (I: 60, A.5).

**D. Relationship of God to Creation**

Now let us return to the original question of the validity of McFague’s provocative metaphor. Certainly Aquinas depicts a pervasive involvement by God in creation: as its temporal and ontological source, as its constant preservation, and as its goal. Therefore, it is not surprising that Aquinas can remark that God inhabits the world in an intimate way similar to the human soul in the human body: “…the whole human soul is in the whole body, and again, in every part, as God is in regard to the whole world” (I: 93, a.3).

According to his metaphysics, however, Aquinas must deny the materiality and corporeality of God: “Although it may be admitted that creatures are in some sort like God, it must nowise be admitted that God is like creatures” (I: 4, A. 3, ad 4). God fills the universe, but not exactly as the soul fills a human body: first, while our soul needs a body to exist, God does not need the universe for God’s existence. Second, God could not be a body because it would limit God’s presence and power to fill the rest of the universe: “God fills every place; not, indeed, like a body, for a body is said to fill place inasmuch as it excludes the co-presence of another body; whereas by God being in a place, others are not thereby excluded from it; indeed, by the very fact that He gives being to the things that fill every place, He Himself fills every place” (I: 8. A. 2). So God is incorporeal, because God cannot be limited by anything and cannot be divided into multiple parts. By the converse of this reality, however, Aquinas argues for a seemingly greater intimacy: that God must be in all things, and innermost; and that God must
be everywhere, filling each place and all the bodies that occupy it.\textsuperscript{14} We will return to this metaphor of the universe as God’s body once we have listened to similar themes in Desika.

\textit{II. Desika}

\textbf{A. Lord as Support}

Similar to Aquinas, Desika expounds a threefold role for Iswara’s relationship to creation: “Iswara is called the inner self or soul (Sariri), because as long as they exist, He is, in regard to sentient and non-sentient substances (dravya), their support (adhara), their controller or ruler (niyanta) and their Lord or Master (S’eshi) for whose purposes they exist.”\textsuperscript{15} The first element of the Lord’s relationship to creatures is that of being their \textit{adhara}, the support of all beings through His essential nature. As the primary source of all that exists, the Lord can be called a kind of Creator: “He who is expressed by the names, Vishnu and Narayana, is stated to have been the ultimate cause of the world in His previous and original state” (RTS 73). As \textit{adhara}, Iswara is the “inseparable and direct support” of every entity’s existence through His essential being (svarupa), as well as indirectly the support of the various attributes that define it (RTS 23). In Thomistic language, Iswara is both the principle cause of being for all creatures, as well as the various attributes that accompany them, such as consciousness.

Desika employs another term to describe the role of Iswara as support to the universe: \textit{asraya}, or “resting place.”\textsuperscript{16} As Supreme Being (Vasudeva), the Lord is transcendent and cannot be limited to this universe.\textsuperscript{17} Yet, the Lord is not opposed to material reality, but rather is the true inner meaning of matter. The term “resting place” (asraya) connotes not only the telos of all matter – that all things will ultimately rest in God – but that their very existence is one of resting in God. “Bhagavan should be thought of, also, as having a transcendent, super-sensuous
(aprakrita), divine and auspicious form, which is the resting place (asraya) of the universe” (RTS 38).

B. Lord as Controller

Second, Iswara is the niyanta, or the controller or ruler of sentient and non-sentient entities. Iswara’s control manifests itself in three dimensions: in a being’s essential nature; in its continuance in time; and in its activities. First, by His very nature, Iswara provides the foundation for all beings and becomes the material cause of all. We have seen this already in regards to the Lord as support: the Lord controls the existence of all substances in the universe through His essential being (svarupa).

Second, Iswara also provides for all beings through His will (sankalpa) continuance in time (sthiti), which resonates with Aquinas’ notion of preservation. Creatures that are destined to be eternal exist by dint of an eternal will (RTS 24), while other beings that are non-eternal exist by a temporary will and “this continuance is subject to expansion and contraction in accordance with the will of Iswara” (RTS 50). Thus the Lord’s will (sankalpa) and being (svarupa) are active in every moment of a creature’s existence: “The will of the Supreme Being ordains that these objects should be supported by His essential nature (svarupa). Thus all things are dependent on Iswara’s essential nature and also on Iswara’s will” (RTS 24).

