The Spirit blows where he wills. He calls from within, he calls from without. May his chosen ones never fail to attend to his call! In the desert or the jungle, just as much as in the world, the danger is always to fix one’s attention upon oneself. For the wise man, who has discovered his true Self, there is no longer either forest or town, clothes or nakedness, doing or not-doing. He has the freedom of the Spirit, and through him the Spirit works as he wills in this world, using equally his silence and his speech, his solitude and his presence in society. Having passed beyond his ‘own’ self, his ‘own’ life, his ‘own’ being and doing, he finds bliss and peace in the Self alone, the only real Self, the parama-tman. This is the true ideal of the sannyāsī.

Abhishiktananda, *The Further Shore*, p. 16

No thing exists in separation from Wisdom; in Consciousness no difference between ‘this’ and ‘that’. In the one realm of self-illumined Light there is no difference between ‘self’ and ‘other’.

Abhinavagupta, *Paramārthaśāra* v. 2
Editorial

Two great spiritual friends of Swami Abhishiktananda were remembered very specially in 1995: Fr Dominique OSB who passed away in January in Belgium, and Jules Monchanin whose Birth Centenary was celebrated this year. Both loved to be hidden and solitary, and yet their greatness and the authenticity of their lives cannot be forgotten. This issue of SETU is dedicated to them.

The other highlight of this issue is a meditation by Raimon Panikkar, fellow-pilgrim of Abhishiktananda to Gangotri (cp. The Mountain of the Lord), on his “ultimate pilgrimage” to Kailasa. Pilgrimage, both physically and spiritually, was certainly one of the leitmotifs of Swami Abhishiktananda’s life, and here we find a reflection born from experience on the meaning of pilgrimage.

Bettina Bümmer

A Pilgrimage to Kailasa and Mānasarovar

by Raimon Panikkar

Besides autobiographical factors, which I don’t need to disclose here, my pilgrimage of 25 days almost 4,000 kms during the entire month of September 1994 revealed to me a threefold symbolic power of that Sacred Mountain and Holy Lake which for millennia have stood there attracting people and challenging religions to overcome their doctrinal inflations. A pilgrimage is not theory (orthodoxy), but action (orthopraxis). I shall transfer on Kailasa the symbolic power of a human invariant: It may be any other pilgrimage, physical, merely internal or any other human ultimate experience. Kailasa is the excuse, but also the symbol.

I have been asked time and again to write “my impression” of the pilgrimage, which I have politely refused to do saying that the Absolute is ineffable, and the ineffable cannot be written down. I went without paper, pen or camera. I went, but I did not conceptualize. What follows is simply a story, a true story indeed, just a narrative accompanied by some reflections – not the ‘real thing’.

Transcending History

Kailasa is a temple of the Absolute. Unlike Ayodhya, Borobudur, Chartres or any other mosque, cathedral or shrine, it is not man-made. Kailasa simply is, it stands there. It has been discovered as a sacred symbol by most of the south-asian religions (bon-po, hindus, jainas, buddhists, sikhs, etc.). But it was already there. It needed simply to be dis-covered, unveiled from its only material appearance.

Nobody can claim an exclusive right to Kailasa. Or rather, all can discover it as a living and sacred symbol. Kailasa is not a private property; it is not just a mass of matter covered by snow, not a geographical protruberance and much less a closed historical phenomenon. It is a sacred symbol for all those who recognized it – and by this recognition invest the mountain with a new degree of reality.

Many pilgrimages are hazardous, but this one is specially risky. You put your life at stake, you go a path of no return. Neither modern ‘amenities’ for rescue are available nor the traditional ones, since the long route of pilgrimage from Kathmandu, Kodari, Nyalam, etc. has practically no pilgrims. One is alone and there is no escaping from death if the heart weakens. One has to be ready to abandon history and to take leave of time. This experience is both objective and subjective. The subjective aspect is that one has to be prepared to risk one’s life – specially if one is not young and not trained in living at high altitudes. One comes near to 6,000 m several times. One may be theoretically ready and prepared, but when the actual experience comes the readiness disappears and the proleptic courage is of no avail. Death is not an intellectual affair. It is simply ceasing to live – at least in this phase and in this body. Words here do not help, since all thought, all reflection fades away. You simply are between being and non-being: asti, nāsti, as the Katha Upanishad says. Death is not in you. You don’t feel sick. There is no point of getting up so as to breathe better. Death is all around. Extracting yourself from the sleeping bag does not help. It is the enwrapping atmosphere which seems to embrace you from all sides with the arms of death. It is not a threat. It is an embrace which peacefully kills – although it has spared me this time.

But if during the night the subjective awareness prevails, during the day the objective awareness is overwhelming. Hours and days, and specially during the parikrama the scenery is timeless and the landscape is out of
history. All human concerns tied to temporality dissipate. Human history, both personal and collective, sinks into irrelevance. The immense valleys, the distant peaks, the lack of trees, the rocks and rivers, the vast meadows, all exist without history. They don't come from an origin and go to an eschaton. They are simply present.

In our modern times most of human existence is lived on the riverbed of history. Most of our human actions are goal oriented and our lives eschatologically conditioned. We seem to live for tomorrow, work for the future and act in view of some goal to be attained in time. Death frightens because she frustrates all our projects and interrupts our dreams. We live projecting, believing we go somewhere in history. All this disappears in the high planes of Tibet. It is not that history stops. History is simply not there. Life is of the Present. If you have to live life to the full you have to live it today without waiting for the morrow, without reserving energy for the future. The overwhelming presence is that of the Earth. She is there with the moon, the sun, and there are the stars that move around — smoothly and without a hurry.

But it is not a lunar landscape. It is an environment without history, but not without Men. It is not an inhuman scenery. Man is there, I was there, we belong there with the yaks, the sheep and the other animals. It is the revelation that Man is not only history. It is also Earth — and also Divine.

We may put it another way. The pilgrim goes ‘there’ just to go there, just for nothing — and if one keeps the secret desire for ‘merits’ (puñya) one is soon disappointed. The hardships of the journey make you impatient and sap away all your “meritorious acts”. The pilgrim interrupts all the chores and important activities of his own life and is not even sure of being able to resume them after the journey.

But the experience that it is a way of non-return invades you and lets you discover that all your historical achievements are irrelevant. Historical consciousness is one of the main factors of present-day human despair, I submit. Only a tiny minority of our competitive society has “made it”. Only a few become director generals, top executives, world-renowned artists, sportsmen, workers, happily married, economically carefree, or even saints or spiritually realized persons. You have to content yourself by playing second fiddle or no fiddle at all, and may search for consolation in a future heaven, karma or the like — which amounts to prolonging the myth of history as the canvas of reality.

When you realize that each step could be the last one you become aware that each step is definitive. It is not the last one because the next step is more difficult. You are not climbing so that the next looms more dangerous or impossible. The next step is practically like the previous one. Human life is one step after another and at least the last conscious step, is not a Vishnu stride, but an ordinary one. Each ‘normal’, ‘trivial’ moment could be our last one. What then with our lives? Frustration, because we have not arrived? Of course not. Frustration, because we have squandered the past? Or just the experience that in any one moment of the way our entire life is present?

