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Editor: **Bettina Bäumer**

"Bring me the fruit of the fig tree!" Uddālaka Aruṇi spoke to Śvetaketu. - "Here it is, sir!" - "Break it open!" - "There it is, sir!" - "What do you see?" - "These fine seeds, like tiny particles." - "Break one open!" - "There it is, sir!" - "What do you see?" - "Nothing at all, sir!" - He said to him: "Believe me, my dear! This finest element, which you cannot perceive -- out of this finest element, my dear, comes this big fig tree! That which is the finest element, the whole world has for its self: That is truth, that is the *ātmān*, that are you, Śvetaketu!"

Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.12

greatly in our humble effort. May this not be the last time for such an inspiring meeting to take place.

This issue of SETU comes with apologies for the delay of several months, due to unavoidable circumstances.

Bettina Bäumer

Sūnyā-Pūrṇā-Plerōma: Void and Fullness in the Buddhist, Hindu and Christian Traditions

An Inter-religious Retreat-Seminar organised by the Abhisikṭananda Society, Samath, Varanasi, December 14-16, 1999

A Report

by Bettina Bäumer

Note: Before giving a report on our third inter-religious retreat seminar, I have to apologize on two accounts. One that I am not really qualified to give this report, being the organizer. Two that this report comes with one year delay due to unavoidable reasons, such as sickness. But reading the papers and listening to the discussions makes me realize that this was not an event which loses its actuality, like most of the events reported in our daily newspapers. And its importance and impact is certainly not limited to the papers presented, which will, hopefully come out in book form within the year 2001. Therefore this report focuses more on the experiential and dialogue aspect, instead of summarizing papers which will anyhow be published.

Between the Seminar Hall of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies at Samath, the hollowed place of the Buddha's

first sermon, and the Kālacakra Maṇḍapa, the now empty temple where H.H. The Dalai Lama had celebrated the Kālacakra initiation ceremony about 10 years ago, and where we held our shared meditations, there is an open field which the participants had to cross whenever we went from the more academic side to the experiential side of silent meditation. One of the participants, in her concluding remarks, noticed the symbolism of this empty field – not only a symbol of emptiness which was our topic, but a symbol for the necessity to keep our minds empty and open when we encounter another religious tradition. A reminder that we should not jump too soon to interpretations and conclusions based on our own categories, but that we should allow the seed of the insights of another tradition to fall in the fertile ground of our openness, where they can germinate and finally bear fruit.

For me the empty field between scholarship and spirituality, between speech and silence, contained another symbolism (which others noticed equally), that we still have to bridge this gap in our scholarly and interreligious endeavours, in our personal lives, and in our respective traditions. As Prof. Alois Haas, specialist in Christian mysticism, remarked at the end, *plerōma*, fullness, means precisely the wholeness which integrates action and contemplation, theory and practice. Although we were still suffering from this dichotomy, the aim of the seminar was precisely to overcome it. For this reason the times of reading papers – not more than three or four in a day – discussions, prayer – recitations from the different religious traditions present – were balanced with almost three hours of shared meditation daily.

The topic chosen touched upon three major concepts which made it possible to talk about the core of any of the religious traditions present. According to Prof. Raimon Panikkar, who, thankfully, took over the moderation of the discussions, the three terms *śūnyā* – *pūrṇā* – *plerōma* are words which are symbols rather than concepts. It is this symbolism of void and fullness which

attracted us, the active as well as passive participants. It is a syncretism which cannot be merely intellectual, it attracts us by its experiential dimension. We are not satisfied in our search unless we either experience emptiness, or we find fullness or wholeness. And yet, the three words do not denote the same, each tradition has its distinct understanding and interpretation of them. According to Panikkar, "There is nothing beyond the ultimate (void or fullness) which would allow us to say whether it is the same or not the same. At some point of the discussion we exchanged the words "sameness or difference" by the more dynamic terms "convergence and divergence". This lively tension made out exchanges rich and meaningful.

Speaking about the options before us in the field of inter-religious dialogue, Panikkar said that the mere plurality of religions without any deeper contact, cannot satisfy us any longer, and on this point all the participants agreed. We have to overcome the dialectical dilemma, the either-or of exclusivism. Pluralism is unavoidable if we accept that it belongs essentially to our human predicament. Non-dualism (*advaita*) may be the real alternative. Learning about another religion is like learning another language, it requires the capacity to listen. Listening was certainly one of the qualities of this seminar, even when there were difficulties of language.

The distribution of the papers was balanced so that on most days all the three traditions were represented. The balance of topics was only disturbed by the last-minute cancellations of some important scholars, so that the gaps could not be filled. But the element of surprise had also its positive sides, because some unexpected participants enriched the discussions (to mention: Prof. Krishna Nath, Prof. Ram Shankar Tripathi, Dr. Rama Ghose). Swami Nityananda Giri and Pandit H.N. Chakravarty complemented some missing topics.

