Death is passed – crossed over, left behind – when the knots of the heart are severed which hold the ātmāna in the loka (world) of the nāmarūpa, of the voice, of the thought, of the name we give ourselves or which others give to us. The knot of the five prāṇa (breaths) which control the vital energy in our bodies has little importance, for attachment to the body is in the manas (mind). The resurrected state in the ascension to what is deepest: to discover that 'I' which awakes in suṣupti (dreamless sleep), while the I of the waking state remains asleep. We must search for this fundamental 'I' – but then, an indistinguishable mass of Light, an ocean without horizon, where no one can any more know himself except in saying (hearing?) āham asmi (I am) beyond all duality. And the great upanishad in this depth of oneself and the recovery of oneself, found in the depth of each being that I meet.

Abhishiktananda, Letters, p. 302

When (the yogi) is merged (in the transcendent state), he should enter (the three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep) by the power of his own awareness.
This is also said in the *Netra Tantra*: “One should give up the gross movements of breath (*prāna*), and even the subtle inner breath. Then the supreme pulsation of consciousness is attained which is even beyond the subtle.” In this way one should enter (this state of consciousness) with one’s mind, i.e. with an awareness free from thoughts, and of the nature of introverted inner joy of consciousness.

When the breath functions in a balanced way, he perceives oneness.

It has been said in the *Ānanda Śūraṇavas*: “Giving up all worldly practices, one should resort to non-duality which brings about liberation. Then one’s attitude towards all the gods becomes the same, and also towards all the castes and stages of life. The one who looks upon all things as equal is freed from all bonds.” Therefore the *Īśvarapratyābhisāda* declares: “In the case of those who are free from the limitations caused by external space, time and form, even when their mind and breath function (in ordinary life), they experience the entire universe as their own Self.”

Śiva Sūtra III.21-22 with Kṣemarāja’s commentary

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**Editorial**

We do not know if Abhishiktananda read the Śiva Sūtras, a revealed text of the Kashmir Śaiva tradition, but the spiritual experience described in them tallies perfectly with his own experience as described in his letter to his disciple Ajatananda. It is the Upanishadic experience, relived by Sri Ramana Maharshi, an experience which throws fresh light on the much misunderstood Christian experience, or, rather, experience of Christ, both in the subjective and objective genitive. But at the level of this experience the labels do not count any more.

SETU intends to be an open forum for bridging the gap between religions from a spiritual perspective. Therefore a meditation on spiritual texts should form the basis. However, intellectual reflection is no less important if we want to make any progress in interreligious understanding. Prof. Joseph Prabhu has thrown much light on the meaning of pluralism, and its relationship to universalism and fundamentalism, a reflection which has much relevance to the situation in India today. A healthy pluralism, which used to be the characteristic of Hinduism, is essential, but it should not be watered down to an indifferent secularism.

The new design of SETU (drawn by Hiralal Prajapati, Varanasi), taken from traditional Buddhist and Hindu art, symbolizes the idea that every religion or spiritual tradition is a vessel of fullness (*parṇakūmbara*), allowing growth and unfolding of many forms, and culminating in a full-blown lotus at the centre, which cannot be claimed as the exclusive property of any one side of the bridge.

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**From Universalism to Pluralism**