Paradoxically enough, the pilgrimage helps us realize that the way is to no-where, no-here, that each step is the fulfilment of the gātrā. It is not tourism. It is the first step that counts. And each step is the first — and the last.

We sometimes tend to imagine that it is easier to feel the novelty of the first step than the ultimacy of any step. I would venture to say that there is no really first step if it is not equally the last. Otherwise each step is just the continuation of a prior one — not really the first. We become aware that it is the first, when it dawns on our consciousness that it could be, and in a certain way is, the last.

Sacred Space

There are many sacred spots in the world, many sacred places of pilgrimage. The sacredness of Kailāsa and Mānasārovar helps us to become aware that any sacred space is unique. But their sacred character is not a limited place. Their sacredness is not just the peak or its surroundings. Kailāsa has no mandapa, no grihāgarīka, no cloister, no altar, or rather the entire pilgrimage reveals the sacredness of Emptiness. It is the empty space which manifests its sacredness, i.e. its definitive reality. The wonder of the pilgrimage is that the empty space becomes visible or rather transparent: the emptiness is filled with pure light, the space is full of void. Kailāsa is not the limit; but the centre. This empty space is but filled with another reality. When we say “empty space” we are prone to imagine an astronomic space without celestial bodies. Ether is not empty space. Ether is only a mathematico-physical hypothesis, abandoned as useless after all. The empty space is filled with
Man. "The prāṇa fills the All". The pilgrim fills that space. It is a human space; that space which allows Man to be free: to move outside the strait-jacket of History. It is an empty space because it has no history. Svaṃ svaśāntakam. All is connected with all, synchronically.

Man and Nature belong together; space is their link. It is not that Man is inside space as in a box. There is no such box. There are plains, mountains, valleys, passes, rivers, grass, rocks, trees, animals and Man... All belong together and space unites them all.

Man is an historical being, but not exclusively historical. Man is a cosmic being too. Man belongs to Nature as much as to History. Our destiny is tied to the destiny of the Earth. Kailāsa is a symbol for the cosmic nature of Man. Kailāsa is imposing but not threatening. Its peak is like a cupola or like a tumescent feminine breast: round, soft, snow-white, alluring, inviting, seducing. Open to the sight, but not to the touch. Beauty could be the word to sum it all up. She commands admiration, respect and awe.

To be more than History does not mean to be uprooted from the Earth. It means not to be identified with a historical destiny, not because we are angels, but precisely because we are Men, cosmic beings participating in the cosmic adventures of the entire universe.

"A grand and ultimate struggle (agon megistos kai eschaton) stands before the [human soul]" said Plotinus.

This agon is a cosmic struggle. The home of the psychē is the universe, the cosmic-and-adventurous field - not just a historical scenario or a newtonian-einsteinean place. We are playing our role in the daiwsuram, in the struggle between Gods and Demons. The first action of Jesus-Christ at the beginning of his public life was, in the same way, to engage in that cosmic war with the "prince of this world", and all his life was a struggle against the "forces of darkness". The demons are ever present in the Gospel narratives - in a similar way as we find it in the hindu, buddhist and other traditions.

Sacred space is a cosmic magnitude. The kurukṣetra is more than geographical, it is historical; the dharmakṣetra is more than spiritual, it is cosmic. Both belong together and this was the teaching of Krishna to Arjuna in the Gītā. The pilgrimage to Kailāsa is not trekking, let alone climbing. It is not an expedition. It is rather a walking on the high plains enframed by distant snow-clad mountains. The pilgrim discovers not an "Earth-connection"; not even that we are "dust and to dust we shall return". The pilgrim experiences that we are one with the Earth, and that our destinies are tied together. Even the christian scriptures speak of the "new heavens and the new earth" and not only of the "new Man". "Heaven and Earth are held by the Skambha" says the Atharva Veda. Earth, the devī is the "Primeval Mother" sings the Bhūmi Śūkla of the same Veda.

The earth has no fear of death, nor the plant or the animal, for that matter. Only human reflection, once it has lost its innocence, may fall prey to such a fear. The pilgrim to Kailāsa feels that cosmic oneness without pantheistic confusion. Our destinies are tied together, we are epiphenomena on the cosmic venture of our destiny - and deep down our being there is the awareness of an immortality which is not the private property of our body or our soul, but the gift of the Spirit, the true atman not only within us, but also at the heart of any being. It is often said that we cannot enjoy divine friendship if we do not love our fellow-humans. It is often forgotten that the cosmic kornōnā is also required for our union with the divine, ultimately for being our true selves. Terrestrial estrangement brings about human alienation and divine ostracism.

An Ultimate Pilgrimage

A pilgrim is one who "goes", one who crosses a field, who transgresses boundaries and trespasses limits. Both the latin word (peregrinus, peregre, peregrare) and the sanskrit yātrikā (yātṛā; from yā/yāt) have the same meaning of going, journeying, marching.

But Kailāsa is an ultimate pilgrimage; a param yātṛā. You don't reach Kailāsa, you don't climb the peak, you circumambulate it, you perform the parikrama, you do the pradakshina (circumambulation). Interestingly enough the autochthonous bon-po perform it in the opposite direction to all the other traditions which do it clockwise so that the peak is always at your right.

As anything ultimate this pilgrimage is ineffable. It is not beyond description because we are poor of words. It is unspeakable because its experience transcends the logos. The ultimate pilgrimage belongs to the Spirit, to the other shore of reason. It is not reasonable to undergo such an experience. It is not irrational either. Simply it does not bear any possible theory or explanation. It is another way of saying that it does not constrain
the mind. We are in a realm which is free from logical necessity (the greek anânkê, Sanskrit niyâna), not because it is above the Mind, but because it is outside it. One can have any number of theories on pilgrimage or Kailâsa. None of them ‘touched’ the thing. Kailâsa is there, visible and inaccessible, present and ever elusive.

Ultimate means that it is a pilgrimage of no return. If you ever come back it is sheer grace, it is a new being.

Since an ‘ultimate’ pilgrimage is indescribable, I am not going to attempt to describe it.

Instead, I shall betray what I realized after the experience. I never had such an intention before the pilgrimage. I have always been more inclined to the spiritual pilgrimage. And yet that memory of a hindu father telling his son about Kailâsa reverberated in him when the occasion arose to join the last batch of sâdhus the chinese would allow in 1959. He had then to renounce by virtue of ‘holy’ (christian) obedience, and later on due to other reasons, not the least his heart not supporting high altitudes. By an inexplicable synchronicity of events he found himself this time almost led to undertake the pilgrimage which for him was likely to be not only ultimate but final...

A threefold transformative action underpinned my pilgrimage, well aware that if this metamorphosis could take place in the microcosm of my person it would have repercussions in the macrocosm itself.

Peace between Men, i.e., among religions, because there is no denying that religions have been the main causes of human strife. An ecumenical gesture overcoming all exclusivisms (of any tradition or religion. Kailâsa is not only for hindus or buddhists...). Defeating all inclusivisms (and all “fulfilment-theologies”), Kailâsa is also for christians, but not because of a higher right absorbing all the rest. Resisting all solipsisms. Kailâsa is for all.

