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Editorial

“Interreligious dialogue” is a big word, but in India it is so much part of daily life that it would be more appropriate to call it “interreligious living”. Hundreds of episodes and experiences could be told about the natural way of an interface between religions. Tension and conflict arise only when there is a conscious refusal to live together and to share our common destiny. SETU wants to contribute in a humble, but spiritual way, to a deeper understanding of the processes that unite us. For this we need models and Gurus – and Abhishiktananda had laid the trail for us to follow. So have his close friends and disciples, and others who follow a similar path.

Among the close friends of Abhishiktananda we dedicate this issue to C. Murray Rogers who has left us to the “further shore” in October 2006. He has been a witness to the inner development of Abhishiktananda, also in the field of ecumenism, and there was a rich spiritual sharing between the two. His wife Mary was equally close to Swamiji, and she left a few months later, in January 2007. Mary contributed immensely to the literary formulation of the texts from the Indian tradition which were and are a great inspiration. We are therefore reproducing her poetic versions of some verses from the Isā Upaniṣad, and of the mystical Hymn Bhairavastava by Abhinavagupta, in gratitude for her self-effacing work.

The other model is Swamiji’s closest disciple Marc/Ajatananda, in whose memory another Association has been formed to support the editing and publication of his unpublished spiritual writings.

Fr Bede Griffiths who was Swamiji’s successor in Shantivanam would have attained his hundredth birth anniversary in December 2006, which was celebrated on a grand scale in Shantivanam. It reminds us that Abhishiktananda will also attain hundred in 2010, an occasion to bring together those who are interested and inspired by his life and spirit.

Bettina Bäumer

A Message from the New President¹:

The Spiritual Legacy of Swami Abhishiktananda and the Challenging Task of the Abhishiktananda Society

Swami Abhishiktananda (1910-1973) stands today among the foremost Western pioneers of the 20th century such as Thomas Merton, OCSo, H. M. Enomiya-Lassalle, SJ, and Bede Griffiths, OSB, in the dialogue between monastics of different religions on the level of spiritual experience. The various stages of his spiritual journey are well-attested in his own diary² and have also been well-researched in three extraordinary biographies³.

Immersed, during the twenty-five years he spent in India, in a genuine endeavour to understand advaita⁴ as expressed in the Vedantic tradition (and more fundamentally in the Upanishads), Swami Abhishiktananda underwent a deep theological and spiritual transformation. As a matter of fact, he first articulated a theological synthesis in the mid-1960’s which was founded on his contemplative experiences in the caves of Arunachala and the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Gnanananda. His vision was still inclusivist, based on the so-called “fulfilment” theology of religions, which was part of the current climate at that time. However, in the later 60’s and towards the end of his life, he realized more and more that the Truth lies beyond concepts, myths and symbols, and eventually gave up completely his theological and comparative approach to the religions. As he wrote: “We have to descend into the ultimate depths to recognize that there is no common denominator at the level of nāmarūpa⁵. So we should accept nāmarūpa of the most varied kinds (…) No comparisons, but we should penetrate to the depth of each one’s mystery, and accept the relativity of all formulations. Take off from each of them, as from a springboard, towards the bottomless ocean.” ⁶
The deepening meditation on the Upanishads, and the meeting and association with his disciple Marc (Swami Ajatananda), accelerated dramatically an inner process which culminated in a devastating advaitic experience in Rishikesh, in July 1973. There and then, the deep insight of the early 50’s became evidently true: “One simply is. And this fundamental experience is, at the same time, that of the unique and single existence.” His final spiritual awakening which is itself beyond any discursive description is the essential and primary key to understand his real message and the relevance of his spiritual itinerary.

Interestingly enough, throughout his search, the theological reflection – limited by his own formation but still significant for contemporary theology – always remained incomplete and provisional, without leading on to any synthesis. But a depth was reached which is far beyond any particular theological language and cuts across all religious boundaries. Indeed, the realization of the non-dual Truth to which the Upanishads point transcends the plurality of all particular religions. Said Swami Abhishiktananda: “The Upanishadic experience has nothing to do with any religion whatever, and still less is it a matter of mere logic or epistemology. It is of a different order altogether. It is the ultimate awakening of the human spirit, with which religions are now being confronted, as they were confronted in the past with the categories, first of mythical, and later of logical thought.”

Hence, the spiritual journey of Swami Abhishiktananda becomes a neo-paradigmatic model of interreligious and intra-religious dialogue. Christianity, Hinduism and other traditions, as religions, are the conceptual expressions of the fundamental experience of the Absolute or the one ultimate divine source. From this perspective, the authentic dialogue, based on an existential encounter, consists in diving from the intellectual and theological understanding into the intuitive and mystical awareness in the innermost depths of the heart...

