

ABHISHIKTANANDA SOCIETY

Brotherhood House, 7 Court Lane, Delhi 110054

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"Whether or not I wish it to be so, I am profoundly attached to Jesus Christ, and so to the koinonia of the Church. It is in him that the 'mystery' has been revealed to me, ever since my awakening to myself and the world. It is through his image, his symbol, that I know God, and that I know myself and the world of men. After my awakening here to new depths of myself (of the self—the atman), this symbol has become marvellously filled out. Christian theology had already revealed to me the eternity of the mystery of Jesus *in situ Patris* (in the bosom of the Father). Later India revealed to me the cosmic whole of this mystery—this revelation within which the Judean (Jewish) revelation is inserted." ... "For me Jesus is the Sadguru. It is in him that God has appeared to me, in his *mirror* that I have discovered myself, in adoring him, loving him, consecrating myself to him."

Abhishiktananda's *Diary* 24 July 1971

May + Oct.
Bull
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THE STUDY WEEK POSTPONED

The last *Bulletin* (June 1980) gave notice of the Society's intention to hold a Study Week on "the Role of Renunciation in the Contemporary World" in January 1982, and a number of friends wrote to say that they would be interested to take part in it.

Meanwhile, however, it became clear that for good reasons the proposed date would not be possible; but an alternative date could not be fixed until the Executive Committee met on 6 October.

The new date is December 1983 (provisionally Dec. 7-15). The organizing sub-committee will continue to prepare for it on the lines indicated in the last *Bulletin*, and further information will be given in subsequent issues.

The postponement is regretted, but is not entirely unwelcome;

first, because by the end of 1983 we hope that the unpublished remainder of Abhishiktananda's writings (especially the *Diary*) will be in print, and second, because more time is needed to collect funds to finance the *Week*.

THE HOLYOKE SYMPOSIUM

In the *Study Week* we shall be looking at the meaning and value of renunciation as practised in various religious traditions, with a view to discovering its relevance in the modern world. Last November the symposium at Holyoke (Mass.), sponsored by the North American Board for East-West Dialog (a sub-commission of A.I.M.), explored one aspect of our theme: "the archetype of the monk as an integral aspect of human fulfillment for every person." The main speaker and animator was Professor R. Panikkar, and among the 80 participants were several members of our Society. The report on the Symposium is eagerly anticipated.

(From a press release) "A growing number of persons are discovering today the Mystery hidden at the very core of their being. Meditation and contemplation lead to a new consciousness emerging all over the world. The search for the Mystery has been the quest of professed monks throughout history. In short, this universal monastic archetype is a manifestation of the religious dimension of every person. The Symposium urged Churches and Institutions to stress what is common among them and respect their differences. All divisions between action and contemplation must disappear, all polarization between East and West; right and left must be overcome. If we want to meet this challenge, a 'network of the heart' must encompass the earth. To make this a reality is a question of survival. Only a common effort can avert the threat of disaster. This implies the responsibility to be well-informed, to think globally and to act locally, but act we must and now."

SWAMIJI'S DIARY

For obvious reasons the publication of the *Diary* is a matter of urgency. It has to be in the form of a selection, both on account of the great length of the *Diary* and because it inevitably contains much repetition. The selection has been care-

fully checked with the original text by Mme O. Baumer-Despeigne and Dr M. Küpper, and is now being finalized by our President. After this we can be certain that nothing has been omitted that is in any way significant for Swamiji's long spiritual Odyssey. Professor Panikkar expects to complete his work, including the provision of the necessary notes of explanation and introduction, by the end of 1981. In this he will be assisted by Susri N. Shanta and Dr B. Bäumer.

NEW PUBLICATIONS, 1980-1981

Catalan

Editorial Claret (Barcelona) published a translation of *The Further Shore* (*L'altra riba*) in two volumes: 1. *Sannyasa—la crida al desert*; 2. *Els Upanishads—selecció de textos—una introducció*. The latter also contains the essay "The Upanishads and the Experience of Advaita".

French

Mme Marie-Madeleine Davy's book on Swamiji, entitled *Henri le Saux—Swami Abhishiktananda: le passeur, entre deux rives* (Cerf, 1981), is the first sustained study to appear; its importance will be seen from the reviews given below.

German

Der Weg zum anderen Ufer (Diederichs, Düsseldorf, 1980) is based on the expanded French version of *The Further Shore* (*Initiation à la spiritualité des Up.*), translated by Dr B. Bäumer. It has received the accolade of being included in the catalogue of the most prestigious German academic publishing and book-selling company, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, which makes it all the more regrettable that the publishers omitted a vital chapter from 'Sannyasa'!

One essay "Die kontemplative Botschaft Indiens" also omitted from *Der Weg*, has been printed in the periodical *Una Sancta* (1/1981).