The Tibetan Buddhists were our hosts, and especially Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche, whose presence made a lot of difference (he was otherwise busy with the impending visit of H.H. The Dalai Lama). The clarity of his presentation of the Mādhyamika concept of *śūnyatā* was enriching, complemented by the vastness and depth of Prof. Alois Haas' paper on "The Nothing of God" in the Christian mystical tradition. The mutual discovery of our spiritual riches was an important element of the Seminar, which helped us to overcome our mutual misunderstandings and simplistic misunderstandings. The Hindu Mantra (Sahajayāna, Kashmir Saivism, Wijnāna, Bhairava) were presented, which made us realize the astonishing parallelism and common practices. In selecting the speakers it was important that they belong to the living tradition on which they spoke, and were not mere scholars (to mention: Prof. M.L. Kokiloo of the Kashmir Saiva tradition, Lama Wangchuk Dorje Negi of Buddhist Tantra). It was stressed that comparative religion is not the way to come closer, but only those who also practice can understand a religion.

Sacred texts are not only to be studied and followed in practice, in all traditions they are to be recited with the vibrant force of mantra. Therefore recitations of texts from Sanskrit, Tibetan, Pali and Greek (or English) were an essential part of the daily programme.

Apart from the academic discussions, human encounters and silent meditations, there was another dimension of the dialogue which should not be missing in any such meeting: the aesthetic dimension. Religions often meet more harmoniously through their music and art than in their doctrines, as could be shown in the case of Hinduism and Islam. The artistic dimension was represented by an evening of Kabir-Bhajans by Manju Sundaram and accompanists, in the meditative atmosphere of the Kālacakra Maṇḍapa. Another evening was devoted to a dance programme in

Bharat Nāyam style by about 40 children of Varanasi who presented a choreography on the theme of void and fullness, and of interreligious dialogue by taking basic texts from the Veda, the Pali canon, and the Gospel of St. John. Dance is another language which conveys ideas at another level than intellectual discourse. This was a unique attempt, which at the same time was a great educative experience for the children in interreligious understanding.

Five days of listening, discussing, meditating and living together prepared us for the highlight on 16th December afternoon meeting H.H. The Dalai Lama in a concluding session and panel discussion, in the presence of the teachers and students of the Tibetan Institute. It was a unique event which made us once again feel the commitment of His Holiness to the cause of interreligious dialogue. Gestures often say more than words: on being requested to light the lamp at the beginning of the session, the Dalai Lama called Sushri Nirmala Deshpande to join him in doing so. It was a truly symbolic act.

While summarizing the entire seminar for the benefit of the Dalai Lama, Prof. Panikkar recalled that exactly 40 years ago he had welcomed the young monk who had fled from Chinese occupied Tibet when he came to Samath. It was already an interreligious act, since a Hindu, a Jain and a Catholic priest were the first to welcome him. Since then interreligious dialogue has taken many steps forward, and the role of the Dalai Lama has been momentous. Thus, at the very end of the 20th century, our small attempt was yet a historical contribution to some of the most necessary human endeavours of our time.

The panel discussion brought out some essential points of our seminar in the presence of His Holiness, and with his concluding speech, with his usual warmth and kindness.

For the sake of completeness each of the panelists, which included Prof. S. Rinpoche, Nirmala Deshpande, Prof. R. Panik-

kar, Swami Nityananda Giri, Prof. Alois Haas and myself, addressed three points as the outcome of this meeting: 1) the question of methodology of dialogue, where an analysis of language is essential, 2) the question what we have personally gained or how this encounter has enriched us, and 3) the philosophical question. These three aspects are necessary for any meaningful dialogue. His Holiness also stressed that the different philosophical traditions are meant for different kinds of people, that they are not exclusive but represent different perspectives, different spiritual experiences related to the one truth. Even in the question of sameness or difference a "middle path" should be adopted.

Ultimately the purpose of such seminars is to enrich our own life, and to transform the mind.

I would like to conclude by remembering the most silent participant, a young Lama, a Vipassana teacher at the 'Tibetan Institute' who sat with us in meditation every day, without interfering with anybody's spirituality, but whose silent presence was a great support.

Even the most critical participants who preferred to emphasize differences, were convinced that such meetings should take place more frequently, at different levels, with different traditions, and in various places, so that the tensions and misunderstandings between religions can be overcome.

Silence and Music:

Impressions of the Inter-religious Retreat Seminar on *Sūnya-Pūrṇa-Plerōma*, Sarnath, December, 1999

by Rex John R. Dupuche
Melbourne

The silence was full of music. Once the learned papers were heard and the conviviality enjoyed, we would move together into a period of meditation, several hours per day, and there, beyond words, would commune with the One, however understood, and so commune with each other at the deepest level. Sometimes at the end of the meditation we would listen to Chants in various languages, ancient and modern, and so taste of the spirit which had inspired them. In this way the Retreat Seminar, aptly named was a model for all inter-faith dialogue.