Deeply inspired to follow in Swamiji’s pioneering footsteps and as the Abhishiktananda Society is soon going to celebrate its thirty years of existence, it is relevant to reassess today what the Society stands for and to reflect about its past, its present and its vision for the future. The Society started as an informal association of friends – Hindus and Christians – of Swamiji soon after his mahā-samādhi in 1973. Five years later, the Society was registered in Delhi under the Societies Registration Act, XXI of 1860, and more friends who had come to know Swamiji through his books joined the association. Prof. Raimundo Panikkar was its first President (and founding Member), succeeded in 1988 by Dr Bettina Bäumer. The main objects for which the Abhishiktananda Society was established were to pass on the unique spiritual legacy of Swami Abhishiktananda, to make known his writings and to encourage the dialogue between different religious traditions – Hinduism and Christianity in particular.

To fulfill these objectives, the Society has been essentially promoting the publication of Swamiji’s writings and making available his spiritual diary and the many articles and essays that were left unpublished at the time of his departure. The task was considerable, especially the enormous translation work of the original French books or manuscripts into English, done mainly by the Late Rev. James Stuart, the founder Secretary. Today, the Society is pleased to have contributed directly to many publications in various Western and Indian languages. The interest in Swami Abhishiktananda is still widespread and ever growing, more in the West than in India, and it is amazing to see that Swamiji is regularly and frequently the subject of studies, doctoral theses, and talks in interreligious meetings, more than three decades after his passing to the “Further Shore”.

The Society will definitely carry on with the new re-editions – particularly the original French titles and the English titles published in India – as well as with the translation into new languages like Russian, etc. On the other hand, the main focus in the coming years will be to provide a better distribution of the English titles in the
English-speaking countries through signing agreements with overseas publishing houses.

To carry forward those concerns which were close to Swamiji's heart — the spiritual meeting between Hinduism and Christianity — the Society organized three interreligious Retreat Seminars (conducted and conceived by Dr. Bettina Bäumer) between 1990 and 1999. There are plans now to prepare the Birth Centenary Celebrations of Swami Abhishiktananda (August 2010) which will most likely take place in Rishikesh, Shantivanam and Delhi. As for the interreligious dialogue on the existential level as viewed by Swami Abhishiktananda, a new interreligious ashram has come into being in Rishikesh (in the Himalayan foothills) sponsored by the Society and now fully independent as an intermonastic community.

Furthermore, since the very beginning, the Society has kept up correspondence and contact with a wide network of friends and scholars inspired by Swami Abhishiktananda in India and abroad. To support this network, the annual bulletin "Setu" was founded in 1979 and includes articles on Swamiji and related subjects. Year after year, we try to upgrade the bulletin while keeping it simple, and we endeavour to increase its circulation. Besides, in December 2003, the Society started an online presence with the aim of introducing the life and work of Swami Abhishiktananda to the widest audience possible. The website — very simply and beautifully designed — has been a great success so far. We do hope to make more texts available online and to update the content on a regular basis.

Finally, we wish and pray that the Abhishiktananda Society which, for the last three decades, has been so genuinely dedicated to spread the message of Swamiji and to foster the dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity, will be more and more an interactive forum of members of different religious traditions committed to the underlying unity of Spirituality.

Swami Atmananda

Notes:

1. Swami Atmananda was born in Western Europe. He studied Theology, Indian Philosophy and Comparative Religion in Louvain, Paris and Jerusalem. As a monk, he is rooted in two monastic lineages: the Eastern Christian monastic tradition and the Udāsīna Panth, one of the Indian Orders of renunciates. Initiated into sannyāsa by H.H. Sri Chandra Swami Udasin, a contemporary Indian sage, he has also been deeply inspired by the lives and spiritual journeys of Swami Abhishiktananda and Swami Ajatananda. After four years spent in silence and solitude in the Judean hills near Jerusalem, he came back to India in 1997 and settled down as a hermit in the Himalayan foothills. In 2003, he shifted to a new interreligious and intermonastic ashram, Ajatananda Ashram, at the bank of Ganges, near Rishikesh. He is presently the Head Monk of the ashram. An Associate Member of the Abhishiktananda Society since 1983, he was appointed as Secretary in 2002, Vice-President in 2005 and President in 2007.


