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When one is released from all desires
that bind the heart, then mortal man
even here becomes immortal and realizes Brahman.

If one sees God face to face as the *ātmān*,
as Lord of what has been and what shall be
one shrinks not from him.

Those who know the breath of the breath,
the eye of the eye, the ear of the ear,
and the mind of the mind – they have realized
Brahman, ancient and primeval.

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad IV.4.7, 15, 18

I am the universal Breath,
I am the blowing of the wind,
the harmony of the stars
beyond sound, the silent word
in the silence of the life
hidden from the wise
but revealed to the humble –

the smile of joy
beyond pain;
fecund love,
cosmic origin,
spring of water,
eternal source, thirst-quenching,
without end.

Caterina Conio
18 April 1996

Editorial

The question is frequently asked whether in our times of crisis in all spheres of life contemplation is not a luxury which does not contribute to really solving our burning problems. Abhishiktananda, who stood for a contemplative ideal, would then be completely outdated and unfit to help us in facing the tremendous present-day challenges, in India and anywhere in the world. But the contrary seems to be true. The interest in this monk hidden in the Himalayas seems to increase, and with this the search for a deeper self-understanding and more openness in understanding the so-called 'other', mainly those belonging to another religious tradition. *Contemplation* and *dialogue* (not as a fashion-word, but in the sense of an authentic meeting) seem to be the necessary complementary elements in the future of religion if religion wants to survive in the next century.

Some of these burning questions have been dealt with in the article by Francis D'Sa which he delivered as an address at a Dialogue Panel in Delhi (see reports).

In this issue of SETU, we remember very specially Caterina Conio, one of the most faithful friends of Abhishiktananda who devoted her life to this ideal by combining contemplation with dialogue, based on a serious academic involvement with the three religions - Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity.

Bettina Bäumer

RELIGION AND RESPONSE-ABILITY The Future of Religion and the Religion of the Future

Francis X. D'Sa

0. Introduction

President Lyndon Johnson once said of President Charles de Gaulle, when you have a friend like de Gaulle there is no need of any enemies. In an analogous manner one is tempted to say: when so many people speak of religion, it does not need any enemies. Speaking of religion is a dangerous thing: either you speak for it and you embarrass others or you speak against it and you embarrass yourself. In the future if one is to speak of religion one will have to present it as naturally as one talks of bread or breath. Yes, we stand in need of a new experience, a new understanding of religion as something that is absolutely essential to all, at the same time as something that awakens and deepens response-ability. This has become all the more necessary in an age that is caught up in a perpetual quest for modernization.

1. The Legacy of Modernity

Modernization is something that none can escape. Though the process began long back it has gained momentum since the so-called economic liberalization in our country. In this short time modernization has made such rapid strides and deep inroads into our life that it is here to stay. Whatever one's stance towards the modernizing spirit, there are signs on our horizon that are both ominous and auspicious, signs that have consequences for all, even for the future of all religion. Irrespective of the tradition we belong to, it is therefore in the interest of all traditions to discern and interpret these signs.

1.1 The End of Traditional Religion

The critical spirit, which is part of the modern scientific mindset does not brook an irrational or a simplistic approach to religion. If one may hazard a guess, the scientific spirit will spell the end of

traditional religion. In the case of India's religions the end may probably take a long time in coming but come it will. Modernity has affected the intelligentsia and given the magic of the media, the source of all our new revelations, the bold and the beautiful, the fast and the fascinating, and the pleasant and the practical things of life will find increasingly more adherents. The scientific spirit is not going to leave even the farthest corner of the remotest village in India unaffected.

Can religion withstand the offensive of the market forces, the enticement of the consumerist dream and the quick-fix approach of modern inventions? What can religion do about this? Will it do anything about this? Should it do anything about it?

In today's world, I discern two major trends: one has created unprecedented problems, the other is giving birth to unforeseen opportunities.

1.2. The Problems of our Times

The negative side of today's world shows itself in its attitude towards the world, towards humans and towards religion.

1.2.1. The Instrumentalization of the World

The sense of mystery has given place to a sense of mastery. To speak of mystery is an embarrassment. Mastery is the mantra of our age. It has come to be accepted as the sign of progress and the measure of achievement. The most striking thing about our times is the instrumentalization of the world. There is hardly anything in our surroundings that is not being systematically and thoroughly instrumentalized for profit and for pleasure. There is neither limit to human hubris nor respect for tradition. Formerly one nation could destroy another, but today humans are in a position to destroy the whole planet irreparably and irrefreably - thousands of times over!

But judging from the way it is flirting with alternatives like the comprehensive test ban treaty, humankind does not appear to be seized of the seriousness of the nuclear-treaty. But alas, it will not be long before the writing on the wall will become clear and unambiguous, hopefully before disaster strikes! What makes

our age historically notorious is the absolute instrumentalization that characterizes it. Science is today's alchemy that is helping to transform creation into a commodity.

What the modern world has to offer by way of peace and protection is best symbolized in the nuclear arsenal.