Swami Vivekananda Centenary Celebration
Harvard University, May 16, 1994

by Joseph Prabhu

**Note by the Editor:**

The years 1993 and 1994 have seen many centenary events remembering Swami Vivekananda which have become an occasion for inter-religious understanding (and, alas, sometimes misunderstanding). One such event took place at Harvard University, on May 16, 1994, at exactly the same time and place where Vivekananda delivered his first lecture at Harvard. This Centennial Celebration was organized by Diana Eck, Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies, Harvard University, under the Pluralism Project directed by her. She gave an introduction on the historical importance of the event, and a survey of religious pluralism in America today. Bettina Bäumer spoke on the situation of religious pluralism in India, and here we reproduce the lecture by Joseph Prabhu, Professor of Philosophy, California State University, Los Angeles, and sometimes visiting Professor of Religious Studies at University of California Santa Barbara, and United Theology College, Bangalore.
Time, place and topic all conspire to lend this occasion a palpable sense of history. When Swami Vivekananda spoke here at Harvard a hundred years ago today, he had by all accounts the same electrifying effect on his audience as he had had earlier at the Chicago Parliament of Religions, and indeed on all the audiences he encountered in his wide travels. How does one honor a man who accomplished so much and how does one convey an impression of his incandescent personality and the depth and nobility of his mind and spirit? To relate in any kind of detail what Vivekananda, "the cyclonic monk of India," as he was called, achieved in a mere thirty-nine years by way of a virtual renaissance of Hinduism, the imparting of a sense of national and spiritual self-confidence to his fellow Indians and the creation of a vision by which the world's religions could encounter one another in openness and truth would require considerably more time than we have in this setting and a far more eloquent chronicler than I can claim to be. Here I shall focus only on his philosophical thought and that too on just one notion within it, which Vivekananda offered as a basis for the meeting of different religions, namely, that of universalism. But before I come to that I should say a word about the special time, place and theme of this meeting.

The celebration of a centenary inevitably invites one to hermeneutical reflection, that is, to negotiate the historical and cultural distance between two different horizons of thought. It is a truism that to understand a thinker requires us to place him or her in his or her context. Hermeneutical thinking demands not just such historical reconstruction but also a transmission and mediation to our own contemporary context, what the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer has called a "fusion of horizons." This allows us to sift out those aspects of a thinker's ideas that have a more local and dated provenance from those that have a continuing significance.

A similar dialectic of continuity and discontinuity, orientation and re-orientation is evoked by the consciousness of occupying the same place as someone. To stand where Vivekananda stood is inevitably to share, at least partly, in a tradition, a tradition that took place here, but which now has perhaps a different trajectory and sense of direction. Universalism, of which Vivekananda was one of the pioneers, sought to transcend parochialism and find common ground with other faiths. The question that challenges us today is both where that ground is to be discovered and how it is to be arrived at.

Finally, a word about the larger topic to which my particular remarks provide may be a philosophical prolegomenon. We address ourselves to this question of universalism and pluralism within an America and an India substantially different from the countries that Vivekananda encountered and lived in. This will be explored more fully by Bettina Bäumer and Diana Eck. But I should like just to point to the contemporary urgency and complexity of this matter in these two societies. America saw itself in its founding as the land of immigrants and in the last hundred years migration has largely changed the face and faces of this country, giving rise to all the vexed questions associated with ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. When we turn to India, it too over its five thousand year history has attracted vast influxes of religiously and racially diverse populations, a plurality that Vivekananda celebrated and took pride in. What is new, however, is the interval is the achievement of independence in the aftermath of a painful and deeply troubling division of the country. Contemporary India has had as an independent country to deal with the rights of a number of minorities coexisting with a large Hindu majority. Both India and America, therefore, serve as laboratories within which the challenges of pluralism have to be met, an experiment where the stakes are high and where success or failure surely affects the fate of pluralism worldwide.

With these preliminary remarks let me come now to my main theme. The electrified response at the 1893 Parliament of Religions that greeted Vivekananda's opening salutation, "Sisters and Brothers of America," coming as it did amidst the rivalries and triumphalism that were amply on display up to that point in the proceedings is by now well known. It presaged a tolerance and universal acceptance that he then buttressed by a quote from the Bhagavad Gita, "Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths, which in the end lead to Me" (CW.I.4).1 And describing his own attitude, Vivekananda on another occasion asserted: "I accept all religions that were in the past and... worship God with every one of them; in whatever form they worship Him... not only [that] but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future... the Bible, the Vedas, the Koran and all other sacred books are so many pages and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I would

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1All questions are from The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Calcutta, 1977; hereafter referred to in the text as CW and cited by volume and page number. This is Vivekananda's rendition of Gita 9: 23.
leave my heart open for all of them.  

