

ABHISHIKTANANDA SOCIETY

Brotherhood House, 7 Court Lane, Delhi-110054

OCCASIONAL BULLETIN No. 11

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The most important problem at present is that which is posed to all religions by the need for self-transcendence, for truth, for sincerity, which characterizes the contemporary world. Advaita is a marvellous thing in itself; too often, alas, people make of it a kind of new super-religion, which is as unsatisfactory as all the formulas which claim to transcend this advaita, and is also very often unconcerned about the real problems of mankind. (...) Advaita, which is the highest experience of the mind, cannot isolate people and produce esoteric groups. As man's supreme act, it cannot cut the umbilical cord. It takes a man out of himself, in order to bring him to his fullness as man. Is not that the deep meaning of the Resurrection? Everything dies, but everything is reborn. Advaita should result in the total integration of the whole man, and in each one's integration in the totality of mankind. Religion is a form of service, not an end in itself.

(*Abhishiktananda in a Letter to O.B.*, 1.10.68)

NEWS

The President of the Society. For the first ten years of its existence the Society has been blessed with the inspiring leadership of Dr Raimundo Panikkar. But at the Annual Meeting of the Executive Committee in March Dr Panikkar expressed a wish not to be re-elected for a further term, and this was accepted with much regret. In his place the Committee elected Dr Bettina Bäumer, who has kindly contributed a 'Message' to this *Bulletin*. Our new President will be known to many and is assured of a warm welcome.

Membership of the Society. The Committee decided that a Register of Members should be maintained, in addition to the list of those to whom the *Bulletin* is sent. This Register will contain the names of those who have already asked for

membership and of those who have sent donations to the Society, taken as indicating a wish to be members (please check in the enclosed list). It is proposed that in future those who wish to become members should write to the Secretary in Delhi and make a minimum contribution (in India, Rs. 10.00; in other countries \$ 5.00 or its equivalent). However those who are unable to contribute, for example, on account of currency controls or as sanuayasis, will be accepted without any contribution. The *Bulletin* will continue to be sent *without charge* to anyone who requests it, as has always been done.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR NEW PRESIDENT

"Where angels fear to tread...." In accepting a responsibility for which I feel wholly inadequate, I can only go forward in faith. But since I find myself in this situation, let me reflect on some aspects of the possible role of the Abhishiktananda Society.

My approach is certainly not different from that of R. Panikkar, the first, and so far the only, President of our Society. From the beginning he stressed the spiritual role of the Society in our present time and held that it should not be limited to the propagation of Swami Abhishiktananda's writings, but rather should seek to develop and carry forward his ideas and ideals. During the first ten years of the Society's existence our chief work has necessarily been concerned with the publication and translation of his writings, especially the *Journal*. Efforts to organize a Seminar or Study Week and to start an interreligious ashram have not so far been successful. It might be thought that, once the task of editing his unpublished writings has been completed, the Society could close down. But, in view of the wide-spread interest in Swamiji, greater perhaps in the West than in India, this course is not open to us, since at the very least the Society serves as a point of contact for many to whom Swamiji is a symbol and forerunner of their own search. We now have to find ways and means of deepening such contacts, and would welcome your suggestions.

I am reminded of the time when Swamiji realized that his own dreams for Shantivanam—and for a "feminine Shantivanam"—were not going to be fulfilled (Shantivanam, as it

has now become, is another matter, and was not yet on the horizon). He then began to speak of "le Shantivanam de l'Esprit"—the ideal which we all shared—which could be lived in various different circumstances. He stressed that his own solitary hermit life was only a kind of "signpost", to make the ideal visible in its pure form. So now the Abhishiktananda Society might be something like that "Shantivanam of the Spirit", a kind of spiritual network, without being too much institutionalized.

In India we should seek to be more true to the ideal of interreligious dialogue, both in theory and practice, overcoming the Christian urge to dominate.