4. Non-duality (lit. "not-two").

5. Lit. "name and form", the external manifestation of reality.


ARTICLES

A Mystical Hymn from Kashmir:
Abhinavagupta’s Bhairavastava – Overcoming Death

Translation and Commentary
by Bettina Bäumer

In continuation from the last two issues of SETU we are bringing a third mystical Hymn of the great Kashmirian Saiva philosopher and mystic, Abhinavagupta (10th-11th cent.). Bhairava is the name of the supreme Divinity in this tradition, and does not refer to any mythological form of Shiva as found in other parts of India. This Hymn is especially related to the theme of overcoming death.

With my mind merged in You, Lord Bhairava, in my heart
I worship You, who pervade all beings, whether mobile
or immobile, pure Consciousness, the One, without beginning
or end, the refuge of the lonely and lost. 1

By the power of your grace, O great Lord, this whole universe
appears to me now as filled with your presence.
You, O my Lord, are ever my own Self;
wherefore the All is one with my own Self. 2

Since You, Lord, my very own Self, pervade the universe,
where is the need for me to fear the world,
even if innumerable actions afflict me,
causing pain unbearable, deception and anxiety? 3

Avert from me your gaze, O Death, life-terminator,
you who are filled with wrath most dire;
through meditation on Śiva and his worship I am established
being one with the fearsome Bhairava and His Energy. 4

Thus the dense darkness has been dispelled
by the rays of your Spirit as You, Lord, approach.
Nevermore shall I fear the life-terminator, Death,
Yama, with his throng of evil-perpetrators.
Praise be to You, O Lord! 5

In You, who are my Self, being filled with the supreme
nectar of all beings. I attain complete peace;
in You the Reality of all created things
in this whole universe, contemplated as the rays
of your own Consciousness, revealed in truth. 6

O Lord! When defilement invades the field of my mind,
creating great torment, then in that same moment
the nectar of your praise arises in me
like a shower, for I am inseparable from You. 7

O Śiva, if it’s true that vows and almsgiving,
ritual bath and the practice of asceticism
remove the suffering of earthly existence,
meditation on the supreme nectar of your Words
releases in my mind a stream of peace. 8

When my spirit, Lord Bhairava, has found You, the Beloved,
in a vision of oneness, the harmonious celebration
of sacrifice, so difficult to attain by others,
it dances, sings and deeply rejoices. 9

Abhinavagupta composed this Hymn
in the dark half of Pausa, year sixty-eight
through which at once the all-pervading Lord
relieves people’s suffering in the desert of existence.

Commentary

This extraordinary hymn touches almost all the chords of human experience and of the experience of a devotee: life and death, unity and separation, joy and suffering, and that in the powerful language

1 Edited and put in poetic form by Mary Rogers.
of which Abhinavagupta is a master. Every verse would deserve a commentary of its own, as well as in relation to the entire hymn.

A basic creative tension is that between bhakti and advaita, between the already existing oneness of the author, and hence the devotee, with Bhairava, and his need to adore the Lord, to take refuge in Him. He knows that he can worship the Lord only being one with Him, because who else would be worthy? This worship takes place in the depth of the heart (v. 1) The already existing oneness is entirely due to the power of grace of the Lord (anugraha-sakti), and it consists in the realisation of the all-pervading nature of the Lord which embraces the entire universe: the hymn starts significantly with the expression vyāptacarācara... Oneness with the Lord means therefore at the same time oneness with the entire reality (v. 2), and any thought of separation is unfit for the devotee. And it is only due to this state of oneness that the terrors of saṃsāra can be overcome, consisting of so many actions (karma) leading to suffering, deception and fear (v. 3).

One dominant topic of the Stotra is death and its overcoming. Bhairava himself being Mahākāla, it is He who is fearful, who brings death and at the same time delivers from death. Though the devotee is one with His Lord, there is still the realistic feeling of the fear of death, its terrors and darkness (vs. 1-5). How is the devotee able to overcome this fear? It is by meditation on Śiva and by His praise, so that His light may dispel all darkness (v. 5).

It is the revelation of true knowledge illuminating all things which alone can give peace (v. 6). In this light even the things are like rays of the Divine, they become ‘nectar’ (āmṛta), medium of the experience of oneness. The greatness of this spiritual tradition becomes more evident in the statement that even impurity or mental defilement cannot separate the devotee from his Lord, as Somānanda had already expressed in his Śivādṛṣṭi (7.105, sukhe duhkhe vimohēpi...). Even a state of depression or affliction can become a moment of grace and an occasion to praise the Lord (v. 7). The element of grace is also clear from the image of rain or shower, which occurs again in verse 8.