Both Vivekananda’s personal catholicity towards the major world traditions and his broader goal of harmony and peace between them cannot be doubted. In this he was a faithful disciple of his master, Ramakrishna. There is, nevertheless, a crucial difference between the two. Ramakrishna’s openness was based on an experiential and indeed mystical intuition of the unity of faiths, where in the relative transcendence of culturally mediated differences, he saw diverse religious traditions all leading to the same point. Vivekananda’s ground for asserting the commonality of religions is more philosophical and is based on his equation of Vedantic philosophy with *Sanatana Dharma*, the eternal religion:

India alone was to be, of all lands, the land of toleration and of spirituality … *Ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti* [He who exists is one; the sages call him variously] … This is … one of the grandest truths that was ever discovered. And for us Hindus this truth has been the backbone of our national existence. Our country has become the glorious land of religious toleration. The world is waiting for this grand idea of universal toleration. The other great idea that the world wants from us today is that eternal grand idea of the spiritual oneness of the whole universe. This is the dictate of Indian philosophy. (CW.III.186ff)

In the light of subsequent events one can be forgiven for being a bit uneasy about such statements, which unfortunately are fairly typical of Vivekananda. But even abstracting from such developments and exercising interpretive charity, one is justified in harboring some suspicion about the scope of Vivekananda’s much-touted tolerance. In fact, I submit, his position is much better characterized as inclusivism rather than tolerance. Inclusivism is the position in which one’s particular tradition is taken to represent the final or ultimate truth and other traditions are seen either as aspects of or stages leading up to such final truth. It does not just incorporate but is logically committed to subordinating other traditions. As such it is a form of self-assertion, which does not sit easily with toleration in the full sense of the word, which implies a stance of equality and an acknowledgment of the truth and legitimacy of the other. Inclusivism by contrast is tolerant only to the extent it can absorb the other.

This difference between inclusivism and tolerance is clearly exemplified in Vivekananda’s attitude to Buddhism, which to a student of the history of religions is an interesting test case. Buddhism emerged out of Hinduism from which it achieved its autonomy by way of a critique. Vivekananda’s attitude to Buddhism is similar to Dr. Johnson’s opinion of a book he had reviewed: he felt it was both good and original, but unfortunately the parts that were good were not original and those that were original were not good. While he praises the Buddha as the great teacher and practitioner of compassion, according to Vivekananda it was the Buddha’s own followers who did not realize the import of this teachings (CW.I.21), whereas from a Hindu standpoint the Buddha only makes explicit something that was always implicit in Hinduism. On the other hand, he reproaches Buddhism after the Buddha for a general degeneration of religious life both within Buddhism and in its influence on Hinduism, via the corruption of Tantrism and — a truly breathtaking accusation — the creation of Brahminism and idolatry in India (CW.III.264). Part of the greatness of Hinduism to Vivekananda is its inclusivist power and absorptive capacity and so he can, quite unselfconsciously, say about Buddhism, “In India this gigantic child was absorbed, in the long run, by the mother that gave it birth, and today the very name of Buddha is almost unknown all over India” (CW.III.312).

A hundred years later, when we have more fully explored the logic of universalism and inclusivism, we are aware of how it systematically neutralizes difference and eliminates otherness. Such inclusivism in fact consistently misrepresents difference, which it either seeks to absorb as something similar to exclude as an alien other. It is thus unable to be truly tolerant, a stance which requires that one see difference not as an unstable relation pulling either in the direction of inclusion or exclusion, but as the relatedness of things bearing greater or lesser similarity in a multiplicity of respects. Inclusivism by contrast freezes this fluid, dialectical relation between identity and difference into a simple binary opposition. The practical consequences of this are not just coercive, but for that very reason counterproductive. Stifled by such rigid universalism particularity and difference burst the bonds of such coercion, desperately seeking room for expression. Over and over again in this century voices and forces long dominated by inclusivist totalities rebel against their incorporation and demand their own space — the
voices of women, of marginalized races and cultures and of subordinated ethnic and religious groups.

There is an irony in this. Swami Vivekananda was a sincere champion of precisely such freedom. Having suffered as a Hindu and an Indian not just from the overt brutalities of British rule but also from the more dehumanizing attitude of Christian universalism, which had its own "fulfillment theology," where Christianity was presented as the final truth to which all other traditions led, Vivekananda well knew what it was to be absorbed in someone else's imperial dream. Perhaps his own pride and the compelling need he felt to instill some of that pride in his co-religionists caused him to turn the tables on the British and on Christianity and invert their dream. If that is so, then I would argue, it was an unfortunate choice forced on him by history. His guru, Ramakrishna, who was not a political person, escaped this pressure and his essentially mystical and experiential intuition of the unity of religions was quite different from the "practical Vedanta" that Vivekananda as philosopher and patriot preached.