1.2.2. The Manipulation of the Human

A second pernicious sign of our times is the reduction of the human being to an individual island. Basically the human has shrunk into a self-enclosed monadic world of likes and dislikes. Understandably the focus is now on pleasure, privacy, private property and rights of the individual. Personhood, consisting of and realized through relations and relationships, is being gradually replaced by a flimsy intangible entity called the Psyche. To become liberated the Psyche has to learn to think positively, to counsel oneself, to feel O.K., to speak out what one feels, to feel free, etc. In the process humans are imperceptibly losing the sense of wholeness, the 'feel' of oneness with nature and the appreciation for human community.

Contrary to the loud and ubiquitous protestations about becoming more free and more open, the modern human is now more insecure, more lonely and more lost. The insistence on the O.K. feeling is symptomatic of the privatized and individualized state of the Psyche; and the search for secure possessions is symbolic of its emptiness inside.

The power and the persuasion of our advertisements are representative of our thirst to be more by having more. Self-possession is giving way to possession.

1.2.3. The Meaninglessness of Religion

With its politicization religion has assumed today two Avatars: it is either a pawn in the hands of the power-brokers or a commodity like Nescafe promising instant liberation in the hands of sensational swarms. To be religious in the traditional sense of the word is to run the risk of becoming obscurantist. Though religion appears to be widespread it is not a religion that purifies, inspires and enlightens. It is a religion that turns people into fanatics instead of

believers. These who are not taken in by all this are turning away mostly silently from traditional religion, finding it meaningless and even dangerous. In their eyes religion and God are anything but liberative and liberating.

1.3. The Opportunities of our Times

I have been painting the dark side of our times. That however is only one side of the coin. But there is also another brighter side to it.

1.3.1. The Wholeness of the World Besides the tidal wave of instrumentalization there is also the current of wholeness that is gaining momentum. For the first time in history we perceive an awareness of the loss of wholeness and interconnectedness dawning over the globe. The movements to prevent the pollution of the waters and the atmosphere, to prevent the loss of forests, to avoid monocultural adventures for commercial gain, to be concerned about wild life and the vanishing species of flora and fauna, are initiatives that are cutting across countries and cultures, and across political and economic systems.

Not unconnected with this is the increasing awareness of the worth of the human body, especially of the female body. Health and wholeness are discoveries that are related to the cosmic dimension of all reality. The sacredness of the universe is in the process of revealing itself. The world is being treated as sacred as a sacrament. The movement to serve the earth tries to do justice to the objective aspect of reality but it does not reduce it to an objective wholeness of the earth.

1.3.2. The Discovery of the Human Person and of the Human Community Concomitant with the search for wholeness of the world is the discovery of the human person and the human community as witnessed to by a multitude of movements that have been mushrooming in the recent past. There are all kinds of groups engaged in promoting human rights and making public human rights abuses;

groups for the welfare of children, orphans, refugees, prisoners, the sick and the terminally ill, the aged, the helpless, the despairing, victims of war, famine, floods and flesh-trade; all this and much more not just in one's own region or country but in unknown and unheard of territories.

Not the least among these are movements for the liberation of women for the survival of primal societies and cultures, for the rights of and equal opportunities for the downtrodden, of new goals and methods in education, of political awareness and so on and so forth. All over the world we find voluntary groups committed to demilitarization, justice and peace, understanding and harmony among peoples and nations.

What is slowly but nonetheless surely coming into its own is the inviolability of the human person and the human's responsibility for fellow humans.

The United Nations and its various fora are a tangible expression of this dual awareness of human person and human community.

1.3.3. The Search for Meaning

At no time in human history has the human's search for meaning been so intensive and so insistent as today. Where traditional religion has broken down there the search for meaning has intensified. People are crossing religious boundaries as never before, undergoing courses in prayer, meditation, Vipassana, Yoga, Zen and a hundred and one different kinds of spiritual exercises.

The urgent need for interdisciplinary studies investigating the relationship between science and religion/mysticism, the bond between body and spirit, the harmony of the cosmic, the human and the divine is being increasingly recognized. The secularization of religion is bringing forth a religion of secularization where secular values like holistic food and health, the virtue of sex, the need for sex education and family planning, the meaningfulness of women's liberation, of thinking more universally in politics, of universal concern and welfare in economics, of peace and justice for all, etc., are characterized by a holism that was not always evident in the traditional religions.

In all this the concern is neither the Almighty nor God nor Ishvara nor the Transcendent but behind all in all, this there is without doubt the search for meaning, for the meaning of life and the world, for what makes sense, for what makes life worth living, a search for authenticity, for freedom with responsibility, for universal justice, for values that promote the welfare of all.

Peace and Cross-Cultural studies, and interdisciplinary and interreligious dialogue are symbolic of this search for meaning.

2. Interpreting the Signs of the Times

How do we interpret these signs? Whether it is the dawn of a new axial period or not, one thing is clear: these are epochal changes that are taking place in our understanding of the cosmic, the human and, yes, even of the divine.