Finally, Iswara is the controller of a creature’s activity (pravritti). In the case of insentient things, Iswara is the direct cause not only of their existence and continuance but also their movements. “The activities (pravritti) of these three kinds of non-sentient things are of the nature of varied modifications (parinama) in accordance with the will of Iswara” (RTS 60). As an example, Desika identifies the Lord’s control over the massive celestial objects that fill the
sky: “‘The heavens, the sky with the moon, the sun and the stars, the different quarters, the earth, the great ocean – all these are supported by the might of the Supreme Being, Vasudeva.’ It is stated here that, in regard to keeping these heavy things in their respective places without their falling away from them, the existence, continuance and activity of these things depend on Iswara’s will” (RTS 24; from the Mahabharata). As for the jiva, or sentient being, Iswara does not dictate her activity in the same way, yet clearly it is the Lord’s desires that condition and guide the lives of all jivas.

C. Lord as Master (S’eshi)

Finally, Iswara is the S’eshi, a term that has profound significance for all of Desika’s theology. S’eshi means “Lord” or “Master,” the one for whose purposes all things exist. By contrast, all other beings are “s’esha,” servants. For Desika, everything is a s’esha because all beings exist to fulfill the Lord’s purposes: “Iswara is said to be the s’eshin of all things, because they exist solely for the fulfillment of His purposes. They are His s’eshas … Sentient beings and non-sentient things exist not for their own sake but for the fulfilment of God’s purposes. Their nature is ever to exist for somebody else (i.e.) the Lord. In using them for His own purposes, His glory is manifested” (RTS 25, ch. 3). Nothing exists for its own sake. Each creature’s entire existence is oriented to the Lord, to serve God and to satisfy God’s purposes. Desika repeatedly stresses the Lord’s sovereignty over all creation, and we hear similarities to Aquinas’ notion that all things have God as their telos. As the support of all and the cause of everything’s continuance in time, there exists no realm or aspect of the universe that lies outside of God’s purview.18
D. Distinctive Doctrine

While this threefold divine activity is important, more illustrative for our purposes is what Desika calls the “most distinctive doctrine” in Srivaisnavism: “The relationship between Iswara and the world of sentient beings and non-sentient things is that between the soul and the body” (RTS 22, ch. 3). Just as the body cannot exist without the soul, so the world cannot exist without Iswara. Desika certainly affirms that the Lord is not a bodily creature as we understand embodiment: “The body of the Supreme Being is not constituted of the (five) elements,” he says, and again: “His form is not constituted of prakriti or matter nor formed of flesh, lymph, or bone” (RTS 38, ch. 4). Like Aquinas, Desika refuses to limit the transcendent power or presence of the Lord by circumscribing him into a body such as human beings have: “Being full and complete in every object, on the part of One who is both immanent and transcendent … does not mean that His essential nature is all contained (and exhausted) within any one object (to the exclusion of others)” (RTS 381, ch. 27).19

Still, the Lord’s independence from all creatures does not negate Iswara’s closeness to all beings, and Desika continually remarks that Iswara is the Sariri, the inner self or inner soul of all things: “[The universe] is absolutely dependent on Him for its existence and continuance and likewise for its activity and the fruit or result arising from it; since the universe is supported and controlled by Him and is also solely for the fulfillment of His purposes, one will understand that it is the body of the Primeval Creator” (RTS 22, ch. 3). Here we see how Desika directly links our tripartite scheme – God as support, controller, and master – with the notion that the universe is the body of God. In Desika’s mind, these three metaphysical theses – which he clearly shares with Aquinas – are logically linked to seeing the universe as the body of God.20
Because the relationship is like that between body and soul, the universe and its various constituents become the Lord’s attributes, or modes of the Lord’s existence. This includes not only humans, but also the gods, as well as all creatures: “These gods (Brahma, Rudra etc.) are others like the modes or prakaras of the Lord of all who has all things as His body. … (For example it is said that Rudra is Narayana, Brahma is Narayana, the earth is Narayana and so on.)” (RTS 77, ch. 6) When beholding any object, we see that thing, as well as the power and presence of Iswara, who is its inner self and who uses it for His glory. In addition, all of these beings, from rocks to humans to gods, exist as ornaments and decorations on the body of God. Just as Iswara is the repository of all the virtuous qualities that describe Him, such as strength, wisdom, and splendor, Iswara also contains all creatures within Him: “In relation to Iswara, all (substances), sentient and non-sentient, are attributes that are inseparable from Him (Aprithak siddha vis’eshanas” (RTS 23-4).

Desika offers another way to understand the interrelationship between Iswara and the universe through analysis of one of Iswara’s titles, “Narayana.” “The word Narayana has two meanings: (1) the resting place or refuge of naras or living beings and (2) He who has naras (living beings) as His abode or resting place” (RTS 28, ch. 3). First, the title Narayana means the resting place of living beings. By this, Desika draws out the meaning of everything resting in God because A) they draw their power of being from God, and B) the meaning of their lives terminates in God. This notion is also plainly Thomistic, who remarks that “God does not rest in some thing but all things rest in God.”