Of the three themes of the conference, Void, Fullness and *Plerōma*, the first, the void, *sūnya*, attracted the most interest, as though the inherent paradox of the term entranced us. Similarly, of the Christian authors studied during the conference, Meister Eckhart attracted the most interest because he had so powerfully expressed the ineffable. We drew the conclusion that the way to unity in the world was mysticism and that after speaking our words we would all meet in silence.

The thirty or so invited members were taken from the three traditions, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist. However, the guest who was most present was also the most absent, namely the Dalai Lama. We saw him on two occasions. On the first we had been cordially invited to the dedication of the new and magnificent Vajravidyā Temple where we ate and drank together, seated with hundreds of other guest and monks, and listened to an address by the god-king who exactly forty years earlier had come to Banaras in flight before the Chinese armies. He in turn graciously ac-

cepted to attend our last meeting where he listened to a report on our conference and took part in a sort of 'round table' giving valuable teaching on how best to approach inter-faith dialogue. He suggested we should not, in terms of the Tibetan proverb, try to put anyak's horn on a sheep's head, in other words pick and choose from various traditions but rather should listen to each other's truth and so deepen our own.

Prof. Dr. Raimon Panikkar chaired the Retreat Seminar as a whole, and despite a certain frailty of body showed an unpaired vigour of mind as he consistently developed the possibilities of a discussion, especially by his analysis of language. Prof. Dr. Bettina Bäumer was an excellent organizer and host, greeting people with her usual warmth and adapting the conference according to needs as they arose. She did so both courteously and decisively.

The major difficulty I experienced was sometimes, not to understand the speakers or to appreciate the complexity of the issues they raised. This showed only the need to deepen my knowledge.

All the activities and they were many — were directed to the time of silence which symbolized the point of our human history, the place where we find rest at the last.

**How does a bridge between fullness and emptiness look like ?
Reflections after the Sarnath Seminar on *sūnya*, *pūrṇa* and *plerōma***

by Jacques Vigne
Kankhal, Hardwar

When one comes from Christianity and discovers the various traditions of India, the relationship between fullness and emptiness

is a natural subject of meditation, or contemplation. At least it has been for me. Even if building a bridge in between the two may look perilous, I feel it comes rather naturally. I arrived fourteen years ago in India, officially with a research scholarship, but mainly to be able to progress more in my *vādhana* which was already inspired both by Christianity and Yoga. Although I have often some writing on the anvil, I spend about half of my time in Himālaya for my *sādhana*, in a hermitage where my own guru, a Frenchman, who has been closely associated with Ma Anandamayī, spent seven years in solitude. It has been useful for me to hear in this seminar many ideas or intuitions that I had in my meditations but that I could not express so clearly, or with a such a strong traditional basis than it was done during the five days in the Tibetan Institute. This seminar was indeed all the more interesting for me because I am preparing a book on Christian yoga.

To begin with, I found important quite a few reflections on the very methods of interreligious dialogue. Rather than speaking of unity or difference between traditions, it is better to use the terms convergence and divergences. Every tradition has its own inner harmony and balance which ought to be respected. The theme of fullness and emptiness enabled us to see it more clearly. Just as every language has its own shades, even so the religions have their different traits; this is a richness, not a confusion. No need to wish to make them uniform, or to have the development of a kind of religious Esperanto. I noted that the Dalai Lama when he spoke in the concluding session, underlined the need of interreligious meetings at the level of scholars and religious leaders to send the right message of tolerance to their people; but he well accepted the idea that a devotee of a particular tradition does not need to frequent these meetings to reach the Goal. Coming close to members of other traditions, occasionally visiting their

places of pilgrimage may be other ways to develop a healthy spirit of understanding them.

I liked the personal criterion that our host, Samdhong Rimpoche, the director of the Tibetan Institute, gave us, to know whether a person is truly religious: just see if he criticizes the faith of others, if so, you can be sure that he is not really religious. Betina Bäumer has a point when she mentioned that dialogue means *piercing the logos*, i.e., going beyond the words, the mind, and their apparent logic to reach the essential. Of course, everyone is proud of his logic, but it may be that this pride itself is the problem: one day, a father realized that his young son was seeing double since birth. He decided, for the sake of his future, to tell him all the truth about his disease, but the boy reacted by saying: 'No, Dad, this is not possible. Should I see double, instead of seeing two moons in the sky, I would see four of them! Speaking of this kind of attitude, the Dalai Lama quoted what in Tibetan has become a kind of proverb: 'When a scholar makes a statement, everything becomes true'. The difficulty comes later, when another scholar makes quite a different statement which seems as true as the first one.