Above all, our relationship to Abhishiktananda should follow the dynamism of his life and thought. May we draw from him the inspiration to move forward in the depth of the inner experience, which alone will give us the authenticity and originality to which we aspire.

Bettina Bäumer

SEMINAR ON MONASTICISM EAST AND WEST

reported by Caterina Conio

The Centro Interreligioso H. Le Saux of Milan has recently held two Seminars at San Biagio di Mondovi—one on "Pain, Illness and Salvation" (July 1986), and one on "Monasticism East and West" (July 1987). Several members of the Abhishiktananda Society took part in the 1987 Seminar and made contributions. We were specially happy to welcome Swami Magni Ram Shastri of Rishikesh.

In the Seminar on Monasticism several interesting papers relating to interreligious dialogue were presented. Cornelius Tholens dealt with "the universal dimension of monasticism". A Russian Orthodox point of view was given by Silvano Livi in "From baptismal monasticism to monastic consecration—the unique way to deification". Stefano Piano described his meeting with the Shankaracharya (Head) of the Sringeri Math (monastery) in S. India, illustrating his talk with slides. Peter Della Santina, speaking on Buddhism, studied "the relationship between Monks and Laity in our time". A very original suggestion was made by Odette Baumer, who proposed the mediaeval mystic Hadewijch of Anvers as an example

of possible dialogue with Oriental religions. Extracts from Bede Griffiths and David Steindl-Rast, as representatives of two "Monastic perspectives", were presented by Thomas Matus.

Although, as is well known, orthodox Islam has no place for monks, there exist Muslim communities (brotherhoods) which have played and still play an important role in the Muslim world, as was shown by Khaled Fouad Allam of Algeria.

There was an important discussion of the Lutheran and Calvinist points of view regarding monasticism, and of the revival of the religious life in Protestant Churches since the 18th century—"Deaconesses" in France and Germany, new Religious Orders in Germany—and also in the Anglican Communion.

A more speculative paper was given by Gaetano Favaro on "the dialectical relationship of action and contemplation" within the interreligious dialogue.

An important place in the Seminar was given to times for meditation and to the celebration of the Liturgy.

The round-table discussion on the last day brought together the representatives of the major religious and Christian confessions, and reached a surprising consensus that the monk/nun is the best bridge between the different religions and their diverse theologies and life-styles, because it is the monk/nun who reduces the complications to simplicity, the words to silence. It is the central place of spirituality and the thrust towards simplification which allows communication at a deeper level, transcending the limitations of the outward manifestations, which tend to divide rather than unite. In this sense it became clear that Abhishiktananda was a true monk in the universal sense, acting as a bridge between diverse traditions.

The Seminar papers, which are to be published shortly, will be of interest to all who appreciate monastic life, whether as a historical phenomenon or as a contemporary counterpoise to secularized society. As a call to realize the Absolute, to Liberation and inner Freedom, monasticism is still able to attract both young and old.

The Centro has just published *Quaderno* (Notebook) No. 6, containing the papers given at the Seminar on "Pain, Illness and Salvation". Typed copies of some of the articles in

German and English are also available. *Quaderno* No. 7 will contain the papers on "Monasticism East and West". Please contact Miss C. Conio, Via Carroccio 4, 20123 Milano, Italy.

SYMPOSIUM ON THE LIFE AND WORK OF SWAMI ABHISHIKTANANDA/H. LE SAUX

reported by Odette Banner

This three-day symposium was organized in October 1987 by the International Spiritual and Cultural Centre of La Sainte Baume (near Marseille, France). About one hundred people took part, including one of Abhishiktananda's sisters, whose presence helped to situate him as a contemporary.