Die Gegenwart Gottes erfahren (Matthias-Grünewald, Mainz, 1980) is the translation of the French edition of *Prayer* (*Éveil...*) by Dr Bäumer, whose rendering has been praised by reviewers. The German version of *Gnanananda, Das Feuer der Weisheit*

(O.W. Barth Vg, 1979), has been remaindered in view of disappointing sales—possibly to be explained by the title chosen by the publishers.

Italian

Centro interreligioso Henri le Saux (Milano) published two *Quaderni* in 1980, of which No. 1 is entirely devoted to essays on Swamiji with extracts from his writings, while No. 2 ("Incontri Ecumenici") contains a further essay on him. See review below.

IN THE PRESS

French

Under the title 'Intériorité et Révélation: essais théologiques' Epî (Paris) will shortly publish a collection of fourteen essays, edited by Mme Baumer-Despeigne and Fr J. Dupuis, with an introduction by Fr Dupuis. Four essays belong to Swamiji's Arunachala period in the '50s and the rest to his later years. They supplement what he wrote in *Saccidananda* (*Sagesse...*) and reveal the subsequent directions of his thought.

Tamil

A translation of *Gnanananda* by Shri K.N. Subramanian is being published by the Sri Gnanananda Asram, Thapovanam; articles have also appeared in their periodical, *Gnana Oli*.

REVIEWS

M. M. Davy, *Henri le Saux—Swami Abhishiktananda: le passeur entre deux rives*. Cerf, Paris, 1981.

(a) *Information Catholiques Internationales* 562 (May 1981) gives a long review by F.-H. Dalmais. Some of the passages which he quotes from the book will convey something of its quality:

"For one who is governed by the intellect, to make the mind descend into the heart presents a laborious task. In addition, to transcend duality demands not only a knowledge but a love of unity which is expressed in a tension to which one has to surrender oneself in love."

In connection with his long inner crisis, when he had to struggle on alone in the darkness, she says of his Diary:

"In the absence of contacts with like-minded friends, that is, with fellow-climbers on the way up the interior mountain, Henri le Saux took as a partner in dialogue his Diary. With its help he could set to work on opening his own heart. This is something whose practice is always a matter of feeling one's way, on account of the difficulty of self-knowledge, and even more from natural reserve... In this process of groping, phrases are let fly which cannot fully be accounted for, they rather resemble preliminary statements, tentative beginnings. In the absence of bridges, one puts out temporary gangways, in the hope of finding a better line of advance." Dalmais comments that the author's familiarity with the mystics, especially those of the Rhineland and Flanders, enabled her to appreciate this procedure, which others might find shocking.

"Henri le Saux, the Christian and Hindu monk, was a man whose faith was very pure. Even so he had to pass through the refining fire of the dark night. To say that he suffered would be inadequate; he was tested by a truly crucifying passion."... "The fascination experienced by H. le Saux in India, as much from his meeting with Ramana Maharshi and Gnanananda as from her sacred Scriptures, such as the Upanishads, aroused fundamental questions in his mind and also prompted him to answer them."... "It was not on account of any superficial motives that for a time his adherence to the Church seemed to be called into question, but because of his being poor in spirit, the nudity of spirit to which he had attained. It put a question mark against the teaching of the Church, because this teaching seemed to begin and end in a dualism which in his view was erroneous... The Church did not seem to have any answer to his spiritual needs. In the teaching which she gives, she seems to be speaking to the natural man, to beginners, without attempting to lead them to the level of spirit. Naturally she takes note of the condition in which the majority of people actually live. And it is through compassion that she so acts, while sometimes giving the impression of forgetting those who are seeking for real liberation."

Dalmáis notes the stages distinguished by the author in Le Saux's passage through the dark night, at the end of which he could live his Christianity at a deeper level than that usually found in the Church, and through books, conferences and

retreats could share widely the treasure which he had found. He agrees with her conclusion: "Henri le Saux, monk of the West and the East, filled the role of ferryman between the two shores of the river... (at once) true to his Christian faith and with a heart fully open to the depth of India's mystery."

(b) Dr Bettina Bäumer writes:

Few of those who knew Swami Abhishiktananda personally would have dared to write his spiritual biography. It needed the courage and audacity of a prolific writer on spiritual subjects, and a specialist in Christian mysticism like M. M. Davy to undertake the task. The very fact that this book has been written and published at such an early date shows the importance of Abhishiktananda's testimony for the spiritual situation of the West—an importance which Mme Davy sees as consisting in his mediation between the 'two shores' of Eastern and Western spirituality. The book is very well written, and the 'empathy' (more than sympathy) of the author with the 'sannyasi monk' can be felt throughout, although she never met him in the body. Her description of his personality (p. 63ff) is a striking example of this 'understanding from within', as also is her presentation of his 'experience of spiritual paternity' (p. 174ff). She describes Abhishiktananda as a mystic who reached the highest illumination, and compares his experience with that of Christian mystics of the past, especially Meister Eckhart, with whom in fact he felt a very deep communion of spirit.