Desika construes a second meaning from this name, however, that is even more powerful and revolutionary from a Christian perspective. The name Narayana means that God’s resting place is in living beings (naras). Desika is certain not to equate humanity, or any living being or
non-sentient thing, with Iswara, the divine. Desika upholds a decisive ontological divide between God and the rest of the universe, as his terminology of S’eshi and S’esha demonstrates. Nevertheless, he is also unafraid of underscoring the Lord’s immanence, saying that “Narayana pervades all things and beings within them” (RTS 381, ch. 27). Yet again, Desika balances a robust doctrine of God’s transcendence with an equally robust doctrine of divine immanence.

III. Hearing Aquinas Again

To conclude, we can once again return to McFague’s provocative metaphor, of the universe and the Earth as the body of God. After listening to Aquinas and Desika, the metaphor no longer seems at all shocking, and in fact seems quite reasonable. Three concluding points. First, Desika reminds us of the importance of a doctrine of creation in the life of faith. The universe is more substantially and directly connected to God than some Christians believe or acknowledge. Creation is not peripheral to God or God’s essential nature; rather, it emerges directly from God. Indeed, when Desika presents the relationship between Iswara and the world as the most distinctive doctrine, he is suggesting its vital importance in the religious life of a devotee. For the Christian, it is akin to suggesting that the theology of creation I have outlined is essential to following Christ as a disciple. While Aquinas discusses a theology of creation in depth, it is hard to argue that this doctrine has influenced the life of Christians in a similar way. And as McFague points out, a proper understanding of God’s relationship to the Earth is essential for a vibrant ecological ethic that protects the Earth from flagrant abuse.

Second, Desika offers the possibility for greater reciprocity between God and creation. “Living beings” can become a resting place for God, without diminishing the Lord’s transcendence or supremacy. Moreover, unlike Aquinas, who sets off human beings from other
animals, Desika includes humans, animals, and plants in this category of living beings (jivas). In this way, Desika underscores the worth of whole ecosystems and the work of ecological ethics by including humanity among other living beings. We might also recognize that the soul requires the body for its purposes and its proper existence. The soul cannot be a true soul without a body that it animates and vivifies. Similarly, Iswara cannot be Lord and cannot fulfill the divine life without dwelling in creation in a vital and intimate way. Creation is still extrinsic to God, because it depends absolutely on God. But perhaps we can grasp the real delight and pleasure God takes in all of creation, just as we can delight in our bodily existence.

Third, in the voice of Desika, the universe as the body of God is a deeply reverent way to appreciate the importance of creation and to glorify God. McFague is right that we must see avaricious abuse of the earth as an assault upon God. To diminish the harmonious functioning of ecosystems, as well as to subject the poor to the harmful effects of environmental degradation, does something to lessen both our and the Earth’s potential to be a glorious ornament on the body of God. God is the inner self of all beings, so God is not only active in other people we meet, but also in every animal, every plant, and every substance. Just as we treat the bodies of those we love with respect and care, so must we behave towards the body of God. Our opportunities to serve and praise God increase immeasurably if we learn to see the universe in this way, as God present in all beings and in all places, at all times, and innermost, as the inner self of all.


3 For Aquinas, the contingent character of creation underscores God’s generosity and munificence:
“God does not will to give to someone the divine goodness so that thereby something may accrue to the divine benefit, but because for God to make such a gift befits the Godhead as the fount of goodness. But to give something not for the sake of some benefit expected from the giving, but because of the goodness and befittingness of the giving, is an act of generosity .... God, therefore, is supremely generous .... and alone can truly be called generous, for all agents other than God acquire some good from their actions, which is the intended end.” (Summa Contra Gentiles (hereafter SCG) I: 93, n.7)

4 In Aquinas’ Commentary on John, found in Matthew Fox, Sheer Joy (New York: HarperCollins, 1992, 100). Aquinas includes Jesus Christ in his conception of creation by emanation as well: “The being of things flows from the Word, as from a kind of primordial principle; and this flow is terminated in the being which they have in themselves.” I: 58, A. 6.

SCG: III, ch. 65, n. 8.

Aquinas distinguishes two meanings of God’s preserving activity. The first is a lesser category, that of indirect preservation. By removing some defect, e.g. restoring health to a being that suffers from illness, God can be said to “preserve” its fundamental health, or preserve its intended condition. God may do this for some, but it is a minor subset of the second and primary meaning of preservation, which is our total dependence on God.