The Director of the Centre, Bernard Rérolle SM, presided over the opening session after which Patrice Chagnard showed his film "Swamiji—an Interior Journey". This paved the way for a lively philosophical-theological dialogue between Raimundo Panikkar and Jean-Yves Leloup on Swamiji's book, *Saccidananda—a Christian Approach to Advaitic experience*. Panikkar presented the Hindu approach to *sat-cit-ananda*, and stressed the importance of the mahavakya "tat tvam asi", of which he offered his own interpretation as "You are (a) thou—the thou of the I-Brahman". The three Sanskrit words (*sat, cit, ananda*) were also commented on in parallel with the Christian concept of the Trinity.

The day ended with Odette Banner's contribution, entitled "Awakening: On the Way: Discovery of the Grail", illustrated from unpublished subsidiary texts by Abhishiktananda.

Next day Anand Nayak spoke on "How we Indians saw him—a testimony". This included some touching recollections of his meeting with Swamiji at Rishikesh in the 1960s. For instance, the story of Swamiji's visit to a church in Dehra Dun in response to an invitation from the bishop; how he was driven away by the priest, how he went off and wept, and then quietly returned to Rishikesh. When Nayak said to comfort him: "But Swamiji, it was only because he thought you were a Hindu sadhu", Abhishiktananda's reply was: "Is that the right way to treat a Hindu sadhu?"

The Eucharist, at which R. Panikkar presided, was celebrated at midday. In the afternoon we heard Marie-Madeleine Davy's account of Swamiji as "The ferryman between two shores" (the subtitle of her book). She described some aspects

of the background of his life: first, the deep suffering that we can discern in his portraits; secondly, the deep conflict between his desire to live a solitary life, and his need to speak, to testify, to write. In her view he wanted above all to broadcast a message—that of resurrection before death, the message of his own life.

The day ended with a meditative reading of texts from Abhishiktananda, presented by Odette Baumer: "The Lord's Prayer as a way of initiation". This began from the last clause, "Deliver us from evil", and ended with the first, "Our Father", the return to the Source.

On the last morning we heard Jacques Blanche OP speaking on the topic: "Dom Le Saux and the Bible". The symposium concluded with a panel, in which all the speakers took part, answering questions from the audience in a very friendly atmosphere.

From comments made by the participants it appeared that they were deeply touched, either by their discovery of a spiritual personality who had previously been unknown to them, or by having an opportunity of deepening their understanding of one who was already an old friend on the path.

PUBLICATIONS

La montée au fond du cœur: le journal intime du moine chrétien/sannyasi hindou 1948-1973 (O.E.I.L., Paris, 1986. Price 175F). Swamiji's Diary, edited by R. Panikkar, has been reviewed in a number of French periodicals, of which one is given below; also by Sr Sata Grant in *Vidyajyoti*, Feb. 1988.

Swami Abhishiktananda—the Man and his Message, edited by Vandana (I.S.P.C.K., Delhi, 1986. Price Rs. 20 or \$ 5). Review in *Bulletin* No. 10.

Den Helige Narvaron ("The Holy Presence") by H. Le Saux (Asak, Delsbo, 1986). A Swedish version of *Prayer* by Inga Heikel and Bjorn Sahlin, with a foreword by Bede Griffiths.

Benedyktynski Asram (Znak, Krakow, 1986) contains a Polish version of (a) Abhishiktananda's *Memoir* of Fr Monchanin; (b) his book *Prayer*; and (c) extracts from Fr Monchanin's writings.

The Secret of Arunachala is about to be reissued by I.P.S.C.K. Delhi, price Rs. 30 or \$ 6.