In this sense, as I had done in Arunâcala and Gangotri with Svâmi Abhishiktânanda, I celebrated the cosmic sacrifice of the Cross in the spirit of the Vedas, Melchisedec and all the other ‘commerces’ between Heaven and Earth, which for me was symbolised in the Eucharist. The Chândogya Upanishad, John’s Prologue and Nâgârjuna were the three short sentences pronounced in the Liturgy, remembering Prajâpati, Abel, and Abraham re-enacting the action of Jesus the Christ who reminded us that neither in Gerizim, nor Jerusalem, nor Kailâsa..., neither exclusively among jews, hindus, christians, africans... are necessary conditions for the fulfilment of Man in worship... Under a heaven, symbol of the divine, with a friend representing humanity, and over the earth embodying the entire creation the one and single sacrifice, as the Rig Veda explicitly chants, that primordial sacred action (with Bread and Wine) was performed.

Peace with the Earth was the second ecosophical transformation. To say that you go there to die sounds horrible and it would be wrong. To explain that you go where you also belong and do not mind accepting a requies in pace on the womb of mother Earth is a different thing altogether.

A transformation which I have called ecosophical: a participation in the wisdom of the Earth of which Man is the intelligent flowering – and speaker. It was not a journey into the abyss. It was a pilgrimage, an itinerarium where you also belong.

Peace among the Gods was the third and still the more ambitious change. If the different groups of what we still call homo sapiens quarrel with each other it may well be because there is also no peace in the desâlaka, in the pantheon of the higher spheres. The Gods have not always been Gods of Peace. The sacrifice is not only there to appease the wrath of the Gods towards us. It is performed to establish peace in that realm also.

I am conscious of the ambitious utopy of this religious orthopraxis. If eclecticism is the danger of the first point and anthropomorphism that of the second, substantialization of the divine would be the trap of the third. We are all engaged in a cosmotheandric adventure. How could I, little fellow, even entertain such literally sublime aspirations? I offer no excuse because I did not choose to undertake this pilgrimage nor had I any a priori purpose in doing or thinking such things.

The pilgrimage to Kailâsa opens up a third eye, the tertium cognitio genus, the anâkha, the experience of another dimension of reality. Paradoxically enough, Matter is correlated to Spirit in the cosmotheandric experience. Kailâsa appears as a gigantic rock suffused with the Spirit as it is clothed by snow.

I learnt anew the Sermon of the Mount. It was more than the sermon on the mount, and also more than the sermon along the trekking on the mount. More than what the poet said:

“Great things, not less, are done when men and mountains meet. They
are not done by jostling in the street" (A.K. Coomaraswamy, Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism, p. 165)

The Sermon of the Mount is the sermon of the mount. It is not a sermon I hear on a mountain slope, not a sermon of a lovely valley. In our days of anthropomorphic humanisms it may not be easy to figure out the language of the mountain. I could not make that total silence. Echoes were still reverberating in my ears. I only heard: “Blessed are these, blessed are all, blessed, asirvād, ānanda, suhba, zara...” all too human words to my not yet soundless ears.

But I would not be true to myself if I were to hide that all along the way the Sermon of the Mount began to overcome even the subjective genitive of the sentence and became the blending of the two genitives, the objective and the subjective, interpreting now what did not need any interpretation then. It was no longer any sermon I heard on any mount, not even the sermon of the mountain herself. The mountain did not speak. It was the sermon of the mountain in the vocative first and in the nominative at last. The mountain herself became the sermon, and the sermon was the mountain.

It would be already a very limited interpretation to say that I experienced “and the logos became mountain”, raising the eyebrows of those fearful of pantheism, or the enthusiasms of the believers in the cosmic understanding of the christian incarnation. But it may be a way of suggesting it, provided we forget the literal meaning. The sermon of the mount is the sermon: Kailāsa!

were certainly occasions to re-evaluate the relationship between Monchanin and Abhishiktananda.

We are here reproducing a selection of Raimon Panikkar’s presentation in Lyon on ‘The Monastic Project of Monchanin’, and a report on the event in Shantivanam by Sr Marie Louise of Ananda Ashram, Shantivanam. Fr G. Gispert-Sauch participated and spoke on behalf of the Abhishiktananda Society. Fr Emmanuel Vattakuzhy spoke on the complementary vision of Fr Monchanin, Fr Bede and Abhishiktananda. Since the papers of these seminars will be published, the following two contributions will throw light on these events, while a more detailed report is awaited.

The Monastic Project of Monchanin (extract) by R. Panikkar

Monchanin is, with Le Saux, the founder of Shantivanam. Shantivanam lives on today in the tradition of the Trinity transmitted by its two founders and the last guru of the ashram, Father Bede Griffiths.

As in the divine Trinity our three persons are both equal and different. Sometimes the differences in character and ideas between the three, more especially between the first two has been emphasised. I, however, would like rather to underline their Koinōnia within a basic understanding. All three were authentically spiritual. They followed the same ideal and the differences between them were the more visible thanks only to their identical basic aspiration. I feel it would be inappropriate to omit mention of this deep communion of spirit within them and to confine oneself to anecdotes which indicate the differences that existed between them. One and the same flame consumed the three. Their differences were the more obvious because each had a strong personality.

Monchanin was a (christian) intellectual who aspired to holiness. He was deeply affected, even overwhelmed, by India. Intellectual activity had his impasioned commitment.

Abhishiktananda was a (christian) monk who aspired to the Absolute. He immersed himself in India, in hinduism itself. Life itself had his impasioned commitment.

Griffiths was a (christian) gentleman who aspired to perfection. He was in love with India, indeed, idealised it. His impasioned commitment was to harmony.
If one does nothing, Le Saux used to say, one stays fixed where one is. If one does something, somebody will say – not without reason – that the time is not yet ripe. But the time will never become ripe if we do nothing; *oportet et haeresesi esse*, said St Paul (I Cor IX.19). ... Monchanin is open to every response provided that it is both Christian and based on an intellectual foundation. The optimism of the beginning of the Shantivanam comes up against theoretical difficulties and practical obstacles. He was still 'on the way' when his pilgrimage ended. It was 1957, before Vatican II, before the 'All India Seminar' of 1969, before various other attempts and failures, before the resurgence of a certain Hindu uniformity... Monchanin was a prudent pioneer...

Unity and diversity, identity and difference, Hinduism and Christianity. With an instinct that one can only call the fruit of the Holy Spirit, Monchanin sees in the Trinity a model. I would add in this regard that the Holy Spirit is wholly different from the Father and the Son, all within the Trinity being non-finite. Would this not be a model for a monasticity that plumbs the depths of which the Hindu mystics seem to speak? A monastery as he envisaged would aim at being a means of penetrating below this (false) dilemma of the One and the Many, Reality and Appearance. ...