7 Questiones Quodlibetales 4, q. 3, a. 4; found in Fox, 141.

8 “It is desirable for each thing to be united to its source since it is in this that the perfection of each thing consists.” Commentary on the Metaphysics I, L. 1, p.7; found in Fox, 103.

Because of this, Aquinas detects a kind of circularity in the universe: “There is manifested a kind of circle in existing things, for they have the same beginning and the same end.” Commentary on Dionysius’ “De Divinibus Nominibus,” found in Fox, 101.

10 “As the soul is whole in every part of the body, so is God whole in all things and in each one” (I: 8, A. 2, ad 3).

11 Aquinas borrows from Augustine the notion that a soul is “whole in the whole body, and whole in every one of its parts” (found in I: 8, A. 4, Obj. 6; cited from De Trinitate, Book VI, n. 8: “In any body [the soul] is whole in the whole and whole also in any part of the body,” from translation by Edmund Hill).

12 A body, for Aquinas, is distinguished by its union of matter and form. While many creatures may share the same form – all humans are rational animals – they are distinct from each other because of the matter that constitutes them.

13 Since everything exists because it participates in God, God can be said to be immediately and deeply present to it: “But being is innermost in each thing and most fundamentally inherent in all things since it is formal in respect of everything found in a thing, as was shown above (7, 1). Hence it must be that God is in all things, and innermostly” (I: 8, A. 1). Aquinas detects a tripartite scheme of God’s indwelling in creatures by power, presence, and essence: “God is in all things by His power, inasmuch as all things are subject to His power; he is by His presence in all things, as all things are bare and open to His eyes; He is in all things by His essence, inasmuch as He is present to all as the cause of their being” (I: 8, A. 3).

14 In a set of somewhat obscure objections, Aquinas raises the question of whether anything else could be said to exist everywhere. He theorizes that if the universe consisted of only one body, it could be said to exist everywhere. This would be only an accidental omnipresence rather than an essential one, however, so it could not be everywhere primarily. Aquinas also considers the possibility of an infinite body, but he reasons that while it would exist everywhere, it would do so “only according to its parts” (I: 8, A. 4, ad 4). God, on the other hand, exists everywhere not only primarily but also absolutely: “Therefore to be everywhere primarily and absolutely, belongs to God, and is proper to Him: because whatever number of places be supposed to exist, God must be in all of them, not as to a part of Him, but as to His very self” (I: 8, A. 4).

15 All quotations from Desika come from his magnum opus, The Srimad Rahasya Traya Sara (Translated by M.R. Rajagopala Ayyangar. Kumbakonam: Agnihothram Ramanuja Thathachariar, 1956). Hereafter RTS. This particular quotation is RTS 23, ch. 3.

16 In addition to being the asraya of the universe, Iswara is also the asraya, or abode, of the attributes that belong to Him, such as Jnanam (knowledge), Anandam (bliss), and Satyam (being). Just as Christians might say that God is Love, but God is also more than love, Desika identifies numerous attributes that belong to Iswara but do not comprehend the totality of the Lord’s essence. In addition, similar to the apophatic tradition in Christian theology, this approach affirms that no amount of human language can adequately describe God: “Is there any one that can comprehend the qualities of Visnu, who is the inner self of all beings?” (RTS 37, ch.4)

17 Desika frequently employs a kind of visual hyperbole to emphasize the greatness of the Lord and hence Iswara’s transcendance of the material world. Rather than minimize material reality, Desika relates Bhagavan’s superiority
by stressing how the entire universe only occupies a minor place in the nature of the Lord. Quoting the Bhagavad Gita, Desika affirms the Lord’s transcendence: “In that form, the whole universe occupies a small part” (RTS 39).

18 Iswara “rules with His sceptre the earth surrounded by the turbulent ocean and the world of Vaikunta without even the least exception” (RTS 15, ch. 1).

19 “Bhagavan who is not dependent on any one else, who is not subject to the authority of any one else and who does not exist for the fulfilment of the purposes of any one else.” RTS 106, ch. 9.

20 Desika further intensifies this concept with a linguistic claim: every word, no matter what it normally denotes – cow, man etc. – ultimately refers to Iswara “who is within them as their innermost soul” (RTS 22, ch. 3).

21 And again: “Though Thy qualities are infinite, yet six of them are foremost among them; even as the universe is borne within thy body, the other qualities too, are contained within them” (Desika quoting an unknown source, RTS 37, ch. 4).

22 Commentary on Isaiah 66, p. 574 (found in Fox 108).

23 Aquinas himself understood this principle: “Error about creatures spills over into false opinion about God, and takes away people’s minds away from God.” (SCG II: 3, n.6) And again: “There can be no question that to study creatures is to build up one’s Christian faith.” (SCG II: 2, n.6)