2.1. The Cosmotheandric Principle

The philosopher-mystic Rajmon Panikkar has articulated a principle for interpreting the signs of the times:

"The times begin to be ripe, now to gather again, the broken pieces of these partial insights into a new holistic vision; there is no matter without spirit and no spirit without matter, no World without Man, no God without the Universe, etc. God, Man and World are three artificially substantivized forms of the three primordial adjectives which describe Reality." (Philosophy as Life-Style, in A. Mercier, M. Svilar (eds), *Philosophes critiques d'aujourd'hui*, vol. 4, Bern: Lang, 1978, pp. 199-207, p. 206.)

Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision which brings together God, World and Humans into a harmonious whole without reducing the three either to an amorphous unity or separating them like oil and water, is best understood from the advaitic perspective of 'not one, not two'. The cosmotheandric vision far from doing violence to traditional religion enhances it by bringing out the best in it. Moreover it preserves its specific uniqueness on the horizon of wholeness; by discovering in the universe of faith the pluri-verse of belief. And what is most important is that here, the human being is not merely human but that conscious centre which alone identifies

the divine in the cosmic, the cosmos is not simply cosmic but the unique meeting-point of the human and the divine, and God is not just divine but that omnipresent Mystery which brings and holds together the totality of the human and the cosmic.

2.2. Interpreting the Signs of the Times

Just as a new day begins in darkness so too a new but gradual beginning is in the making in the history of humankind. In the dark night of instrumentalization there shines the faint light of a new awareness of the value of the human body and of the world-meeting place of the human and the divine.

In spite of the massive manipulation of humans there is an ineluctable irruption of community consciousness; humans are discovering personhood and human community. Person and community go together. There is no community without person and no person without community. Persons are symbolizers, discoverers, of wholeness; it is they alone who discover wholeness, they alone are discovering the divine in the cosmic.

And in and through the meaninglessness of religion a re-vision of religion is taking place. The search for wholeness is the expression of the emergence of a new religiosity. Wholeness is one of the new names for the Mystery of God and is symbolized in the harmony of the cosmic, the human and the divine.

2.3. Responsibility of Religion

What does this imply for our traditions? Does this mean that we have to replace our traditions with the cosmotheandric vision?

This would be to misunderstand the objective of our interpretation. The cosmotheandric principle has the task of making every religious tradition conscious of its response-ability vis a vis the signs of our times.

Our religious traditions have to wake up from their one-sided but deep slumber of otherworldliness to an awareness of their cosmotheandric response-ability. They have to respond to the challenges of our times in a twofold manner: first, by taking seriously the implications of the very real dangers of our age; and second, by

discerning the equally real manifestation of the sacredness (sacramentality) of the world, the unaccountable irruption of a new attitude, a be-attitude (sacramentality) among humans and the revelation of the sacred in their search for wholeness.

The specific task of religious traditions is to respond to the dangers and opportunities of our times. It is here that religious traditions have to be on their mettle and display their authority, not their power. The cosmotheandric vision does not dictate what a religion should teach or say but it points out their response-ability. Our understanding of religion cannot any more focus one-sidedly on God or the Ultimate alone. The concern of authentic religion is reality, the wholeness of reality, all the dimensions of reality, the integration of all the dimensions of reality. If, for instance, God is said to be love then, the cosmotheandric vision challenges us to work out its meaning and implications for humans and their world.

More concretely, but unfortunately, humans tend to reduce religion to 'beliefs' in the sense of doctrines and doctrinal statements. This short-circuits the essence of belief. Belief is primarily not made up of linguistic expressions. To believe is not the same as to hold on to certain statements. It has to do with one's being, with the openness of one's being. To believe is to be different and to live differently. Genuine belief finds its concretization and culmination only in living, in living harmoniously and holistically. Belief which does not animate life is barren and life without belief is blind. It could be a life of meditation or of love or of service, depending on the challenge that is posed by reality's three dimensions. To believe is to be open to the world, to human beings and to the Mystery in which we live, move and have our being.

To be open however means to watch and wait in readiness, to identify the good and the generous and the selfless in non-sensational places, to cope with the unexpected and perhaps the unwanted, and more especially to respond to discriminatory and irrational attitudes, to unjust and exploitative structures, and to one-sided approaches in different spheres of life - but in and through all this to encounter the Mystery.

Indeed, it is dangerous to speak of religion. It implies not just a

embarrassment: it means re-vision: re-vision of religion in general and our own religion in particular, re-vision of attitudes and our approaches in life, above all, re-vision of our understanding of the true, the good and the beautiful (*satyam, shivam, sundaram*).