Monchanin's theology would be described nowadays as 'fulfilment theology', Christianity being the fulfillment of all religious thought and thus of that of Hinduism. One observes in this attitude a trace of colonialism. No doubt it is the result of the background of the era, that of the colonial epoch. Nevertheless it would be a caricature of a great spirit such as that of Monchanin to see therein a complex of European superiority linked indissolubly with Christian self-comprehension. It provides a challenge, as I know only too well...

'The hermits of Shantivanam' remain a dream; or rather, to put it more starkly, a failure. The monastery as envisaged and dreamt of did not take root. Novices did not come their way. The Christians of the country did not feel a call. For Hindus it was too 'Christian', Monchanin left India with scant hope that the monastery would take root. He put Shantivanam in God's hands. He himself was totally detached. ...

Nearly forty years have passed since the Great Departure of Monchanin and one may well say that in him was accomplished the mystery of the resurrection. If the grain of wheat does not die... Maybe we have now gone beyond the understanding of Monchanin, but we would not have done so without his contribution. 'Swept away by the wind', by Vāyu, by the Spirit no doubt, but even the eagle flaps its wings a little when it soars majestically over the mountains of theory and the valleys of praxis...

The encounters between India and Europe that have taken place have not brought about a meeting between two deep religious and mystical experiences at the crossroads. Rather they have occasioned a confrontation of ideologies at the crossroads of power. Gregory of Nyssa, Denis, Origen, St Francis, Nicholas de Cusa or Tauler never went to India, nor did Bādarāyana, Shankara, Abhinavagupta, Rāmānuja, Caitanya or the Álvare visit Europe.

It was Monchanin who spoke of the great 'misunderstanding' between these two great 'religions'. The India of our secularized century is faced with this encounter...

(Transl. from the French by Mary Rogers)

To the Source of Monchanin's Pastoral Ministry

by Sr Marie Louise

How was it possible for a giant of this stature to stoop so low and make these simple, illiterate and lowly multitudes his own... and live the experience of his pastoral ministry with profound love, compassion, greatness and meekness? An intellectual giant he was and remained up to the end. The sense of mysticism with which he was born, the essence of this mysticism which he kept nurturing unceasingly, kept unfolding its all-embracing mantle. This charm and magnetic touch drew him constantly to the depths of the Trinitarian mystery and this magic 'wand' became the fascination for his entourage... irrespective of their material poverty, illiteracy and primitive conditions.

These convictions can be strongly supported by the few and precious writings on Monchanin.

Already in Lyon his Seminary Professors (his teachers were those who influenced his friends: Henri de Lubac, Teilhard de Chardin, etc.) had recognized in him unusual intellectual gifts and consequently had urged him to continue his studies towards a doctorate in Theology. But Monchanin decided against continuing his formal theological studies and asked the archbishop for reassignment to a miners' parish in the diocese of Lyon.
Monchanin came to India, volunteered to work under an Indian Bishop, emptied himself of all Europeanism and lived by the banks of the River Cauvery (after his priestly ministry in the parishes), “the world forgetting, by the world forgot”.

When he came to India, he brought to her all the riches of his thought and of his love. He put at her service his whole intellect and his whole heart and his ambition was to try to find, at the summit, how to bring together Christ and India. Such gems he was presenting to India, but the return gift of India to him was a pearl even more precious and which he could not have dreamt of. She gave him nothing in the way of success... of visible results... not even the consolation of the dawning of some better future. Instead she gave him the desert, the solitude, the demudation, the absence, so that he might be able to delve within freely and to attain them in the Supreme - the One in the Communion of the Three. He came to give and he was loaded with gifts and riches. From India he learnt that he had to empty himself to make possible the ‘meeting’... with the ‘Self’ for that cannot be realised but in a heart ‘empty’ and ‘alone’. Long ago already his faith had made him aware of it, but India was to provide him with the right place, the right means, the right circumstances. She was to be really for him the instrument of divine grace and by grace too, he responded to grace. His call was inwards. But to delve within to the centre of himself, where the ‘Word’ abides, it was necessary for him to go through the barrenness and the ruthlessness of the desert, where there is no form, nor accident, where the traveller is lost, alone and hangs on in the middle of emptiness, without any break in the horizon on which to rest his eyes, any water to quench his thirst and when all joys which may occur leave after them the bitter taste of not being the Eternal. He longed to penetrate into the zone of inmost Silence which leads to the ‘Absolute Quiet’.

When Monchanin reached India, his Bishop (of Trichy) had this to say about him: “Preparing himself like the Master of whom it has been said that during his 30 years of hidden life, He did nothing else, except being ‘subject to them’. By his simplicity and humility coupled with his amiability and patience, he became one with our people, and won at once the hearts of our people.”

Away from the great centres of thought and action, he buried himself in the villages amidst the insulted and humiliated, whom he loved and served...

All the village parishes were far away in the countryside and during his lifetime the little comfort that is found in our times was totally missing. But whenever he went people were anxiously waiting for him. They would flock to confession and communion. It was for them as if a Saint had come to visit them. People loved and venerated him deeply. His simplicity made them immediately feel free and at ease with him. In every place he was sent as a Parish Priest or an Assistant Parish Priest even neighbouring villagers came to him. They were always eager to come to him, to see him, to receive his spiritual advice.

The question: “His true vocation: Was it a failure?” has surfaced persistently every now and then. There are texts written on him, which have been gathered here:

“I will not say that I was disappointed when I met him, yet I must confess that I perceived a very definite sense of failure in his external mission. There was thus on these two occasions (concerning the talks given in Bangalore and Madras) a sense of failure in communication. That the impression was not accidental was confirmed by later impressions. When I visited Shantivanam, I found everything as I expected. Yet here also I could not but be aware, how little it had succeeded in attracting either the Christian or the Hindu.”

“It was the deliberate acceptance of this hidden life which marked his apostolate in India. It was a way of the Cross of external failure and often of misunderstanding, but it was also the way which leads further into the heart of India and, which one may believe, will ultimately bear most fruit.”

“Monchanin’s symbolism as a grain, a seed of good quality, which will burst forth into a mighty tree, providing solace for all.”

“If by his very nature it was inevitable that he should fail, yet this very selfsame nature precluded failure. In the Divine Economy many a harvest has risen from the soil of failure. Is not the Church herself founded on the failure of that first Good Friday afternoon? He pursued the march across the desert in quest of the Absolute.”

“The failure of his mission, in human terms, he accepted as proof of its ultimate fruitfulness. Unless the “seed dies...” we are only arrows pointing the way, he often said. And humbly he wanted nothing but that. But the role of pioneers is to open up new paths towards eternal realities. He
realised his vocation in a death which was not sterility but parturition. It is his life which is ultimately his essential message. And through death he remains near to every person, teaching us to resolve these paradoxes: Being together and being alone, love of the world and asceticism of the Spirit... the taste of the earth and the savour of eternity."

"In the Temple he was officiating with such a profound recollection that the moment was charged with all the mystery of the solitude of man face to face with God."

"Souls of this type blossom only in their death."

"He was with us and yet he was not quite with us. In this lay his success. In this perhaps his failure too?"

"He was able now to be put out to sea, he was ready to taste it beyond all veils, all clouds, face to face with the One, in the final transformation in the bosom of the Three."