An important point of convergence between traditions is that the Absolute is linked with dynamism, be it in itself or on the way coming to it. In Christianity, in one God are the Father and the Son united by a fundamental current of Love which is not different from the Holy Spirit. Vedantins speak of *advaita*, non-dualism and not of *ekantā*, monism because the basic life of a human being is steeped in duality, and his experience of non-duality is the result of a dynamic process. Likewise, in Buddhism or Kashmiri Saivism, people prefer to speak of *śūnya*, empty, rather than *śūnyatā*, emptiness, because the spiritual practice is a continuous process of emptying, of *stamping phenomena with the seal of emptiness* as says Milarepa in his songs. Buddhist logic clearly emphasized the need to go beyond the category of exis-

tence and not existence, but this necessity was perceived in the other mystical traditions also. In Christianity, Dionysius the Areopagite said: *The Absolute does not pertain to the sphere of being or not being*, and P. Y. Deshpande's daughter Nirmala quoted to us this striking utterance of Tukaram, the great saint of Maharashtra: *Use your speech to say that God is, experience in your heart that He is not*. Certainly, these are deep questions which have been disputed for more than two millennia in India; we should not expect definite or definitive answers about them to come from a five day seminar.

To understand that *pūrṇa* and *sūrya* are the two sides of the same coin, the main factor is to realize that both have neither form nor limit. If I had to keep only one association of words in the Sanskrit language, I would choose that between *ānanda*, bliss and *ananta*, infinite. In the uncertainty of one letter lies a whole *sādhana*. And if I had to sum up the seminar in a seminal form, in a *bija-mantra*, I would say: *beyond*. Of course, philosophers or writers of books on comparative religion will say that this is too simple, this is skipping over the problems, but as far as practice is concerned, I feel content with this mantra. For *sādhana*, simple truths deeply experienced are the best. It may be objected that we do not know whether this Absolute which is beyond every religious path is the same; but here, I feel we should not waste time in academic hairsplitting, especially since we are reunited in Abhishiktananda's spirit. If everyone goes out of his house, will they not see the same sky? Is it not logically and spiritually clear that, if words are many, silence is one?

At the end of the seminar arose the question of the possible contribution of psychology to a reflection on fullness and emptiness. One can say that modern psychology acknowledges the essential want of human nature, and sees how desires mould the mental life. Practical psychology comes to a concrete distinction between need and desire, roughly corresponding to the traditional

distinction in India between *śreya* and *preya*, what is best and what is the most attractive. Regarding emptiness, it is true that this feeling is present in depression, but if one looks at this question closely, one will see that in this disease there is no real emptiness, i.e., silence of mind, but on the contrary an overflowing of negative thoughts, anxieties about the future and especially brooding over the past. This hardly deserves the name of emptiness. There are of course cases where depression manifests in religious life in the form of unhealthy detachment, love for suffering, guilt, etc... but examining that in detail would be a whole chapter. In a broader perspective, there could be a contribution of transpersonal psychology to interreligious dialogue. The declared aim of this psychology is to look for the common basis of various religious forms. Communication may not be easy because psychologists often have a very different mental frame from religious people, but the gap is decreasing for quite a few of them. At least for the western current culture, this kind of dialogue is also important.

On the practical side and for the future, I feel that it could be good to increase the retreat aspect of the seminar by organizing 'meditative presentations'. For instance, to communicate what a great mystic has to say on the chosen topic, the orator could make a kind of anthology of his or her words and read them slowly in the meditation hall while the audience would be sitting - hopefully in a perfect posture - and tasting the *rasa* of these mystical utterances deep inside. It would be harder for knees, but lighter for mind, and is it not a spiritual endeavor to make the mind lighter? One possible intervention could also be a personal poetical and mystical evocation of the theme of the seminar, but the difficulty of course would be to find the right person to take the plunge, and that he or she might agree to do it.

At the time of ending these reflections on the Sarnath seminar, a story which was heard there comes back to my mind: a dis-

ciple asks his guru, What is Atman, Absolute? The guru remains silent. Two times, three times the disciple repeats his interrogation, but the guru does not even move an inch. Frustrated, he asks, why don't you answer me? - I answered you three times, but it seems that it was in a language which you don't know yet...

BOOK REVIEW

Antony Kalliath (ed.), *Pilgrims in Dialogue, A New Configuration of Religions for Millennium Community*, The Journal of Dharma & Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 2000. 416 pp., price Rs. 300.00 or \$ 20.00 (ISBN 86-86861-23-8).