3. Conclusion: The Religion of the Future

The future of religion is dependent on the religion of the future. Such a manifestation of religion will be validated not by intellectual logic, but in the fire of its cosmotheandric response-ability. That is, it will have to realize its response-ability to all the challenges of reality. Accordingly the religion of the future will have to promote harmony with the Cosmos, communion among all humans and confidence in the Divine Mystery. In such a scenario it will not be the Church or the Gurdwara or the Mosque or the Temple that will be the focus of religion. Like breath real religion will be life-giving and life-saving, in forgiving and self-giving; and this not at special times but, in the words of our poet Tagore, at "every moment and every age, every day and every night". For the Divine Mystery "comes, comes, ever comes".

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BOOK REVIEWS

Abbé Monchanin. *Lettres au Père Le Saux, 1947-1957*. Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1995. Pp. 285. ISBN 2-204-04766-X.

All the friends of Abhishiktananda will warmly welcome this edition of the letters of his companion in Shantivanam, P. Jules Monchanin. It contains a total of 94 letters written in the space of eleven years, from the first welcome letter to India to start a

On the whole this is a very valuable collection specially for the history of Shantivanam.

G. Gispert-Sauch, S.J.
Antony Kalliath, The Word in the Cave. New Delhi, Inter-cultural Publications, 1996. Pp. xvi + 486. ISBN 81-85574-16-2.

Evangelion encountering various climes, creeds and cultures is not a new phenomenon. It is as old as the Urkirche, the first Christian community itself. With regard to the Hellenistic mindset the issue was more or less resolved by the time the Gospel of John was written. But the marriage between Pax Romana and the Aristotelian unilinear logic has perhaps reduced the Evangelion into a set of trite canons and rigid doctrines, the process culminating in creating almost a spiritual vacuum in Christendom.

Christian monastic life lacking in desired progress and its incapacity to manifest a direction open to oriental mysticism finding new adherents in the West, coupled with infertile speculative theological formulations fail to show the way to many a deeply searching soul.

Responding to the call of the Himalayas, a son from the land of Brittany, Henri Le Saux pursued a *sadhana* at Arunachala and went on to become Swami Abhishiktananda, which signalled a radical transformation in his life. Swami's encounter with the culture, civilization and much more with the spiritual heritage of India made him leave behind his Western garb and propelled him to enter into the inner world of *atman*, his true self.

The Word in the Cave painstakingly authored by Antony Kalliath gives an account of Swami Abhishiktananda's theological-spiritual pilgrimage, opening up vistas for an honest Hindu-Christian spiritual encounter at a very profound level.

If one follows a *sadhana* one can become a *sadhū* in the real sense. Such a one is likely to pass through different layers of consciousness and gradually discover his/her real self. In other words, the dormant inner self is awakened and during the course of the interior journey, unity of the individual self and of the Supreme Self is experienced, like flashes of lightning, as some of the sages

have put it. In the classical spiritual parlance of India it has been called an *advaitic* experience.

The book which gives ample evidence that it is well researched, opens with a chapter on the theological context in which it is placed, viz., of religious pluralism, as well as the on-going East-West dialogue which provides an avenue for the emergence of an Indian Christian theology.

Armed with a tenacity of purpose and a completely open mind Swami plunged himself into the realm of Hindu spirituality and mysticism. As he had not been cut out to fit into a mould, the approaches he made and the unconventional means he adopted in order to attain the cherished goal have been regarded as a departure from the tradition. He then arrived at the shores of *sannyāsa* and rediscovered the true monastic ideal in the unfettered environs of an ashram. The Rule of St. Benedict which resonates with the teachings of the Desert Fathers, was found to be very close to the ashram ideal (p. 61).

Together with a persevering spiritual search, a consistent theological pursuit to build a bridge, was simultaneously going on in the life of Swami. This endeavour led him to make an exploration into the categories the Vedantins usually employ in order to articulate their thoughts as well as to give expression to their inner experiences. "Self is the royal cell, the reserved abode of the Creator and the created." (p. 155).

Swami's efforts have been directed towards incorporating into Christianity all the positive values of Hinduism. One can make a beginning with Christ the Sadguru and progressively move towards the divine Christ who is considered a unique incarnation. But such an attempt at synthesis, albeit enchanting, is fraught with existential struggles as he himself has expressed in his journal and letters. A critical dilemma haunted him and the fear of liberation of *mokṣa* persisted; yet the call of *rājagubyaṃ* was irresistible (p. 218).

The thesis put forward is that the awakening to Self is an awakening to God. This luminous experience reduces all *nāmarūpas* to insignificance and holding on to name and form at this stage, will

be like the foolish act of burning candles when the Sun is shining bright. The *jñānī* desires neither life nor death and he becomes a *jīvanmuktā*. Swamiji's own personal experience in this regard has been described as "glory of transfiguration".

The foundation of a Hindu-Christian meeting point should rest on *advaita* because it is basically an experience, a fundamental attitude of the soul. It is not a philosophy which is likely to lead one into polemical situations. In fact *advaita* is opposed to nothing. Religions belong to the realm of *nāmarūpās* and can give rise to conflicts. But Hinduism will accept the supreme experiential statement of Jesus about himself, viz., I AM (AHAM ASMI). However, an exclusivistically loaded claim like the Church is the sole heir to Jesus' heritage will be outrightly rejected by an *advaitin*.