While we might thus understand the pathos of Vivekananda's position, a hundred years later, we are painfully aware of its limitations, political and religious, and in this context there is no need to separate those deficiencies for they amount to the same thing. A lack of political freedom is at the same time a lack of religious freedom and vice versa. My argument thus far has been that the goal of religious unity and understanding that Vivekananda sincerely sought was undercut by the philosophical conceptuality he provided. It is inadequate merely to replace Christian universalism by Hindu universalism whatever the political pressures might be. We need to go beyond universalism and inclusivism to pluralism. Pluralism, I submit, is the theoretical and practical basis for the tolerance that Vivekananda wanted.

Pluralism, as I construe it, needs to be distinguished both from pluralism and from inclusivism. Plurality as a fact merely points to the multiplicity of religions, and to the extent that it embodies an attitude, it is one of tolerance in the minimal sense of indifference. This kind of tolerance in practice trivializes religion by not taking questions of truth seriously and, furthermore, often breaks down when the stakes are high and ends up as a kind of exclusivist. The difference between pluralism and inclusivism comes at the point where they deal with difference. Where inclusivism tends to neutralize difference and reduce it to the same, pluralism in the best case scenario celebrates difference as part of the infinite plenitude of being, and in the worst case scenario, when differences harden into oppositions, tries to live with such opposition. Mention of worst case scenarios is meant to highlight the point that pluralism as we well know is not at all an easy attitude to achieve. On the one hand it tries to go beyond the insularity of a certain kind of multiculturalism, where we all remain locked up and isolated in our respective languages, ethnicities, races classes or genders with no or little communication between them. Such insularity severely reduces the human scope and potential. On the other hand, when it does attempt such communication pluralism endeavors to permit the play of differences, seeking the unity implicit in such communication in and through difference. Unity in the pluralist attitude is much more a process or a relation sought, than a commonality that is postulated or presupposed from the start.

With this brief characterization of pluralism in general, let me indicate what religious pluralism in particular entails and how it provides an indispensable basis for a more robust tolerance. What it entails, and this is its most challenging aspect, is for religious traditions to give up their claim of the sole possession of a final or absolute truth, either in the exclusivist forms of such a claim where other religions are judged to be wrong or evil, or in the inclusivist version, where other faiths are considered to have a lesser or inferior truth than one's own. Pluralism by contrast recognizes the legitimacy and full truth of diverse religious traditions, which it sees as alternative spaces in which human beings seek enlightenment and fulfillment. The problem that arises is how such a relativization of absolute truth-claims can be rendered compatible with the religious need to uphold such claims as the ground for sustaining commitment. The short answer to this difficult question is that within each tradition a practitioner is justified in holding on to the universality of such truth-claims, for it would surely be contradictory for truth not to be universal. At the same time, however, this universality has to be recognized as a legitimate feature of the truth-claims of other traditions as well, so that from a global, as against local, standpoint different traditions may be seen as alternative locales within which absolute truth-claims may be made.

Pluralism on this account is not to be confused with an easy and unwarranted relativism. On the one hand, it takes the question of truth seriously and grants the major traditions a presumption of truth, a presumption that then has to be tested by reason and experience. On the other hand, it is not some rationalistic synthesis or, even worse, syncretism; rather, it remains
committed existentially to a particular path, even while trying to assimilate what is true in other paths. Such a notion of a “relative absolute,” if I may phrase it thus provides a religious basis for tolerance in so far as the temptation is avoided to regard others as inferior or mistaken in general, though, of course, one can and must critique particular positions. True tolerance is impossible without an acknowledgement of equality and it is pluralism alone which accords it.