The beginning of a third millennium has been the occasion of much reflection, of many meetings, conferences and publications. The present publication, being well aware of the relativity of time (Panikkar, p. 13), is an important contribution on a central and also sensitive topic: what is the contribution of religions in the present situation, and how do religions relate to each other, and to the secular state of affairs at this turn to the new millennium? Antony Kalliath, in his Editorial, poses the problem in clearcut terms: Our age of High-Tech, of communication network and globalisation, creates an illusion of bringing people closer, of creating a community across the boundaries of cultures. "More than ever before, today, there is a vibrant and total communication through cyber media and internet... The whole world is knit together in a network of communication through high tech media. But, ironically, the expected communion and fellowship among communities are not achieved in this network of communication. Instead, what we find is that media is becoming a monster; it serves its masters of cultural chauvinism and capitalist vision and

values of exploitation; it decides and dictates what we shall desire." (Kalliath, p. 6). Besides, "globalisation which is based on market economy and is dependent on consumerist culture and values, is, in substance, a trans-territorial, neo-colonialism..." (Kalliath, p. 7).

Religions cannot be confined to the ivory tower of transcendence (Panikkar, p. 13), they have to face the tremendous problems and challenges of our present world. This they cannot do in isolation, and that is where interreligious dialogue is not a spiritual luxury. It is only the recognition of the interdependence among religions, conceived as a collective pilgrimage-pursuit, supporting and appreciating mutually and thus forming a community of communities while journeying together toward the Ultimate" (Kalliath, p. 11), which can lead to a common effort and to a new relationship.

This book is valuable because it addresses some of the most burning questions in an intercultural and interreligious way. The contributors analyse the actual situation, its root causes and suggest far-sighted remedies. Thus R. Panikkar provides a condensed "List of Priorities" (pp. 14 ff.), based on religious values which are common to most religious traditions, such as: "Demonetization of Culture", "Reducing Modern Science to its proper Limits", etc. It is not possible to elaborate on some of his points, but they are essential for overcoming our present crisis. He pleads for a healthy cultural pluralism which recognises the different cosmologies and anthropologies. "We do not have (yet) a new sense of the real" (Panikkar, p. 24).

M. Amaladoss analyses the proposal for a Global Ethic put forward at the Parliament of the World's Religions (Chicago 1993). He contrasts the Declaration which is trying to base a Global Ethic on commonalities between religions with the fact that in situations of conflict such a Declaration cannot help in

tion by and on religions on the tremendous challenges of the present and future.

Bettina Bäumer

OBITUARIES

In Memoriam: Sister Sara Grant, R.S.C.J.

by Bertha Wilcox, RSCJ
 and Josef Neuner, S.J.

Editor's Note: *Sister Sara's contribution to a development of Swami Abshktkananda's ideas and life cannot be stressed sufficiently. Both in her theological reflection on advait and in her life as a Christian sannyasini in close spiritual contact with religious people of other faiths, such as the vaikaris and the followers of Vinobaji, she continued what Swamiji had aimed at in his life. Her contribution to the work of the Abhishiktananda Society was also great, and her participation in the Interreligious retreat seminars in Bangalore in 1990 on "Sakti and Pneuma" was very valuable. We remember her with joy and deep gratitude.*

Sister Sara Grant slipped away almost imperceptibly on the morning of April 2, 2000, at the Provincial House of the Society of the Sacred Heart, Pune. The "Lord of the Dance" welcomed her into the eternal mystery after all her years of ceaseless yearning and probing to know the one Truth, the "One without a second". Now, with mind unburdened, all questions done, she rests in the Eternal Truth!

The Lord of the Dance, a collection of fourteen of her papers was published in 1987.

bringing peace, as the experience of the last seven years shows. "Where pluralism is a problem, we must address, not communalities, but differences." (Amaladoss, p. 56). "We do need a common vision. But that vision itself must be pluralistic, ready to integrate difference." (p. 63). His analysis of Islamic fundamentalism is pertinent. In fact, without a thorough understanding of the causes of fundamentalism in any religion, peace among religions is impossible.

Michael von Brück → to mention only a few contributions → gives the example of Buddhism and Christianity for interreligious dialogue, which should lead to a mutual enlightenment and "mutual transformation."

The other contributions contained in this volume are: "The Religious dialogue as a Political Quest" by Felix Wilfred, "Bible and World Religions" by Joseph Pathrapankal, "Way of Manifestness" by J. Soni (the Jaina insight), "The Inter-Religious Future" by M. Danoš Bryant, "Pilgrimage Identity of Christianity and the Emerging Religious Nationalism" (An Analysis of the Political Trends in India) by A. Kalliath, "Inculturation or Syncretism?" by Frans Wijzen, "Celebration of Inter-Faith Experience" by Paulachan Kochappilly, "Gaudium et spes on the Church's dialogue with Contemporary Society and Culture" by Georges De Schrijver, "Dynamic Religiosity" (Insights from Korean Folk Religions) by Paek Il-young, "Indian Ecclesia" (an interreligious Community) by A.M. Mundada.

The book is reflection mostly by Asian Christian scholars working in and on Asia on the intercultural and interreligious challenge of the new Millennium. I find a weakness of the book that it does not contain the voices of at least one Hindu and one Buddhist. That would have made it more dialogical. The book contains a number of often-distorting misprints. But this publication is doubtless an important contribution to a necessary reflection.