"The messenger himself disappears, the message is greater?"

These statements were gathered and sent to us from the Western side: "Father Monchanin was disturbed... was afraid before his final departure from India..." But how could this be? No statement of his... nothing that has been narrated of his last days, his last moments on earth, help us to reflect or explore in this direction. On the contrary the narrations of his last days in Pondicherry, Shantivanam, the Hospital St Antoine, force us to detach our convictions from this earthly view and fix our attention on a superior plane. Certainly there was the moral, physical and psychological depression and struggle. Is the detachment—surrender greater with or without struggle? The pangs of failure, the final and crucial agony of the 'seed', fallen into the ground to die... And if we were to push our faith further, would it be difficult for us to learn from this dying saint's anguish that he was ultimately struggling to reach his Master who when lifted up on the cross and hanging between heaven and earth, crushed and tortured, cried in a final cry of despair: "God... my God... why hast Thou forsaken me? Father if it be Thy Will, let this chalice pass away from me..."

With perfect lucidity the Swami had accepted every eventuality before leaving Pondicherry. He was equally ready either to live or to die, as the Father's good pleasure might decree. The Trinitarian God was basically to Father Monchanin the magnetic pole of thought and the unifying Centre of life. But his quest for the Absolute was never a solitary search, nor was his contemplation cut off from humanity.

And the many witnesses around his deathbed tell us that he accepted his sacrifice lucidly and serenely, offering his life for his friends... India... the Church... for the Glory of the Trinity. Although very near to death, he still found the strength to dictate some notes on the Trinity.

India more particularly was the place where his love of God and the human race was manifested. Although he deeply loved the land of his vocation and the people with whom he had identified himself, his prayer went beyond time and space and was always universal in dimension.

Did he succeed? What is success? To have tried such a great experiment and never flinched in spite of criticism and discouragement, to have died a martyr to it, is this not success in God's eyes, which see deeper and further than man's?

On the morning of his eternal union with God, 10 October, 1957, having received communion, he became silent, stretched out his arms in a Cross in a final gesture of oblation and after a few hours quietly died.

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SWAMIJI'S SAMĀDHI: A REFLECTION

According to legend, when the great mystic Kabir died, both hindus and muslims claimed his body, as he belonged to both traditions, in a way, muslims wanted to bury him with the full honour given to a saint, and hindus wanted to cremate him. But when the cloth covering his body was removed, what they found was a heap of flowers. This legend beautifully illustrates that Kabir had gone so far beyond the limitations of any orthodoxy, that he could be claimed by neither side, since he had transcended both.

This legend came to my mind when reflecting on the transfer of Swamiji's mortal remains to Shantivanam and on the erection of his Samadhi there as one of the founders. From the point of view of an institution – the Church, the Ashram – this was a perfectly understandable move. But does it correspond to Swamiji's spirit? Are we more interested in his bones than in his spirit? This raises many questions. Swamiji's spirituality in the last years of his life, though rooted in christian and hindu traditions, went beyond their limitations and beyond institutional identity. The word *aloka*
became one of his favourites — being without any particular world, place or religious identity was his ideal. Only he who is a loka can be universal. He admitted that if there was any attachment to a loka, it was the Ganga and the Himalayas. So his hindu friends — and many who were close to him — would have felt it more congenial to immerse his remains in the Ganga than to make him return to a loka which was no longer his.

Bettina Bäumer

BOOK REVIEWS


Swami Lakshman Joo was the last Master of the Kashmir Śaiva tradition, and he combined depth of scholarship with mystical realization. His spiritual presence in Kashmir almost covered a century (1907–1991). Though firmly rooted in his tradition, his attitude was universal and ecumenical, and he was open and gracious to all, irrespective of their religion, caste or gender.

The present book is very welcome to make this great spiritual Master known to a wider public, since he mostly lived a secluded life. His teachings are based on the Śaiva scriptures, but he made them accessible to all spiritual seekers and to our present time. Some of the lectures contained in this volume were earlier published from his Ashram, and have been re-edited to be included in this collection.

The ‘Foreword’ by Lance Nelson, which is more of the nature of an introduction, gives a fairly objective account of Swamiji’s life and work. He has quoted the appreciation by his scholar-disciples, such as Lilian Silburn and Jaideva Singh. This is a good beginning, since so little is known about this great saint. Some historical photos enhance the brief biography. The ‘Introduction’ by the editor (not author!) John Hughes, gives further details about Swamiji’s life and his mode of teaching and imparting spiritual instruction. One only regrets that the editor’s family is given the pride of place and Swamiji’s Indian disciples, specially Sharika Devi and Prabha Devi, who spent their life-time with the Master, are totally ignored. Also some of the photos taken in the last months of Swamiji’s life during his brief and only stay in America, when he was already suffering from a brain tumour, present the Master in a wrong light. The editor could have selected photographs which highlighted Swamiji’s spirituality and did not give rise to misinterpretation.

The following texts are contained in this collection of the Master’s teachings: An explanation of Abhinavagupta’s mystical hymn Bodhapañcadaśikā and of Keśarāja’s Parāpravāṣikā, talks on spiritual practice and discipline based on texts such as the Bhagavadgītā, Netra Tantra, Tantrāloka and Yoga-Sūtras, in the interpretation of Kashmir Śaivism, which contain practical indications for spiritual life, and an English translation of Swamiji’s lecture in Sanskrit on Kūṇḍalini (it is not indicated clearly whether Swamiji himself translated his own text, which had been published in Sanskrit by the Sanskrit University, Varanasi). The Appendix contains the Sanskrit texts translated.

His teachings are very direct and alive since they spring from the depth of his own experience. The most difficult philosophical ideas of Kashmir Śaivism become crystal clear in his exposition. Take for example:

You can recognize Lord Śiva through the universe, not by abandoning it, but by observing and experiencing God Consciousness in the very activity of the world. If you remain cut off from the universe and try to realize God Consciousness, it will take centuries. But if you remain in universal activity and are attentive to realizing God Consciousness, you will attain it very easily. ... When He was solely Śiva, He was in His full splendor of God Consciousness. He did not recognize His own nature because it was already there. But He wants His own nature to be recognized. And yet, because it is already there, there is nothing to recognize. Therefore, in order to recognize His nature He must first become ignorant of His nature. Only then can He recognize it.

Why should He want to recognize His nature in the first place?
It is because of His freedom, His svātantrya (independence). This is the play of the universe. This universe was created solely for the fun and joy of this realization. It happens that when His fullness overflows, He wants to remain incomplete. (P. 23-24)

This book is a good beginning and can be recommended to all spiritual seekers, but one wishes that all the teachings of the Master should be made available in well-edited publications, and that his spiritual greatness should be brought out more clearly, as for example in the case of Sri Ramana Maharshi. This is a task before those who came under the spell of his powerful and transparent presence.