It is time to draw these remarks to a close. I began this address by asking how best we can honor Swami Vivekananda today. I submit that it is by taking to heart and working for the religious unity that he so passionately desired both within India and the world at large. Alas, world history has not been encouraging in this respect and today over large parts of the globe from the countries of Europe, through Africa and the Middle East all the way to India and Indonesia, religious strife is tearing the world apart. The clash of civilizations which Professor Samuel Huntington among others has referred to is already upon us. In such circumstances we can do worse than to learn from the one whom his countrymen hailed as “the patriot saint of India,” even though today we might feel inclined to temper his nationalism and reinforce his pluralism.

**BOOK REVIEWS**

**Swami Abhishiktananda in a New Book**

The University of Madras has recently published a book by Felix Wilfred, Professor in its Department of Christian Studies, entitled *Beyond Settled Foundations* (1963). The book presents an outline of the Catholic contribution to Indian theology, stressing the recent theologians. Eight pages (53–60) are devoted to Swami Abhishiktananda, “a very important personality in the development of contemporary Indian Catholic theology, and his significance is increasingly being felt today in Hindu Christian encounter... His vision and mystical intuitions remain a watershed for the evolving Indian Christian theology” (53–4).

Wilfred makes three main points in portraying the significance of Swamiji. First his “plunge into the Depths,” i.e., his readiness to follow the lead of the Upanishads and undertake “a pilgrimage to the inner world, the world of the self.” This awakening to the self will give us the secret of the mystery of God and of the universe. The cave of the heart comes here.

Second, in this pilgrimage there is the discovery of *advaita*, i.e., that reality is one, *ekam sat*. This of course is not an intellectual realization but an experience of the Real as pervading the world of multiplicity. What is new in this exposition is the thesis that the *advaita* mystery is present at the very heart of the Christian faith in the Trinity. For this Wilfred has recourse to the classic book *Saccidananda*. This leads to an important perception of the nature of faith. It is not a theological affirmation of truths — all theological affirmation is just a symbol, a sign pointing beyond itself. Nor are mere acts of believing. It is the surrender to the movement reaching beyond the mind and all its symbols to the ultimate Reality which is *advaita*.

Thirdly, dialogue acquires its validity not by remaining at the level of the *logos*, the word, but entering into the depth experience of the partner. Vatican II is in this respect quite incomplete, and much more should be developed from its teaching on the universal character of salvation.

The conclusion distinguishes three stages in the life of Swamiji: the search for an Indian monastic form of life as a Benedictine monk; the inner journey to the Mystery within, under the influence of Ramana Maharsi and Swami Gaanananda; and his sharing of the experience with the Indian Church during the post-conciliar period.

The section ends with these words:

It is difficult to gauge the depth of this contemplative theologian. He has left no clear theological agenda or program for the development of an Indian theology. But he did, like the angel of the Lord, stir the waters (cf. Jn 5:4), and only by getting promptly into the waters he has stirred can Indian theology be imbued with the freshness and newness of the *spiritus creator* — the creative spirit. (60).

While the portrayal of the contribution of Swamiji is quite positive and helpful, one misses the passion of the search, the struggle that accompanied the inner journey of Swamiji to the end of his life, the cry of joy on those final days after the stroke at Rishikesh, when he had found the Grail.

G. Gispert-Sauch, S.J.
Uyir Punal (Living Spring):
Tamil Translation of Prayer by Swami Abhishiktananda
Published by Vaigai Pathipagam, Dindigul, 1994 (pp. i-viii;1-133; Rs 15).

*Uyir Punal* is the Tamil translation of Swami Abhishiktananda's *Prayer*,
by the Madurai Jesuit's Publication *Vaigai Pathipagam*.

Mr. V. A. Ponniiah is the translator. Himself being a convert from
Hinduism, Mr. Ponniiah is deeply rooted both in the Hindu and Christian
traditions of Prayer and mysticism. As someone closely associated with the
Christian Ashrams for a long time, and as someone who is well versed both
in Tamil and English, having already proved his talent in translating some
spiritual classics from English to Tamil, he is adequately qualified for this
difficult task of rendering the work of Swami Abhishiktananda into Tamil.