Swami Abhishiktānanda's new premise is said to imply new promise and a new hope, since it is a way of questioning and interpreting Reality. It has brought in a paradigm shift in Hindu-Christian dialogue, and he has shown that it can be sincerely pursued without losing one's love and loyalty to Christ. Let Swamiji's "witness glow in the hearts of men and women in India and be understood in prayer and silence" (p. 405).

Some of the outstanding issues are still elusive. Two of them come to my mind spontaneously. As mentioned in p. 288, "Awakening to Self is awakening to the Other". Generally it is not seen as getting translated into praxis except in the case of Swami Chidananda and few exceptions like him. How can this no-doubt profound experience help in alleviating the utter poverty of 40% of Indian population who are eking out a miserable existence and who are below the poverty line?

2. Another area which requires a bit of clarification is how can *advaita* and the salvific nature of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross be reconciled?

The Word in the Cave is brought out with an attractive cover picture by Inter Cultural Publications and meticulous care has been taken as far as transliteration marks are concerned. The index and bibliography are quite handy for further reading and study. The book has also listed the places where different people drawing

inspiration from Swamiji are pursuing his ideals.

For a serious reader who is also interested in finding out the sources, it would have been better to give the references right at the bottom of each page. In the scheme of the book shorter chapters could have made it easier reading. Is it possible to bring out a layman's edition of this book so that Swamiji's experience and life becomes a means for many more seekers?

Though a few limitations are cited the volume under review, no doubt, is a tribute to the signal achievement of Swamiji and the author has made a significant addition to the field of Hindu-Christian dialogue.

Poruthur Anthony

Shabda Shakti Sangam, edited by Vandana Mataji, NBCLC, Bangalore, 1995, (xxxi + 486 pp. on one side of the book, xxxii + 374 pp. at the other side).

It is seldom that the reader has the opportunity of gleaning the main features of two of the world's major religions under one cover. Vandana Mataji has brought out a unique publication which gives an overall vision of Hinduism and Christianity which represent the Eastern and Semitic traditions respectively. She was inspired by the dictum: TRUTH is one but the sages call it different names. As the subject matter of the book is as vast as an ocean, it is understandable that the articles do not give an in depth view of either of the faiths but they are sufficient to spur the reader to further study.

The writings by diverse authors seek to elucidate to the lay reader the basic tenets of each religion. The emphasis in Hinduism on direct personal experience about the nature of truth, runs parallel to Jesus' teaching which enables the individual to enter his inner life. The central figure in Christianity is Jesus Christ while a Hindu may be inspired by any of the multitude of gods and goddesses who are like stepping stones to the ultimate, transcendent, formless Reality. In Ramakrishna's words, "The goal is of supreme importance. The paths are diverse but they lead to the same goal - the realization of God". The most important contribution of this

book will be its role in overcoming narrow, dogmatic fundamentalist attitudes and notions.

That there exists no 'iron curtain' between the two religions is shown in contributions by Hindus who have been impressed by Christ or Christianity, and by Christians who have been deeply influenced by Hinduism. Some of the articles which shed light on the true understanding of both the religions are 'The Christ We Adore' by Swami Ranganathananda, and 'Shabda, Shakti - Word/Spirit' by Paulos Mar Gregorios. The former presents Christ's message of 'indwelling divinity, of divine grace, universal ethics and spiritual realization' as supreme and one which can be happily accepted and assimilated by Hindus, while the latter analyses the similarities and differences in the conceptual understanding of *shabda/shakti* and word/spirit. Mar Gregorios feels that 'once one has understood the concepts it is possible to find that abiding Unity in the One: Who is beyond all form and concept.' Vandana Mataji in her article, 'God as Mother in the Hindu and Christian Traditions' contends that the Holy Spirit is the feminine aspect of God (the motherhood in God), the same as Shakti in Hinduism. Her interpretation is original and helps towards an understanding of the Holy Spirit by the Hindus.

Raimundo Panikkar's prayer envelopes the book not only in stating its underlying purpose but in being the starting point of both sections. He awakens the conscience by asking questions and ends with a prayer directed to his fellow human beings: "it is a cry of compassion, and a shout of hope: that there be peace and harmony among people who pray." George Gispert-Sauch's contribution "The Main Doctrines of Christianity" sums up briefly and succinctly the core of Christian beliefs and values. Similarly, in Chapter 2 of the section on Hinduism, Swami Lokeshwarananda outlines the essence of Hinduism. These two chapters form an ideal introduction for an understanding of the two religious traditions. Analogies, similarities, and diversities are elaborated further in the book.