Bettina Bäumer

Griffiths and Abhishiktananda as seen by Judson Bemis Trapnell

In 1994 the UMI Dissertation Services (300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106) published by xerographic process the doctoral thesis by Trapnell, approved in 1993 by the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. The title of the thesis is: Beds Griffiths’ Theory of Religious Symbol and Practice of Dialogue: Towards interreligious Understanding. In the thesis nearly fifty pages are devoted to an interesting “Comparison with the Experience and Thought of Abhishiktananda” (pp. 421–462). The focus of the comparison is Griffiths’ understanding of the religious symbol and of advaita. The two christian sannyasins had very similar views in the matter but also significant differences resulting from different roles in the task of fostering interreligious dialogue.

Abhishiktananda felt keenly the problem of synthesizing two apparently conflicting spiritualities: one based on the face-to-face dialogue with God and the other oriented towards the advaita experience. The tension was carried along in the depth of his spirit and found expression in his writings. Already in 1969 he wrote, “The tension between Vedanta and christianity is insoluble.” Griffiths, on the other hand, while acknowledging the tension, could speak more easily of the ‘marriage’ of the east and west. For Abhishiktananda there was always the struggle, which he learnt to live with in his spirit. His impulse was to ‘plunge’, to ‘be swallowed’, to ‘lose his foothold’. If Griffiths is characterised as a ‘culture bearer’, a bridge-maker, a man of continuity with discontinuity, Abhishiktananda would rather be the ‘plongeur’ (more than the ‘passeur entre deux rives’ of M.M. Davy), the one who takes the risk and ‘dives’, whatever may happen.

For Abhishiktananda the world was essentially nāma-rūpa, with all the negative implications the word has in the main-line Vedantic tradition. It was even an obstacle to the Ultimate experience, and had to be transcended, one might say, even denied, although according to Trapnell a somewhat more positive approach to the value of the symbol appears after the dikśa of Marc with the obligations of a guru that it implied, and also after his heart attack. Griffiths seems to have more easily seen the world as a sign or symbol, a door to Transcendence. He had also more interest in modern science than Abhishiktananda. He was more cautious, not ready to ‘lose his foothold’. It is true that in the first edition of Sagesse or Sacrificed there is a clear theology of recovering of the world beyond the experience of non-duality. But that was based on a ‘Fulfilment Theology’ which later Abhishiktananda, no less than Griffiths, rejected, and on a conceptual elaboration which later Abhishiktananda simply found distasteful and considered futile. Note however that he did not deny what he had said in the first edition of Sagesse! “I would not go back on what I wrote in Sagesse, but now I would express it in different language,” he wrote ten years later. But if the tension between Advaita and the christian faith was insoluble at the level of concepts, he believed that the solution of the conflict would be found at the deeper level of experience. In the last two years of his life, if there was indeed a more positive outlook on the world, it was more a question of a new experience than a new theological formulation.

All conceptual formulations, Scriptures included, must be transcended if we want to grasp the experience which originally inspired them. Religious observances, whether hindu or christian, are only a ‘sacrament’ or symbol of the ‘Reality’. The ‘Reality’ can only be entered into by dhyāna. And yet Abhishiktananda, and a fortiori Griffiths, never let go of the liturgical expression and endeavoured to help the Church to improve it. As long as we live with an awareness of duality we need to keep the tension of the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’: because we are not yet in the fullness of liberation, the sacraments are still needed. Griffiths seems to have expressed (unnecessary?) doubts about whether Abhishiktananda kept this balance till the end of his life (p. 431, footnote). For Abhishiktananda, the christian
call to crucifixion included the readiness to give up the support of all names and forms, including the name and form of the Lord.

At any rate with the dikṣā ceremony of his disciple Marc the 'sign' seems to have acquired a greater consistency. It was no longer a mere obstacle to the perception of the Absolute, but an expression of the Divine which would in turn lead to the Real. In this Abhishiktananda came closer to Griffiths' view that the last stage in the spiritual growth is the ability to reintegrate in a new way the 'sign' that had been previously abandoned – the tenth and last picture of Zen. The sign becomes a 'real symbol' in the sense of Rahner.

In the July 1973 heart attack Abhishiktananda experienced an awakening, an 'explosion' as he called it, where all concepts with their own sectarian 'coloration' are transcended and only the mystery of Christ's 'I AM' remains at the centre of consciousness. This 'I AM' is the ultimate pole of all religious traditions. All 'theology' about Christ, his history, his attributes, his role, his nature, have disappeared. Even the world of meditation or contemplation is stripped away. Now there was only the 'I AM' and a deeper joy. "The joy (formerly) often went with marvellous poetry...", he writes in his last letter, to his sister; "now there is joy without any poetry, and that is only the more true" (Stuart, p. 357).

One could say that while Abhishiktananda's basic point of reference was John 10, the experience of Griffiths was more attuned to John 17 – both Johannine texts stressing respectively identity and communion, both to be found in mystical experience and in all mature experience of love.

G. Gisbert-Sauch, S.J.

The Indian Christiad


In May 1977 Dr Satya Vrat Shastri, of the University of Delhi, delivered the K. Nath Memorial Lecture in the presence of the acting President of India the Hon'ble Dr B.D. Jatti, on "The Contribution of Muslims to Sanskrit." It was a well-researched lecture, later published by the Institute of Indology, Dr K. Nath Public Trust, Delhi. It gave an inkling of how much Sanskrit has been a common heritage of Indians. At the time Dr Satya Vrat told me he was collecting material for a similar publication on the contribution of Christians to Sanskrit.

The book under review is a rich source for research into this area. It contains two main parts: one is a very substantial essay of 103 pages by Dr Young on the history of 'Church Sanskrit', an odd phrase coined by him. Dr Young had already covered part of the material in an article published in the Winer Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens 23 (1979) 205-31 and in his book Resistant hinduism: Sanskrit Sources on Anti-christian Apologetics in Early Nineteenth-Century India (Publications of De Nobili Library, No. 8), Vienna, Indological Institute 1981. In the present survey he pays particular attention to the Protestant output in the 18th and 19th centuries, including a good survey of the translation of the Bible into Sanskrit and a clear presentation of the polemic around the Ezour Veda which was a 'Jesus Veda', and not a fraud around a supposedly lost (!) Yajur Veda. He ends with Brahmanandav Upadhya's two hymns at the turn of the 19th century. One must add that the bibliography of the book (pp. 366-78) goes much beyond Young's survey, as it records also the respectable output in Sanskrit by Christians this century, specially in Kerala and others (e.g., I.C. Chacko's Kristu Sahasanam, P.C. Devissia, Kristubhadaya ram; T.S. Varma Rajah's Karunakariram Upadesamratham; G. Proccks's Kristayan, and other translations or original productions).

The second part of the book contains some material that had never been printed. First, selections from the Satyaodasamagraha by the Jesuit J. Calmette's (1692-1740) and a collection of traditional Christian prayers translated into Sanskrit probably by Calmette, besides a whole ritual, surely original, of the investiture of Studenthood and of the Upanayana. The text of these compositions, like of others in this section, is given in Roman and Devanagari script and in English translation. After Calmette's, we have selections from śrikṛṣṭaṇgī by W.H. Mill (1792-1853), and the apologetic works of John Muir (1810-82) and the two hymns of Brahmanandav Upadhya (1861-1907) to the Trinity and to the Word Incarnate.