The title *Uyir Punal* is not a literal translation of the original title *Prayer*.
*Uyir Punal* means living-spring or living-water. It is taken from the words of
Jesus to the samaritan women, "The water that I shall give him will become
in him a spring of living-water, welling up to eternal life," (Jn 4:14). It is
also evocative of Ez 47 which describes the living-springs gushing forth
in all the directions from the Temple, a theme which is later taken up by
the author of Revelation in Chapter 22. This symbolic title is chosen by
the publishers to signify the abligy of prayer to signifies that prayer is not
an activity among other activities, but that it is a way of living in deep
union with God, which flowing continuously like the living-stream, enriches
all activities of life. Perhaps it is also an example of the creatively faithful
way in which the original is translated into Tamil.

The Tamil version suffers from one defect. The language is too tough
for the ordinary reader as the style is classical in chaste Tamil. Some times
the technical terms are quite obscure and unfamiliar. A glossary of technical
terms at the end of the book would have been very helpful. The reader has
to struggle and persevere for the first few chapters as if breaking a hard rock
to reach out to a precious gem buried within. As the reader slowly becomes
familiar with the language, the subject matter becomes lucid. One really
begins to appreciate the profundity of the original writer's insights and the
translator's struggle to render them faithfully in Tamil. A perceptive reader
feels that a lot of care has been taken not merely to translate the words, but
their meaning.

The first few chapters deal with the theology of prayer. Afterwar various
methods of prayer are carefully described helping the seeker towards
a deeper union with God in a mystical experience. The reader is allured
and captivated as more and more doors are opened progressively into the
cave of the heart revealing the infinite mystery of God's immanence and
transcendence within us.

This work does not present contemplative prayer as a way of escaping
the world or ending in a contempt for the worldly. It shows how prayer enables
us to see God in everything and everything in God. This vision inspires
for a strong commitment to live and struggle for more life, more love,
more justice, etc., in one's actual living context. When our actions spring
from our inner energy flowing from the depth of our being, they acquire
power not only to humanise the world, but also to divinise it.

One reader, Fr. Anandaraj, O.C.D., a Scripture Professor, said the follow ing
regarding this book: *I rarely find a spiritual book in Tamil sufficiently
engaging me and inspiring me. But Uyir Punal kept me captive for two
full days. I began to relish it so much that I found it difficult to put it down
before completing it. It is a classic of high quality. I congratulate Vaigai Pathipagam for coming forward to publish such works.*

Perhaps these words summarise in a nutshell the strength of this book.
As such it is highly recommended for anyone who is yearning for a deeper
prayer experience. It is a must for the Novitiates and Seminaries in Tamil
nadu and wherever Tamil youngsters are being formed in the art of prayer.

P. Arockiasoss, s.j.

MEDITATION

From Breath to the Breathless

I quietly weaned away
the shoes from my feet
as I entered the holy shrine
and leaving the shores
of Rajas and action
set sail on a voyage
of Atman within
when the dawn was giving birth
to the Lila of vital elan.
In the lap of mother earth
unfettered by Rta and motion
I sat as a lotus blossom
rooted in the soil
of a pool of water.
Then from the paricabhitta
of the bounteous cosmos
my unfurled lungs
drew copiously
deep and long
breath after breath.
Watching its ebb and flow
as the Enlightened One
had said with compassion
aeons and ages ago
its cool soothing hues
spreading into consciousness
I saw the summit
of stillness nearing
yet strayed for a while
into the lure of fantasy
but returned soon to the path
of Santi within.
As quiet wore on in me
I watched it flowing gently
into every tiny cell
fibre of muscle
and stream in the vein.
As on the evening horizon
planet Earth seemed to merge
with its Master, Sun
the river of my breath
mingled for a moment
into that waveless ocean
of the Breathless.

And I returned to the fold
of Karma and Dharma
of daily living
a little more serene,
a little more wholesome.

Anto, SVD
12.02.95

NEWS AND REPORTS

During my time as a Fellow at the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University from April to June 1994, I had ample opportunities to speak about Abhishiktananda, to scholars of religion and those interested in a spirituality which crosses the boundaries of one religion, particularly Christianity. I found much interest and response to his life and ideas. On May 25, 1994 we showed the Video on Swamiji, which was followed by a lively and penetrating discussion, in which Prof. Diana Eck, Fr. Francis Clooney, Prof. Joseph Prabhu and others participated.