Sara was born of Scottish parents in Shrewsbury on 19th December 1922 and her early education was at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Hove, Brighton. She soon showed the keen, questioning intellect, the integrity of mind and heart that was to characterize her whole life, "haunted from childhood by the obsessive need to discover the secret bond of union drawing all things into one". She found the depth of her Christian life in the religious community which she joined immediately after school at the age of 19. It was, war time, the novitiate was shifted to a safer place in the countryside, which gave scope for free movement, and the Mistress of Novices gave them scope also for a creative development of the mind.

The following years of formation she spent first in Oxford in serious studies, which helped her to deepen her understanding of the divine mystery, God's total transcendence, inseparable, however, from the most intimate union with Him. She could never conceive God and world as two realities: all is rooted in God, yet the reality of the world is not wiped out, but is contained in God. Thus in her early years she anticipated her struggle for a non-dual conception of God, the true understanding of Advaita of her later years in India. It became the core of her spirituality. She found her understanding supported by the theological vision of St Thomas Aquinas.

In 1956 Sara was sent to India to head the newly formed Department of Philosophy at Sophia College, Bombay, a sending which she described as "a death and rebirth for which I can never be grateful enough". Her first interest was the students, their personal growth to mature life. They came from different backgrounds and different religions. She saw her task as helping them to form themselves to an integrity of mind and heart which would lead them to acknowledge truth wherever they met it and follow it to the end.

1964, 1965, 1966

To teach philosophy, she had to study the great Indian systems (*darśanas*). In India philosophy is never conceived as a mere intellectual pursuit. It is meant to give an ultimate interpretation of life and the world and their meaning. Soon she was fascinated by the unique personality of Śaṅkarācārya. She had to face the very frequent misinterpretation of his 'advaita' philosophy as pantheistic (if God is everything, then there is no other, and the world is illusion [*māyā*]). Advaita became the core of her philosophical search. She wrote her doctoral thesis on it. With characteristic thoroughness she plunged into the study of Sanskrit to read Śaṅkara in the original texts and find out what he was really saying. In a meticulous analysis of texts she proved that the illusory interpretation of Śaṅkara, widespread also in Europe, is wrong. All creation is coming from the one eternal Brahman and depends on it, without, however, drawing it into the cycles of the cosmos or history. She shows Śaṅkara's closeness to Thomas Aquinas. This search for the Absolute in which all life is fulfilled is the meaning of her entire life. It was one of the great joys of her later life that her dissertation was printed in 1999, after a very long period of gestation, with the title *Śaṅkarācārya's Concept of Relation* (See VITR 63 [1999] 701-2).

Soon Sr. Sara was drawn also into the great movements which changed the life of the Church in the past century and had their impact also on the Church in India. The Second Vatican Council saw the great religions of the world in a new perspective. The Church must learn to discover in their spiritual and cultural traditions the work of the Holy Spirit operative in the world from the beginning.

At the time of the Council (1964) Sr. Grant took part in a Seminar in Bombay on the theme "Christianity and World Religions," a theme still highly controversial at the time when the Council document on the Church and her relation to other religions was still being discussed in Rome. In the sequel of the

Council, when the All India Seminar (1969) initiated the application of the Council to the Indian conditions, she became a member of the "Commissio Technica" in charge of the orientation of theological studies in India in the spirit of the Council. She was actively involved in the international Conference in Nagpur (1971) on the "Theology of Evangelization" and the subsequent Conference in Patna (1974) on mission. She also translated the pioneering book of Swami Abhishiktananda *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point* (in 1970) and other books on theological spirituality.

Thus Sr. Sara's theological insights became fruitful in the wider spheres of the Church in India in this era of renewal and re-orientation. But it has to bear fruit in a particular way in the renewed understanding of consecrated life. When in 1972 she was invited to join a small group of her own society (RSCJS) and a group of Anglican Sisters of St. Mary the Virgin (GSMVAs) in a venture to reopen the Christa Prema Seva Ashram in Pune, she could not make up her mind what to do. She was often teased for her inability to see both sides, indeed several sides, of a question. A clear exposition of one approach would be followed by an equally lucid exposition of another, prefaced usually by her favourite expression, "But on the other hand" (in 1972 she had written a book on this).

The Pune venture attracted her deeply with its call to inter-religious dialogue and ecumenism and to a new form of religious life. At the same time, to accept the offer meant giving up her lectureship at Sophia College, something she found equally worthwhile. For several months she tried to combine both ministries, residing at the Ashram and traveling weekly to Bombay by the night passenger train, packing all her lectures into one day and returning to Pune by the next night train. Such a grueling schedule could not continue and she decided to resign from the College and devote all her time to the Ashram, a way of life which she continued for the next twenty-four years. She was encouraged in her decision by her friend Swami Abhishiktananda

who had spent several weeks at the Ashram when it re-opened, sharing his insights into the Upanishads, the Gita and, above all, his conviction that the Ashram way of life could lead to a new flowering of religious life in India. His untimely death shortly afterwards was a great sorrow to her.