The Selection of texts in this Anthology is judicious. The work will help readers realise the adaptability of the Sanskrit language to new cultural areas from those where it was developed, and the efforts made by both Christians and Hindus to dialogue in a common language. Liturgists and historians of mission inculturation and Indian theology have much to glean...
from these selections and will remain thirsty for more complete texts.

G. Gispert-Sauch, S.J.

OBITUARIES

Dominique van Rollenghem OSB: In Memoriam

by Odette Baumer-Despeigne

On 22nd January 1995 Father Dominique van Rollenghem OSB passed away at the Abbey of Saint André at Brugge. It was he of whom Swami Abhishiktananda said that he was “the friend who is spiritually nearest to me”. Fr Dominique had met him soon after his arrival in India in 1951. They immediately felt a spontaneous sympathy for one another, and a warm spiritual relationship was to develop which would last till the final passing of Abhishiktananda to the “further shore”. Abhishiktananda entrusted to him his bequest, in particular the precious manuscript of his spiritual journal. They met a last time in Indore shortly before Abhishiktananda’s passing.

Fr Dominique was born in Flanders in 1904. During the First World War his entire family took refuge in Northern France. After completing his classical studies at the College of Saint Louis at Brugge, in 1922, he entered the Benedictine Abbey of Saint André of Brugge. He took his monastic vows in 1924 and was sent to study philosophy at the Abbey of Maredsous and Mont Cesar at Louvain. He was ordained priest in 1929.

The next year he left for China for a foundation at Si-chuan, but he remained only for four years, since the political situation forced him to return to Belgium. Thereafter he felt the call to a solitary life, and he confided his desire to his abbot. He may have thought of entering the order of Cistercians, but his abbot decided otherwise and sent him to the Belgian Congo where he lived in several mission stations. In 1949 he spent some months in Algeria for the foundation of the Benedictine nuns of Our Lady of Bethany.

In the autumn of 1951 he was sent to India together with Fr Emmanuel de Meester. He joined a group of young Indians brought together by two Indian priests in Siluvasigiri in South India, in order to prepare for the monastic life. Together they founded a priory at Siluvasigiri. The Indian members requested Fr Le Saux to come to receive the Belgian monks, fearing that they would find their life style too poor! This was not so, but it became the precious occasion for the spiritual meeting between Abhishiktananda and Dominique, and the beginning of a life-long friendship. Afterwards the two Belgian monks visited Shantivanam, and Abhishiktananda took them on a tour of the region to different temples and hindu Ashrams, as well as to some groups of christians. Abhishiktananda frequently visited Siluvasigiri, specially for the important feasts, such as Holy Week and Easter.

In 1953 Dominique visited Abhishiktananda in Tiruvannamalai, where the latter was occupying one of the caves of the holy mountain Arunachala. Another visit was in 1955 when Abhishiktananda stayed in Mahasthan. In 1957 the two Belgian monks along with what remained of the Siluvasigiri community finally settled near Bangalore, where they founded the priory of Asirvanam.

Since Fr Dominique always felt secretly the call to a more solitary life in an Indian setting, it was often thought that he might join Shantivanam which he visited frequently. In 1965 he officially asked for permission to leave his own abbey in order to go and live there. After obtaining permission he lived there for a few months in 1967, but due to his weak health and the lack of a companion, looking after the Ashram became too heavy a burden for him. He was obliged to renounce this call and rejoin Asirvanam, where he was appointed novice master. When the Abbey St André decided to call back the Belgians in 1977 in order to hand over the entire responsibility to the Indian monks, Dominique expressed his desire to remain in India for good.

In 1975 he had passed a first period of solitude in a hut at Atmeshwar on one of the slopes of mountain Gyresar (in Gujarat, West India), which is sacred to both hindus and jains. There he felt very much at home and it is from there that he wrote: “These places, where hermits dwell and where the world of true sannyasa is to be found conveys the presence of the Spirit... What a strong appeal!” Meanwhile he was requested to take up the position of chaplain in the Carmelite monastery of Kurnool. He went there
for some months before retiring to Mount Gynnar where he donned once more the saffron robe as worn by Hindu monks. His hermitage was situated on the bank of a stream and on the other bank there lived a sadhu, an Indian member of the Little Sisters of Jesus de Foucauld, earlier a member of its contemplative branch who had been living as a hermit for several years already in a cell constructed for her by devotees living in that region. It was she who proceeded to do the cooking, providing Dominique with wholesome and regular food which built up his health again after continuing attacks which had been undermining it as a result of the beriberi (lack of vitamins) he had suffered in China. He wrote in a letter that in this setting he felt himself to be closer to Abhishiktananda and submerged himself in the silence for which he had so long craved. He speaks of it as ‘powerful, especially at night-time.’ Father Dominique liked to keep vigil (in the proper meaning of that word) during several hours of the night. The months passed on Gynnar were certainly one of the periods of his life in which he was truly happy.

He stayed there till the end of 1980 when, in response to the bishop’s request, he came down to the plains to occupy, with a lay companion, a hermitage situated in the countryside near Rajkot, exposed to the scorching sun of that region. No longer to live in contact with Hindu pilgrims nor live a life of silent presence among them was painful to him.

In 1982, for reasons that remain unclear, he left Rajkot for the more southerly region of Surat, where he was the guest of the local priest until they could build for him the following year a hermitage in the vicinity of that region. The time when he was living in Surat proved troublesome for him; his health deteriorated and was not helped by the diet given to him by his companion. In the end, in 1985 after violent attacks of malaria he was obliged to return to Asirvanam.

Thereafter he lived in community, remaining intellectually alert and happy to receive books and reviews that came his way. He doubtless proved his vocation as a ‘vigilant’, saying ‘I am more often seated than recumbent and I wonder how the time passes so fast.’

Father Dominique never displayed the great riches of his cultural background. The notebooks containing extracts from his reading material, which he classified according to subject, reveal a great width of interest but unfortunately his personal ponderings upon them have been suppressed. Both the depth of his inner life and his theological reflections remain impenetrable to us, at least on the level of words, for he was able to convey ideas simply by his presence...

As in the case of his friend Abhishiktananda, the Trinity and Advaita were the two poles comprising the centre of his quest. “The Absolute works on me”, he said on several occasions, while hastening to add: “As for explaining what the experience comprises, I feel a total incapacity. I am not a writer as was Abhishiktananda. These days his thought overcomes me: The reading of his spiritual Journal ‘The ascent to the depth of the heart’ made a deep impression on me.” This account, he wrote, “causes me to live happy hours over again – so many thoughts come in that I have heard before I read them today.”

In the depth of his heart he felt uprooted by community life, being himself in love with the life of a hermit or silent witness to his Lord in the midst of those who did not share his Christian faith.

In 1990 he was sent back to Belgium, to the St André monastery. It was not without deep pain that he left India. “Am I too much attached to the light?” he asked in anguish. He lived the last five years of his life in the monastery infirmary and it was there that he continued to pass some hours each night in meditation.