*   *   *

We are very grateful to Prof. Diana Eck who has negotiated with Harvard University Divinity School and who has been successful in getting permission for keeping the Abhishiktananda Archives at Andover Library. This will be a fitting place for interested scholars of religion, spirituality and theology to use these materials for their research. After collecting all the available published as well as unpublished materials, we shall hand them over to Harvard University, possibly connected with some function or lecture on Swami Abhishiktananda.

*   *   *

I also had the opportunity to participate in the “Contact Person’s Workshop on Christian-Hindu Dialogue” of the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, from June 13 to 16, 1994, at St. Procopius Abbey, Lisle, a masterpiece of modern religious architecture (fully air-conditioned!). It was a good experience to meet personally all these great monastics who are, in one way or
another, engaged in interreligious dialogue, whose names I had only read so far. I found that the dialogue with Buddhism was at an advanced stage, but a dialogue with “Hinduism” had hardly begun. This meeting seemed to be a first step. However, there was only one Hindu present as a silent witness, Swami Lalita Krishna, a disciple of Ma Anandamayi, and no Hindu gave any presentation. Prof. Diana Eck and Tim Flinders spoke about various aspects of Hinduism.

Odette Baumer gave a presentation on Abhishiktananda in dialogue with Sr. Pascaline Coff, which was published in the Bulletin of the North-American Board of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue. Though I was not scheduled to speak, I shared briefly about my experience of living with Hindu-Christian dialogue for the last 25 years.

It was a good occasion to learn more about the World Parliament of Religions (Chicago 1993), especially from Br. Wayne Teasdale who gave a presentation, highlighting the most important events, and the follow-up.

* * *

In July 1994 we had an “Abhishiktananda Society Meditation Week” in the Austrian mountains, continuing a tradition of the last several years, with a group of young — and not so young — people. “Puregg”, the “House of Silence”, was founded by Br. David Steindl-Rast and Vanja Palmers, who transformed an old hay shed into a Zen meditation hall. We also took Abhishiktananda’s writings on the Spirit as a basis for our meditation. A similar meditation time will be held in the last week of July 1995, based on the Śiva-Sūtras.

Bettina Baumer

Swamiji’s Samādhi at Shantivanam

The news has been received from Shantivanam Ashram that the mortal remains of Swami Abhishiktananda have been transferred from Indore to Shantivanam, where a small Samādhi has been erected, along with the Samādhis of Fr. Monchanin (only a memorial) and Fr. Bede.

Shantivanam is going to celebrate the birth centenary of Fr. Monchanin from July 8th to 11th, 1995. Detailed information about the programme may be obtained from the Ashram.

Shanti Sadan Ashram

Fr. Emmanuel Vattakuzhy has sent out a News Letter from his Ashram in Kerala, which is inspired by the ideal of Swami Abhishiktananda. He writes: “In the present world, man has lost control over the senses, and sometimes religions bargain the price of God. Though small in form, simple in appearance, silent in service, charismatic in origin and informal in functioning, an ashram is a spiritual oasis and a fountain of living waters.”

Anybody interested in a time of quiet and in a contemplative life may contact Fr. Emmanuel: Shanti Sadan, Avolichal, Neriamangalam P.O. 686693, Kerala.

Shankaracharya of Sringeri

Jagadguru Shankaracharya of Sringeri Math, one of the four most revered heads of Hinduism, came to Delhi on 20th July 1994. On this historic occasion a civic reception was accorded to the dignitary at Ramilla Grounds. The Secretary of the Abhishiktananda Society, Fr. Anto, in his short speech of felicitation said that in the seminal Advaïtic axiom “brahma satyam, jagat mithya” there is much scope to explore and promote interreligious harmony which is a need in the world of today. We need people like the present Jagadguru to interpret what is mithya (false) in the world and show it to the people from one’s own lived experience.