The C.P.S. Ashram was an ecumenical enterprise of special significance, first in the togetherness of Catholics and Christians of the Church of North India. The Ashram was ecumenical in a much broader sense, viz., universal; it became the meeting place of people of all nations and religions to live in an atmosphere of peace and mutual respect. During the packed years when Sara was the Acharya, many groups of novices, seminarians, religious seekers from India and abroad, came to spend time at the C.P.S. and some who had lost faith because of the institutionalized Church, found it again in their contact with her. For a time Sara was also a lecturer at the Inana Deepa Vidyapeeth theologate in Pune and encouraged her students to that deep philosophical/theological reflection which was her own forte. She did not see it as consisting of two separate disciplines, but as one single quest for truth.

Her writings proliferated, mostly articles and pamphlets. The titles give some idea of the breath and scope of her reflection: "Religious Formation and the Challenge of Advaita," "A Call to a More Contemplative Prayer," "Ashram Living as Creative Ministry," "What is the Spirit Saying to the Churches?" This last question became to her a rule of life.

In 1989 Sara was invited to give the Teape Lectures at Cambridge and to repeat them at the Ecumenical Centre at Bristol University. In these lectures, published in 1991 under the title *Towards an Alternative Theology* with the subtitle *Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian*, Sara put in a succinct form the story of her own life's search and the challenge that Advaita had been for her.

All this scholarly work may give the impression that Sara was a deeply serious person and so she was. But on the other hand, she had her own brand of dry humour and could laugh quietly at life and all its quirks.

The Ashram life opened for Sara possibilities of contact with other movements in an atmosphere of encounter and reconciliation. She had a great admiration and reverence for Vinobaji and tried to live out his spirituality in her life. She also introduced some of Vinoba's thinking into the life of the Ashram. She was closely associated with the Sree Shakti Movement at Paunary and attended some of the sessions there where her presence and contributions were much appreciated. One of the regular features of the C.P.S. Ashram was the welcome it offered annually to the Yarkaris on their pilgrim route to Alandi. Impressed by the life of St. Jnaneshwar, Sara felt close to the pilgrims, having made the pilgrimage herself.

Her Ashram experience is truly contemplative yet open to the vastness and complexity of human life. It stirred also her intellectual and creative mind to wider reflections on the needs of religious life in India. They are contained in her last booklet, *Religious Life in a New Era*. She not only points out the deficiencies of religious life and formation, but also looks for reasons why religious do not play the role in India to which they are destined in a country with such a keen sense of the divine and of total renouncement for the sake of God. She does not accept a basic distinction between active and contemplative religious, with Vatican II she feels that "the members of each community should combine contemplation with apostolic love" (PG, 5). She wants Christian Ashrams to be "places of deep prayer and reconciliation", reaching out to all who are broken, and to people of other faiths. This should become a feature of the whole Church and in particular of religious communities.

Though her health had long been declining the end came for Sr Sara earlier than expected.

Sara's song of praise ended on earth on an early Sunday morning. Her death was surrounded by the atmosphere of single-mindedness in which she had lived: God alone. She had desired to be cremated. She was laid in the chapel in great simplicity, no coffin, in her sari, on her face peace and serenity. Nothing was there to separate her from God.

(Courtesy: Vidyajyoti Journal 64(2000), pp.456-459)

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Roger Hooker (1934-1999)

Roger Hooker was born in Sussex, England, in 1934 and studied theology at Oxford. In 1960 he was ordained a priest in the Church of England and joined the Church Missionary Society in 1963. After marriage with Patricia Warren he went to India in 1965 where he worked until 1968. Not satisfied with either missionary work or teaching theology at Bareilly, he realized the necessity of getting to know the religious world of India. For him the study of language was essential to gain an understanding of Hinduism. He studied not only Hindi but for six years he studied Sanskrit at Varanasi in the traditional Sampurnananda Sanskrit University. He was a man of dialogue in the sense of speaking the language of his partners, and in the sense of friendship.

When he returned to England and settled in Birmingham, he and his wife Pat became a nucleus of inter-religious dialogue, with a large Sikh and Hindu community. Rather late in life he completed a Ph. D. thesis on the Hindi poet Ajneya (Vatsyayan) which was published in India. His ability to establish dialogue at various levels will always be remembered.