REVIEW OF SWAMIJI'S DIARY

by Joseph Thomas in *Etudes* 1986, p. 571

An austere book. Like any private diary, it is most often cast in the form of brief disconnected notes, with occasional passages which have been very carefully worked out, notably his magnificent poems. As it stands, this is a fascinating work. The thought of Henri Le Saux, already known from his other writings, is here revealed at the moment of coming to birth. We are enabled to follow the hard inner struggle of a man who was torn asunder. He was possessed by a double fidelity—in the first place, fidelity to the tradition in which he was nurtured, Christian and indeed monastic; but also fidelity to the people of India ("my people"), to the spiritual adventure on which he embarked, to the profound intuition of non-duality which becomes the principal axis of his personal search. A search in which spiritual experience and reflection constantly interact. This sannyasi remains a theologian. His problem is not to find a theoretical reconciliation between Hinduism and Christianity, rather it is to be at one and the same time totally Christian and totally Hindu. Was he successful? All expression betrays the inner experience. However, in any case, his words indicate an immersion in the Trinitarian mystery, an increasingly keen hunger for the Eucharist. Does the experience of non-duality cause all sense of otherness to disappear? Certainly, "God and man cannot be separately numbered." Strictly speaking, they are neither two nor not-two. But is an onto-theological perspective, such as we find here, sufficient to elucidate this mystery?

NEWS OF ASSOCIATED ORGANIZATIONS

This *Bulletin* is now sent to friends in twenty-three different countries in the world. In some countries, groups and associations have been formed which draw their inspiration from Swami Abhishiktananda. Those of which we know are mentioned below, and we will be happy to hear of any others.

France. In Paris there is an "Association Henri Le Saux", which organizes a programme of lectures. Its President is Mr Philippe de Vaudoevres, the Vice-President Mr Patrice

Chagnard. The address is 5, rue Palatine, 75006 Paris. Membership costs 100F.

Italy. The "Centro Interreligioso H.Le. Saux", Piazza S. Sempliciano 7, 20123 Milano, is now at least ten years old. Apart from the Seminars described above, Miss C. Cinio maintains a regular programme in Milan. The Centro also publishes a news-letter (*Notizie*) and volumes of papers (*Quaderni*).

Poland. In Warsaw there is an active group which meets regularly for prayer and reflection, organizes summer 'camps' for study and prayer, and has provided talks on Shantivanam in Lublin University and elsewhere. The subjects at the well-attended summer meetings were "Yoga for Christians" (1986) and "Silentium Tibi Laus" (1987). In 1986 they published an edition of 10,000 copies of *Benedyktynski Asram*. However, they feel somewhat isolated, and would welcome links with like-minded friends in other parts of Europe. Contact can be made with Mr Christopher Gorski, 00568 Warszawa, Natolinska 2/37.

U.S.A. and Canada. An attempt is being made to organize a branch of the Abhishiktananda Society in North America. All those who receive the *Bulletin* have been circularized by Mr Anthony E. Gilles of 6 Torneo Road, Santa Fe, NM 67505, with this in view.

DONATIONS ACKNOWLEDGED WITH THANKS

(April 1986 to April 1987; held over from No. 10). Shri Dharm Paul, Fr M.M. Balaguer, Dr Robert M. Albrecht, Mr Anthony E. Gilles, Sr M. Pascaline Coff, Mme J. Andrieu, Mrs M. Lanvin, Mrs S. Harton, Fr R. Stephens, Mr D. McCarthy, Mme C. de Greef, Mrs Inga Heikel, Fr B. Deegan, Dr Ursula King, Mr Stuart D. Kustermann, Prof. James R. Royster, Fr Hal Weidner, Prof. Enrico Fasana, Bro. M. Zetzer, Mr M. Salen, Revd John R. Cole.

(May 1987 to May 1988). Mr & Mrs Hudson, Fr R. Stephens, Fr S. Chinnappa, Fr John W. Groff Jr, Mme C. de Greef, Mr Anthony E. Gilles, Shri Dharm Paul, Rev. L. Childs, Mrs S. Harton, Mrs I. Heikel, Sr M. James, Fr J. Mattam, Fr Hal Weidner, Mr A.J.D. Robinson, Mr M. Salen, Bro. M. Zetzer, Fr A.W.J. Walker, Sr R.M. Lauz , Sr M. Pascaline Coff, Mrs S. Delaney.