Although there are two contributions on Henri Le Saux - Swami Abhishiktānanda, who along with Swami Vivekananda forms the

centerpiece of this remarkable volume, one misses some of the most insightful, forceful, and enlightening writings of Swami Abhishiktānanda himself. He lived a life of a true Christian and a perceptive Hindu, diving deep to discover 'the further shore'. Swami Gokulananda's keynote address at the Interfaith World Celebration of Unity and Life is rich in quotations from Swami Vivekananda, so that the reader gets a glimpse of his great unifying vision and understanding. His central teaching that each soul is potentially divine and that this divinity can be manifested by 'selfless work, or worship, or psychic control or philosophy'

The title is ambitious and far reaching. *Sangam* (confluence) of the two traditions through tolerance, knowledge, and infinite love for the Supreme who is the Spirit, is the underlying theme of this work. How the *Shabda* and *Shakti* are interpreted by the two religions is not one's primary concern. What is important is to enrich one's mind with what is the truth at all times and everywhere.

In such a rich and valuable book one regrets only that it is not easily accessible through a known publisher, nor does it have any ISBN number. Besides, an English subtitle explaining its content would have increased its readership and helped readers not knowing Sanskrit or Hindi to get an idea of the content of the book.

* It is possible to order this very reasonably priced book at NBCLC, Post Bag 8426, Bangalore - 560084, India.

Sarla Kumar

OBITUARIES

In memoriam John R. Cole (1920-1995)

by James Stuart

John Cole came to India in 1945 as a Presbyterian missionary and worked under the United Church of Northern India, in Farrukhabad

Dist., U.P. As the warden of a hostel for village boys, he is remembered for taking the trouble to visit the home of every boy under his care, so that he might understand their background and problems.

He felt called to identify himself as deeply as possible with India and its people. This was essentially inferior, but also showed outwardly in his adoption of Indian dress and an Indian life-style. He was naturally drawn to the Jyotniketan ashram, founded near Bareilly by Murray and Mary Rogers, which his Mission Board (after natural hesitation) allowed him to join in 1959.

This was where he met Swami Abhishiktananda at the start of his memorable association with the Jyotniketan family. They became friends at once, and soon afterwards John visited him at Shantivanam. On this Swamiji commented in a letter: "I had a visit from an American missionary from the North, very agreeable, very simple. He spent a week with me here, then I took him off to Tiruvannamalai to see my mountain, my caves, and my Hindu friends over there. He was keen to know all about it, a man desirous of solitude and prayer, but finding no help towards this in his own Church. Yet with no doubts about the position of his own confession. He would like an ashram life in the North." Thereafter they often met both at Jyotniketan and elsewhere (once at Gyansu, before it became out of bounds to foreigners) until about 1965, when ill-health compelled John to return to the States.

In 1970 he was well enough to return to India, becoming a presbyter of the Church of North India, and was appointed to St John's Church in Dehra Dun. By then Swamiji was permanently settled at Gyansu, and on his way to and from the plains would often enjoy a welcome break at Dehra Dun, where John's home became for him a true "haven", as a friend described it. John took part in the first "School of Prayer" at the Rajpur Centre nearby, where Swamiji skillfully introduced beginners to the prayer of silence. Later he himself conducted the School, taking Swamiji's place at a School held in Delhi in December 1973, during which the news of Swamiji's death was received. This drew from John a moving tribute to his friend.

Both in Dehra Dun and then in St James' Church Delhi (1979-

1984) John's ministry was greatly appreciated for his sensitive concern for people and for his spiritual guidance. As his parishioners in Delhi wrote after his departure: "In you we have always felt that here is one who has made the things of God his only business."

John's last years in California were overshadowed by illness, but he continued to make himself available to his large circle of friends. When one of these asked him to become her "spiritual director", he characteristically declined the high-sounding title, but nevertheless gave her all the help she needed.

An improvement in health allowed him to make two more visits to India in 1988 and 1991. During the last our Community had the good fortune to have his leadership in a short retreat, whose starting point was a verse in Psalm 62 (RSV): "For God alone my soul waits in silence." This was surely the secret of his own life of hidden, unassuming goodness, and of his ability to help others on the inward path.

Caterina Conio (Nuccia) (1929 - 1996)

was born in Italy and was married to Bettina Bäumer

A great friend, admirer and disciple of Swami Abhishiktananda left us on 31st October 1996, "preceding us to the Source" as one announcement in a Milan daily put it, and another one read: "Caterina Conio, founder and director (animatrice) of the interreligious "Centro Le Saux" has attained the Further Shore..." She has indeed contributed a lot to making Swamiji's message known in Italy by continuing his endeavour and adopting it to a European context. All her friends and admirers owe her a debt of gratitude for what she has done for what she lived, for what she was, in spite of so much physical suffering, specially in the last years of her life. Born on 20th January 1929, at Santo Stefano a Mare on the Mediterranean Sea, she first studied literature in Florence, and in 1959 she moved to Milan with her parents where she studied philosophy at the Catholic University. Already at Florence she became interested in Indian religions and philosophy. Her M.A. thesis was on a topic from Indian philosophy, the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad and