Of all the religious practices which help the devotee to overcome the sufferings of this world, Abhinavagupta stresses meditation on the sacred scriptures which releases a stream of peace in the heart (v. 8). It is this peace which leads to union with the Beloved and to the ecstatic joy of His vision (sudarśana). It is very rare – if not unique – to find such an expression of bhakti in Abhinavagupta’s writings, when he calls the Lord priya. There is a strong impression of his personal feelings in this Stotra which we find otherwise in Utpaladeva’s Śivastotra-vali.

The hymn ends with a rare expression which is very significant: samayajña, the sacrifice of oneness or equality (v. 8). The realisation of union with the Lord, who is the very Self of the devotee, has to lead to a state of equality or harmony (samata), which extends also in the social sphere. But it is a sacrifice, the spiritual culmination of all religious acts, which is not accessible to all (durlabhāham). This state of harmony overflows in the consciousness of the devotee who dances and sings in ecstasy.

In his colophon Abhinavagupta makes it clear that this Stotra is an expression of the grace and compassion of Lord Bhairava. Its recitation and meditation can help the devotee to find peace in this troubled world, to overcome suffering and the fear of death.

* * *

Marc, the Unborn (3)

Following the excerpts that have been already published in the previous issues of Setu (No 25 and 26), we now bring out in this issue three more passages selected from Années de Grâces (“Years of Grace”), the spiritual diary of Marc Chaduc/Swami Ajatananda.
The first passage refers to the initial meeting in India with H.H. Swami Chidananda Sarasvati, the President of the Divine Life Society. Marc shared with him his call for silence and seclusion. Later, in June 1973, the Swami would become his dikṣā guru, by initiating him into sannyāsa, along with Swami Abhishiktananda. Their spiritual association and friendship would deepen over the years. Sri Swami Chidananda would also help him, in January 1975, to settle in a hermitage located on the bank of Ganga, some 25 miles upstream from Rishikesh, at Kaudiyalal. Marc/Swami Ajatananda remained there immersed in meditation until he disappeared mysteriously between February and April 1977.

The two other passages were written just before and after Marc/Swami Ajatananda had settled in his kutiya at Kaudiyalal. It is in that quiet and isolated place that he grew to be entirely absorbed in the all-pervading divine Presence.

Sri Swami Chidananda who was the last one to have met Swami Ajatananda in his Himalayan solitude, always spoke of him in very high terms. In his beautiful Preface to Swami Ajatananda’s diary, which is now under preparation, he has written that Swami Ajatananda was “a mystic and a God-experienced person whose experiences about himself reflect the Truth of the highest Upanishadic experience of the sages of the bygone times (…). His experiences themselves show his illuminated being (…). I pray to the Almighty Lord to shower His choicest Divine Blessings upon this publication (…). It will become a treasure to the world’s spiritual literature.”

We wish here to make grateful acknowledgment to Omar Djézénni for the superb English translation from the French original.

Swami Atmananda

Rishikesh, November 2, 1971

Encounter with Swami Chidananda, whom I had met for the first time in France, in 1969, and whom the father regards as one of the great saints of India. Every time I sit at His feet, I am invaded by a peace that surpasses understanding. Light and peace divine emanate from His sole presence. His tall and slender body is all but austerity and beauty – the incomparable beauty of the saints whose bodies, full of poise, are permanently reflecting on the mystery of the Transfiguration.

His is a discriminating and a knowledgeable mind, capable of transcending all barriers. His soul is none other than absolute love, love, love infinite! At one and the same time a fervent bhakti and an imperturbable advaitin, much beyond the dichotomies of thought, Swami Chidananda is the embodiment of pure simplicity. In his proximity, the Christian seeker is wholly touched by a lofty emotion – that of feeling vibrate so profoundly in him the “Christian feeling of the Supreme Being”, which he fully succeeded in making his own. Besides, I have never seen any Guru as humble as him, nor have I ever seen anyone who would serve all with the same degree of selflessness. If at all he speaks about himself, it is always in his capacity as a humble disciple of his Master, Swami Sivananda. Moreover, as far as he is concerned, all beings are his friends, his “brothers”: all beings are mūrtis of the very same and unique Ātman that he perceives in all.

The exchange with Swami Chidananda unfolded with the usual warmth and profoundness. I briefed him on all the details concerning my plans to go on a pilgrimage all over India in order to receive the holy darśana of its saints. Without relating to him what had happened in the woods in the previous night, I told him all the same how disappointed I was with the bhajan. “This is not real worship!” He smiled. I also told him about the compelling urge that I had been feeling to practice sādhana in total silence for an entire month in the heart of the forest. He consented, “Indeed, God cannot
but be found in silence and in a state of non-doing,” however, that silence is possible only for those who have already experienced at least a minimum degree of inner life.