Birth Centenary celebrations of Fr. Jules Monchanin

The Birth Centenary of Fr. Jules Monchanin (1895–1957), co-founder of Shantivanam and companion of Abhishiktananda, and one of the pioneers of the ecumenical movement, will be celebrated in Lyon, Institut Catholique, from April 5 to 7, 1995. R. Panikkar, O. Baumer, Fr. M. Amaladoss, S. Rohde and others will participate. A report will be given in the next issue of SETU.
Activities of Odette Baumer

Odette is advisor to the MID (Monastic Interreligious Dialogue), and she made a presentation on Abhishiktananda at their Christian/Hindu Dialogue Workshop at Lisle, Chicago. She has also been appointed as consultant for the French-speaking countries to the DIM in Europe, and she participated in their meeting at the Abbaye de Saint Maurice. They also hold regular dialogue meetings with Tibetan monks at Mont Pelerin at Vevey. Besides, she has given an introduction to Hinduism and to Abhishiktananda in the Abbey N. Dame de Compassion, OSB, near Angera. She continues giving talks about Swamiji in different monasteries.

Abhishiktananda Group in Brussels

After Fr. Serge Descy retired to live as a hermit in Lebanon, the group which was inspired by him decided to continue to meet at least once a month and keep up their meditations. For most of them Abhishiktananda has become a guiding light and they would like to keep up contact with other friends. We wish that they can continue in spite of the absence of Fr. Serge.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Tamil translation of PRAYER (see under Book Reviews)

In Italian:


Caterina Conio: Abhishiktananda: Sulle frontiere dell’incontro cristiano-indù, Assisi (Cittadella Editrice), 1994 (reviews of these two books will follow in the next issue).

About coming publications

Report on the publication of the Seminar Volumes
(Rajpur and Bangalore):

I wish I could report that the volumes on “Shaiva and Christian Mysticism” (Rajpur) and “Sakti and Pneuma” (Bangalore) are already in the press. Unfortunately, since I am editing them single-handed, and I have a lot of other commitments to finish, this work has been delayed. But I am certain to complete editing both the volumes in 1995 so that they can come out in quick succession. It would be possible, if we find an interested publisher, to start a series of interreligious studies with these two volumes.

Before bringing out these two volumes, I did not want to organize a third retreat-seminar, but I hope it will be possible after completing this work.

Bettina Bäumer

Diary in English

An English version of Abhishiktananda’s Diary, translated from La montée au fond du coeur, is being prepared for publication. A first draft was completed by Fr. David Fleming early last year and has been in the hands of his colleague James Stuart since then. The latter was able to do some concentrated work on it during the summer, but could not finish it before being involved in another urgent task. Various problems still remain about how some difficult passages are to be understood, but it is hoped that a final text will be ready by the end of the year. It will correspond with Dr. Panikkar’s selection, apart from the inclusion of more details of Swamiji’s first meeting with Sri Ramana in 1949.

Swami Abhishiktananda: His Life Told through his Letters, by James Stuart:

The reprint by I.S.P.C.K. has been held up for months owing to a technical problem, but it is expected to appear in the near future.

Les lettres de l’Abbé Monchanin au père Le Saux, edited by Mme F. Jacquin, will be published by Ed. du Cerf in time for Fr Monchanin’s centenary this year. After that will come her edition of the letters of Abhishiktananda to Canon J. Lemarié, which have been accepted by the same publisher, though they have not so far indicated when this book will appear. Both books will be eagerly awaited.
Writing on Abhishiktananda

Fr Felix Wilfred includes a section on the significance of Abhishiktananda in the chapter of his book *Beyond Settled Foundations: The journey of Indian Theology* called "Widening the Horizons" (see the note by Fr. G. Gisbert-Sauch). This was published by the Dept of Christian Studies, Madras University in 1993.

Fr Jose Kuttianimattathil, S.D.B., has published through the Gregorian University (Rome, 1994), two chapters of his doctoral thesis *Practice and Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: the trajectory undertaken by the Indian Church since Vatican II*, which deal with (a) the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ and (b) the Christian understanding of other religions. He provides a useful discussion especially of Swamiji’s insights on Christology in the context of dialogue (p. 31–38, 56 and 99).

James Stuart

Donations received since January 1994

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We apologize if we have forgotten any generous donor! Donations towards the cost of printing and postage of SETU are always welcome.

Abhishiktananda Society, Registered Office: 7 Court Lane, Delhi - 110034. Address of the President: Dr. Bettina Bäumer, B 1/139 Assi Ghat, Varanasi 221005.