Dear Madam,
 thank you very much for sending me SETU regularly. I am happy to read many things on Swami Abhishiktananda in the Nov. '99 issue. I have met him at the Saccidananda Ashram, Shantivanam, Tannirpalli, along with Swami Parama Arubi Anandam. They lived in small huts separately. I used to sit near Abhishiktananda in his hut and explained to him some comics in the Tamil Weekly Ananda Vikatan. He enjoyed the jokes and in his gentle voice he spoke to me in English. As he talked I watched his two sparkling eyes. He was also keeping Kalki, another Tamil Weekly. He was eager to learn Tamil.

... I am happy to say that I have met a great saint in him. I cannot forget him...

God bless you and all others who have written about him.

Yours sincerely,
 James Fernando

15.3.2000

NEWS

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the foundation of Shantivanam by Jules Monchanin and Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktananda) on 21st March 2000, the event was celebrated at Shantivanam, and also at the Monastic Institute of St. Anselmo in Rome, with a lecture by Prof. Stefano Piano (indologist, University of Turin) and by Fr. Thomas Matus. The event is an important reminder of the pioneering work of the two founders and of the importance of monastic life in interreligious dialogue.

* * *

Madame Louise Montagnon

Swami Abhishiktananda's sister, Madame Louise Montagnon passed away on 30th October 2000. She had great love and regard for her brother and she was always cooperative with the Abhishiktananda Society with regard to her brother's heritage. She also assisted Mr. Patrice Chagnard in preparing a film on Swami: "Swamiji - un voyage interieur". We remember her with gratitude.

* * *

David Kinsley (1939-2000)

Professor of Religious Studies at Mc Master University, Canada, David Kinsley was not only a great scholar of Hinduism and a loved teacher, he contributed to interreligious understanding by his books and lecturing. He spent many years researching in India. His books on Hindu Goddesses have made him well-known. His last field research in Varanasi was on religious healers, Hindu and Muslim, and he planned his next book on this subject. But an inoperable lung cancer cut his life short. His scholarly and human contribution to interreligious understanding will not be forgotten.

CORRESPONDENCE

SETU not only establishes new friendships, it also helps us discover some old friends of Abhishiktananda. We reproduce excerpts of a letter from S.P. James Fernando of Sullurpetta in Andhra Pradesh.

* * *

The members of the Association Jules Monchanin" registered in Lyon, France, represented by their president Mme Francoise Jacquin and vice-president Jacques Gadille, approached us with the suggestion to enlarge their Association so as to include Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktananda). In the last meeting of the Executive Committee of the Abhishiktananda Society this proposal was accepted, which means no change in the legal status of either Society, but only a greater exchange of information and ideas. Although the Abhishiktananda Society has an international membership, its centre remains in India. Abhishiktananda's archive remains located at the library of Vidyajyoti College of Theology in Delhi and it is accessible to scholars interested in Abhishiktananda.

A group of Germans guided by Christian Hackbarth-Johnson planned a pilgrimage tour following the traces of Swami Abhishiktananda in South India, in December 2000 - January 2001.

Abhishiktananda is also one of the guiding figures in Hindu-Christian dialogue, in the context of a one-year course at Salzburg (Austria), St. Virgil, which will conclude in June 2001 with a dialogue on "Moksha and salvation", with Swami Nityananda Giri and Fr. Michael Amaladoss. The participants are mainly Professors and teachers of religion who are interested in interreligious dialogue.

In May 2000 the president gave a lecture at the "Voies de l'Orient" at Brussels on the topic of double belonging, with the title "Shaiya and Christian?", speaking on Swami Abhishiktananda and on her own experience of living in two spiritual worlds.

The DIMMID Bulletin published the lectures by Swami Nityananda Giri and Bettina Bäumer held at the MID Workshop at Nebraska, in the special issue: Christ of the 21st Century. Both papers refer to the experience of Abhishiktananda.

The Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection, published an unpublished article by Abhishiktananda: "Notes on Christology and Trinitarian Theology" in their vol. 64, No. 8, August 2000.

These "notes" were included in Swamiji's Diary (April 1973) and they were intended as a preparation for a series of lectures he was expected to give at the Vidyajyoti Faculty. Since he suffered a heart attack in July 1973, these lectures could never be delivered. But even in their preliminary form they offer food for thought on these central topics, especially since Abhishiktananda's starting point is the experience of the Upanishads!

A brief report on the Samath seminar by Rev. John Dupuche was published in the MID International Bulletin, 2000/4, and also a report on an interreligious event at Melbourne in June 2000, which was inspired by the Samath event.

* * *

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Donations received since January 2000: Fr. Charles Brandt, Ms Anne Marie Stokes, Ms. Jacqueline Herbert, Zion Carmelite Community, Karl Lippok, J. Dalrymple, Major P.R. Reddy, Dr. Susan Vishvanathan, Fr. Ivo Coelho, Christian Hackbarth, Johnign... Contributions are welcome. Computer composing by D.K. Sahoo, Varanasi. Printed by Mahavir Press, Varanasi, Ph. 311848.