Her account of his personality, experience and spiritual itinerary is mainly based on his unpublished *Spiritual Diary*, which is amply quoted. This underlines the urgent need for at least a selection of the *Diary* to be made accessible, first in the French original, and as soon as possible in English.

For all our admiration for this book, clarity and faithfulness require that we should point out some of the problems which it leaves open or does not enter upon in depth. As is to be expected in a European view of Abhishiktananda, the Indian—and more precisely, the Hindu—side of the picture is not fully represented. True as this is from one aspect, H. le Saux is presented as a *Christian* mystic who received much inspiration from the Hindu Scriptures and sages. The internal struggle which he endured is indeed not minimized, but it is treated as a passage through

the night of purification. The deep spiritual and theological questions which he had to face, the objective problems involved in the encounter with another spiritual world at the deepest level of heart and mind, these find little mention here. Although no doubt the mystical experience transcends these problems, we cannot so easily assume that Abhishiktananda found the solution of them at other levels. The nature of his advaitic-trinitarian experience, as well as its implications for theology (Hindu or Christian), still remain a mystery which we should not underestimate.

These critical remarks are not at all intended to depreciate the merits of this notable book, but only to stimulate further research and thought on this subject.

1. *Henri le Saux, OSB. Una testimonianza ecumenica in terra indiana*. Milano, 1980, pp. 160.

2. *Itinerari ecumenici. Spiritualità del nostro tempo*. Milano, 1980, pp. 96.

These are the first two numbers of a series of 'Notebooks' (*Quaderni*), published by the Centro interreligioso Henri le Saux. As its title indicates, the first is fully devoted to the figure of Abhishiktananda. Part 1 contains seven articles about him, all in Italian, ranging from a two-page letter of Marc Chaduc to Swamiji's sister two days after his final liberation, to a thirty-page study of the Swami by O. Baumer-Despeigne. Other contributors are Caterina Conio and Arrigo Chiergatti. Part 2 contains two articles by Abhishiktananda and some extracts from his letters. Eight interesting photographs accompany the text.

No. 2, *Itinerari ecumenici* contains five articles on 'spirituality for our time', three in Italian, one in French and one in English. The one on 'The role of spiritual people in ecumenical sharing' (L. Sartori, pp. 35-50) is about Abhishiktananda.

G. Gispert-Sauch
Der Weg zum anderen Ufer (Diederichs, 1980).

Many reviews and notices of this book and of *Die Gegenwart Gottes erfahren* have appeared, showing the interest that they have aroused in Germany. We quote from a review of *Der Weg in Asien bibliographie*, March 1980:

"Among the many books which deal with the relationship of Eastern and Western faiths the one under review is of unique

importance. Its strength lies in the fact that it does not aim at explaining the differences between religions and relating them at the periphery, but in seeing and experiencing them from the centre, that centre which the author... has himself experienced. He gives an excellent example of the fact that the essence of Eastern spirituality—here of the Upanishads—can in fact be experienced by a European. The simple and very clear description relates to that great experience of advaita, the non-separation of Self and God. This personal experience does not prevent the author from understanding and describing the fundamental questions of Indian and European religions on the background of their respective cultures."

NOTES

Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics (Paulist Press, New York), following on *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, is the latest major work by Professor Panikkar.

The Word as Revelation: Names of Gods by Shri Ram Swarup, of which an advance notice was given in *Bulletin* No. 4, was published by Impex India (New Delhi), price Rs. 75.

Mrs A.-M. Stokes of New York has retired from being an 'Associate Member' of the Society for U.S.A.

Donations to the Abhishiktananda Society, 1980-1981. Our best thanks to the following: Mrs Melita Maschmann, North American Board of A.I.M., Mr & Mrs Bettelo, Mrs R. Lefebure, Rev. L. Childs, Mrs E. Nicholls, Holy Cross Abbey Wimborne, OSB Community of Montreal, Fr Armand Veilleux OCSO, Mrs Cory F. Lyons, Rev. E.S. Pyecroft, Miss Lore Termeer, Mr Mark Lodico, Fr R. Stephens, Mrs C. Gourley, Fr J. Mattam SJ, Mrs A.-M. Stokes, Miss A. Kunze, Mr John Alter, Mr Silas Husain.

The Bulletin. In case you have not already informed us, we shall be glad to hear if you wish to continue on our mailing list, or to become a member of the Abhishiktananda Society. The names of others who are likely to be interested will be welcome.

Donations to the Society will be gratefully received and duly acknowledged.