Gaudepāda's Kārikā. She was soon drawn to a religious life and came close to Don Divo Barsotti who was then about to found his own community. But after many years she found her own way, by the inspiration of Abhishiktananda. She was strongly attracted by Indian spirituality and studied both Hinduism and Buddhism. Apart from her studies in Vedānta and Purānas, she was also fascinated by Kāshmir Saivism and devoted some years to its study. At the same time she was well acquainted with western philosophy and Christian theology. But all her studies did not remain merely at the intellectual level, for it was the spiritual realization contained in these texts which was her primary aim. She had a great respect for the Hindu University which she came to India and studied at the Banaras Murthy, under whom she did a Ph.D. on Māndūkya Kārikā. It was then, in 1964, that she met Swami Abhishiktananda at Shantivanam and was deeply impressed by his spiritual personality by the simplicity of his life and the depth of his thought. He would remain the decisive influence in her life and work.

Back in Milan she worked as assistant at the Catholic University, and spent some time studying indology in Germany. After the death of Swami Abhishiktananda she started the Interreligious Centre, Henri-Le Saux, in Milan in 1974 which would become a spiritual centre for a growing number of people in search of eastern ways of spirituality, and in search of dialogue with all the world's religions. Apart from a meditation room (significantly called *gubū*) and a small library, the Centre reached out to various people and institutions in organising lectures, seminars, meditations and symposia on topics related to interreligious dialogue and spirituality. The Centre thus contributed much to a mutual understanding and to an opening of horizons of the often narrow Christian milieu in Italy. Publications of books and a Newsletter (*Notiziario Centro Interreligioso Henri Le Saux*) further added to spread the ideas and works of Swamiji and of interreligious dialogue in general. All this was inspired by Nuccia's personality and devotion, as she used to be called affectionately by friends, and by her studies in Sanskrit.

In 1982 Caterina Conio became Professor of Indian Philosophy

at the University of Pisa, and she was known as a devoted teacher who was ready to go to any extent to help her students. Among the interreligious Seminars which she organised on behalf of the "Centro Le Saux" were the following topics: *Monasticism in East and West*, *The Spiritual Realisation of Man*, *Suffering, Sickness and Salvation*, *The Creative Word in India and in the Middle East*, all of which have been published. Her last seminar was, significantly, on *Non-violence in the Sacred Texts of the Eastern Religions*. Till her last days Caterina was concerned about the proof-reading of the Acts of this very successful seminar. Non-violence and peace were living concerns dear to her heart.

Apart from looking after the Italian translations of Swamiji's books, she also published a book on Abhishiktananda, with memories of those who have known him, including her own (*Abhishiktananda: Sulle frontiere dell'incontrarivistano-Indu*). Caterina's health was always a problem, but she was looking after her ailing parents for many years until their death. After that her own health deteriorated. During her last visit to India in 1989 she had a fall and broke her hip-bone. She always bore her sufferings with much patience, concern for others, and with her characteristic sense of humour. Her helpers in Varanasi can never forget the moment when she was put on a stretcher to be carried to the Mother, Teresa Sisters, and she herself uttered the words which people recite when carrying a dead body to the cremation ground: *Rāmā, nāma satyā hai*. (Rama is always true even in death.)

During her last sickness, one of the most painful forms of cancer, she equally displayed strength of character and a sense of humour. Some poems found on her table while she was in hospital reveal the depth of her spiritual experience. We are reproducing one in English translation, to give an idea of the different nature of her work. At the academic, spiritual and human levels Caterina has contributed much to a living dialogue between religions and philosophies, East and West. Remaining deeply rooted in her Christian tradition, she could receive and transmit the values of Hinduism and Buddhism. For her, Abhishiktananda was a symbol, an inspiration, a vocation, not an idol. While feeling deeply the loss of a

real friend, we can only wish the "Centro Le Saux" in Milan to carry on the work started by Caterina in the same spirit.

REPORTS OF INTER-RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

In Search of Religious Identity: A Hindu-Christian Dialogue, A Panel in the context of an Indo-Austrian Symposium on the occasion of One thousand Years of Austria, New Delhi (India International Centre), October 10, 1996.

No real meeting of cultures is possible without a meeting of religions, which have a deep influence on people's attitudes, ways of life, thinking and relationships. It is with this insight in mind that a Hindu-Christian dialogue panel was organised in the context of an Indo-Austrian Symposium on October 10, 1996. The question of self-identity is important from several points of view: if it is understood in a too narrow sense, it leads to fundamentalism and exclusivistic attitudes; if there is lack of religious identity, the danger of either indifference or confusion is evident. It all depends on what level we understand our religious self-identity. In the present spiritual crisis the world over, it is important to raise this question not only within one religious tradition, but in a dialogue where we can learn from each other and contribute to a greater understanding of each other as well as of our own identity.

There were seven speakers at the panel who analysed the past and present situation and pointed to the future of religion (see the article by Francis D'Sa in this issue). The following topics were presented and discussed:

1. Prof. Dr. Michael von Brück (University of Munich) opened the symposium with an excellent presentation on "Hindu-Christian Dialogue and the Future of Religions".