A study of the letters he wrote to his Abbot over the years, as also certain other private communication, throw light on the profound metamorphosis that his way of silence worked in him, a way that he summed up himself in one phrase “That shakes one to the depth.” Father Dominique slowed down over the years, his withdrawal along with his discretion making him a somewhat mysterious figure. Finally the lamp went out as if its supply of oil was exhausted, serenely, quietly. It was January 22nd, 1995.

Ignatius Hirudayam, S.J

by G. Gispert-Sauch, SJ

On March 25th this year, India lost yet another veteran of Hindu-Christian dialogue, Fr Hirudayam, born the same year as Swami Abhishiktananda, 1910, his senior by only about seven months.

Fr Nambiarambil has described Fr Hirudayam as a ‘will-to-dialogue’. From early in his studies he was taken up by the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy
into which he was able to integrate easily his Christian faith. When visiting
the South Indian temples he would stop in adoration during the solemn
moments of arati: that was the tradition of his ancestors, he said, and the
blood of the rishis coursed through his veins. He lived in his very person
the dialogue between the Hindu and the Christian tradition. During his 65
years as a Jesuit (priest for 50 years) he tried to live both traditions in all intensity.
He wrote learned commentaries on basic texts which were published in the Hindu
Journal Śaiva Siddhānta. He was the founder director of a dialogue
centre in Madras, Aikiya Alayam, where he organised for nearly thirty
years a number of common sessions with the religious elite of Madras. His
crowning glory was a three-volume work in Tamil, Kristava intiyya jāna
Vazhuva published between 1982 and 1992 (volumes 1 and 2 in two editions
— published by Aikiya Alayam, 98 Santhome High Road, Madras 600028).
Here he gave expression to his understanding of the two spiritual traditions
and the means to integrate them. Another interesting booklet published
by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference was his Prayer in Asian
Traditions.

On the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of Aikiya Alayam Swami Nityananda
Giri sent a message in which he expresses his esteem for Fr Hirudayam, “a
pioneer in the field of inte.-religious dialogue. Very well-anchored in his
own religion, he delved deep into Indian religious thought and experience,
particularly Śaiva Siddhānta, with an earnestness and total commitment of
a seeker of Truth.” May he shine eternally in the heart of the Paramārtha
Satya.

Last letter of Fr Dominique to Bettina Bäumer (original in French):

Dear Bettina,
The world in which we move (?) in fact transcends time and space...
Maintain the height! (Our words are so poorly 'spatial'!)
Remain awakened, stay attentive.
There I remain united with you,
in the power of the same Spirit.

Dominique

Rev. John Cole, a long-time friend of Abhishiktananda, passed away
after a prolonged illness on May 26, 1995, at Duarte (California). A
detailed obituary will follow in the next issue.

CORRESPONDENCE

We receive many encouraging letters from readers and friends of Abhi-
shiktananda. We regret that we cannot always respond to them personally,
but we are grateful if you remain in touch. If you want to contribute any
news item or other contribution, please send it to the editor.

As a sample we may quote an extract of Fr Douglas Conlan's letter from
Australia (dated May 18, 1994):

Dear Dr Bäumer,

May I take this opportunity of congratulating you on the magnificent
production of SETU - January 1994. It is a pleasure to have, to have read
and to dip into from time to time. My prayers are that the spirit of Swamiji
will spread quietly though pervasively around the world; the Church is in
great need of such luminaries who are prepared to go into the beyond.

As Co Chair of the international Bede Griffiths Trust for the Renewal
of the Contemplative Life, I would like to see that the works and vision of
Swamiji is given a high profile, at least in this country, Australia, which
is so needing of assistance in finding its own soul. As we work towards
establishing small study groups focused on the works of Dom Bede, we can
naturally share also in the great work and illumination of Abhishiktananda.

... I send you every prayerful blessing and remain
Fr Douglas Conlan

PUBLICATIONS

The Letters of Abbé Monchanin to Abhishiktananda have been pub-
lished in French. A detailed review will follow in the next issue of SETU:

A German translation of Saccidānanda (Sagesse) by Reinhold Schein, edited (in an abbreviated form) with a new introduction by Bettina Bärmer, has appeared:

A new edition of Swami Abhishiktananda: His Life Told Through His Letters by James Stuart has been published by ISPCK, Delhi, 1995 (price: card cover Rs 200, $ 20, £ 15; hard cover Rs 225, $ 22, £ 18).

The English translation of the Journal by Fr David Fleming is with James Stuart, who is working on the remaining obscurities in Swamiji’s text, and is expected to come out in 1996.

The following article on Swamiji has been published: “The Trinity according to Abhishiktananda”, by Sr Elizabeth Trinity, SMMJ, in: Indian Journal of Spirituality 7/3 (September 1994), pp. 289–311.

NEWS

The Centro interreligioso Henri Le Saux, Milan, under the guidance of Dr Caterina Conio, has organised a two-day meeting in memory of Fr J. Monchanin, and a conference on “Non-violence and Justice in the Sacred Texts of Eastern Religions” in summer 1995.

A meditation week has been held in the “House of Silence”, Puregg, in the Austrian mountains, with Bettina Bärmer, in July 1995, in the spirit of Abhishiktananda. The theme was a mystical text of Kashmiri Saivism, the Śiva Sūtras. A similar meditation will take place in Puregg in June 1996.

Sri S.K. De has organised a lecture on Swamiji by Dr Mathai Zachariah at the India Peace Centre, Nagpur. Dr Zachariah is the author of a book

Inside the Indian Church (Delhi, ISPCK, 1994) in which he pays glowing tribute to Abhishiktananda.

Fr Emmanuel Vattakuzhy of Santhi Sadan, Kerala, has given several talks on Swamiji at different occasions, such as the Ashram Aikya Meeting in Mysore and at the Monchanin Symposium in Shantivanam (see above). He is also engaged in preparing a Malayalam translation of The Further Shore.

Mr Martin Pascual, an American student at Harvard University, is doing research on Swamiji. He has been consulting the Abhishiktananda Archives at Vidyajyoti Library, Delhi.

Rev. James Stuart, long-time secretary of the Abhishiktananda Society, translator and editor of Swamiji’s books and author of his biography, has been awarded a well-deserved honorary degree of Doctor of Theology by Serampore Theological College. All the friends of Abhishiktananda are deeply indebted to him and congratulate him for this honour.

We often receive requests and orders for Swamiji’s books. Since the Abhishiktananda Society is not selling or distributing his books, we may suggest that you order the English publications from:
ISPCK, Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi 110006 (India).

Donations to the Society received since March 1995

Thanks are due to the following friends: Susan Delaney, Fr R. Stephens, Prof. Noel Q. King, Dr Subhash Anand, Juha Cooper, Fr Charles A.E. Brandt, Zion Carmelite Community, Rev. J. Richard Allison, Dr M. Darrell Bryant, Stuart Kustermann, Ana Marchand.

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Abhishiktananda Society, Registered Office:
Brotherhood House, 7 Court Lane, Delhi - 110064
Address of the President:
Dr Bettina Bäumer, B 1/159 Assi Ghat, Varanasi - 221005

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