2. Dr. Badrinath Chaturvedi, a well-known scholar and author from Delhi, spoke on "Toward the Hindu-Christian Dialogue: A Brief History of the Issues", which helped us to situate our 'dangerous' dialogue in its historical perspective, thus freeing ourselves from hangovers of the past.

3. Markus Ladstätter of the University of Vienna presented the situation of

interreligious dialogue, especially between Hindus and Christians, in Austria. Prof. B.N. Saraswati, renowned sociologist and anthropologist, presented "India - A Spiritual Federation of Faiths" in his impressive direct, personal and open manner, addressing the questions of pluralism and tolerance within Hinduism, and with an open criticism of the powers of fundamentalism and political exploitation of religion. Dr. Ursula Baatz of the University of Vienna spoke on "Adoption of Indian Religious Ideas in a Post-modern Society". Dr. Shivamurthy Swamiji, spiritual head of the Virasaiva Math at Sirigere, Karnataka, and one of the leading Hindu personalities involved in interreligious dialogue, presented the spiritual and social implications of living together in a religiously pluralistic society. The concluding presentation by Fr. Dr. Francis D'Sa, Director of the Institute for the Study of Religion at Pune, is printed in this issue.

The participants in the discussions were taking active interest. Many important points were raised and discussed in all frankness and sincerity. The only missing factor in such a meeting is the spiritual side of dialogue, since there was no time for shared silence, and inevitably it remained on the intellectual level. The panel was organised by the undersigned, and other members of the Abhishikhananda Society also took part in the discussion.

Bettina Bäumer
Seminar on Memory, Politics and Forgiveness

On January 6th and 7th this year, on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Independence, the Vidyajyoti College of Theology, Delhi, organised an interdisciplinary and interreligious seminar on the above theme. About 50 professors, scholars, writers and activists from the Universities and cultural life of the capital participated in the discussion around a dozen papers presented. The questions the seminar put on the agenda were: Can we heal our collective and individual negative memories? How can we let our memories be constructive for our future? What is really forgiveness? How does it relate to the demands of justice? How do religions stand today in respect to the memories of the past and the future? Can

they offer something new in a non-communal way? Is reparation inbuilt in the concept of forgiveness or is it excluded from it? The discussions were lively and the memories of 1947, 1984 and 1992 were seen to impinge in various ways in the sentiments and behaviour patterns of various communities. It was also pointed out that the agents of justice and forgiveness could not be restricted to the state or the individual conscience alone, but included also the 'civil' and the religious societies, and that these have often been more influential in the restoration of harmonies than the secular forces, although all have contributed. The participants studied the problems from the angles of philosophy, theology, sociology, psychology, law, history. The Mahabharata, Kashmir Shaivism, Jaisi and contemporary sources featured prominently in the papers and the discussions. It is hoped eventually to publish the papers and a summary of the discussions of the Seminar. Among the organizers, Fr. T. K. John and the undesignated members of the Abhishiktananda Society.

G. Gispert-Sauch, S.J

NEWS AND PUBLICATIONS

Several of Abhishiktananda's books are being reprinted by ISPCK, Delhi, and are expected to come out in 1997: *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point*, *The Further Shore*, *The Secret of Arunachala*, *Sac-*

The Rajput Seminar Papers. The volume containing the papers presented at the Rajpur Seminar of the Abhishiktananda Society in 1990, enriched and edited, is finally ready for the press, and it is hoped that it will come out in 1997 under the title: *Mysticism in Savism and Christianity*, ed. by Bettina Bäumer (D.K. Printworld, New Delhi).

Tamil Translation of *The Further Shore*: A Tamil translation of *The Further Shore* by Abhishiktananda has been prepared by Mr. Ponnalah under the guidance of Fr. Anand Amaladass, who will also look after its publication. It is expected to come out soon.

Theses on Abhishiktananda: We received news of two more doctoral students from Canada having chosen Abhishiktananda as their topic of research: Jean-Noel Ithier of the Seminaire Universitaire Saint-Paul, Ottawa, and J. Glenn Friesen of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Calgary.

A Seminar on "Spiritual Vacuum" took place in St. Georgen, Carintia (Austria), organised by Hans-Peter Premur, in April 1996. It was a kind of stock-taking of the spiritual situation in Europe (mainly the German speaking countries). Bettina Bäumer spoke on Abhishiktananda in the context of a meeting between Hindu and Christian spirituality.

The Austrian group of the friends of Abhishiktananda has again held its meditation week in the 'House of Silence', Puregg, in the splendid Austrian mountains, in June 1996, on the topic "Contemplation in daily life". The *Vijnana Bhairava* (an important Tantra of Kashmir Shaivism) served as a textual basis for reflection and meditation. It was a good and lively group, including Sadananda Das from Orissa. It is hoped to continue this tradition with a similar topic in August 1997.

Donations to the Society received since April 1996

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