Swami Chidananda Ji, accordingly, will help me find a suitable cave, as well as secure all necessary papers for the police, since I am a foreigner.

When I confided to him my intention – that of plunging into total silence once my pilgrimage was over, the Holy Man promptly replied, “Why not doing it now?! Now is the right time to do it!”

His affirmative tone transpierced all my being with the same intensity as the fire that struck me last night.

“But Swamiji, that will disrupt all my pilgrimage plans!”

“That your pilgrimage plans could be upset is one thing, but the most essential thing to consider here is that your mind should not be agitated.”

A human mouth has just repeated the call I heard yesterday that came from the bosom of Darkness: perhaps a confirming sign indicating the direction my life should go? How mysterious it all seems to me! Is it really a life of total silence what the Lord has in store for me? I have come to see India and meet with Hindus, but – lo and behold! – it’s becoming increasingly obvious to me that it is the Lord’s will that, from now on, I should lead a life of seclusion and in total silence…Nevertheless, I still hesitate to accept it: a mixed feeling of both attraction and repulsion plays tug-of-war in my heart (a fear of so many things still has a grip on me…). I’ll bring it up with Father Le Saux, and I should meet with Swami Chidananda again before the 12th. And then again, he’ll help me get an extension to my visa, which is valid only for three months.

Rishikesh, January 1975

(...) January 27, it’s Pārṇimā13, symbol of the Pūrṇānanda14 of the blessed solitude of the Adorable One. Within two days, on the 29th, I should reach Kaudiyala. I left Swami Chidananda, love

infinite. Six months later, I recalled some of his words he had told me, which at first I misunderstood to be unimportant, – with his usual saintly smile – urging me to organize the notes taken during these Years of Grace: “And then, write your experiences.”

Kaudiyala (as of January 29, 1975...)

(...) The roaring of the Ganga reflects the unfathomable depths of silence, more so thrilling at night. Nothing more to see, comprehend, or reflect upon. That is Fullness, the Bhūman15, the true Joy.

Shiva’s Presence can be felt everywhere. But a Shiva who destroys and removes all veils, including those created by Shiva Himself. At that moment the Śīvaḥām (“I Am Shiva!”) bursts out – the perfect mantra that was discovered, revealed and transmitted in Ranagal16 with unimaginable strength. There’s no one but Shiva: the only One in the infinite solitude of the infinitely One. Nothing, other than He, all is He! Who is left then to shout: “Shiva!” “You are Shiva!” so did Henri revealed it to me in Ranagal. However, as long as it is the mind that, through effort, is trying to grasp the meaning of that – such as Tat Tvam As17 – the truth profound shall continue to be elusive.

The night was extraordinarily numinous. Surrounding the place there were mountains everywhere forming a circle much similar to that of Ranagal. Right in front of the hermitage: the mountain’s perfect cone, the vertiginous stone līgam18, motionless, bathed at the base by the Ganges water that passed around it like the yoni19 (matrix) that girdled the maṇḍira’s20 Shiva līgam. Moving and changing matrix – the symbol of the Śakti21, which bathes the motionless, silent līgam. And these two aren’t but one and the same, miscellaneous manifestations of the sole and unique unmanifested Mystery.

There I sought the sanctuary in the depths of the Mystery, totally turned towards the one inner vision. ...To penetrate and to
disappear in the Depth of my own being where the Spirit awaits me. And to be established in the Light forever – absolutely oblivious of the world and of myself. Should a come back be necessary, it would be so only through the works of the Spirit, within its own light, emanating from beyond all worlds – the light that transfigures the world. ...So that the inner Mystery that was present in Jesus is now present in Henri, in every man, as well as in and beyond my own self, explodes inside everyone’s eyes.

Jesus’ Presence, infinitely concealed to everything that lies within the limited range of the senses... Not just a “face,” but rather an almost dormant Inner Presence, and yet one that rises again, entirely unforeseen, and illumines everything with its peace and radiance.

To fathom until the glorious mystery is reached, in the total silence of the senses and the mind, and simply to remain there. Such is my sole vocation.

The Truth, to which I alone can witness, doesn’t have any face, neither Henri’s, nor Jesus’. The glory is of such an intensity that it strips everything of its duality. So’nam: there’s nothing beyond. To seek sanctuary there, and there alone.

The ever charming Presence of Shiva in Kaudyala... Shiva within me, Shiva in all!

(...) A Presence intensely stripping that cannot be probed, nor touched, by anything in me, so all embracing, Omnipresent.

Notes:

1. The spiritual master who has initiated the disciple.
2. Lit. “renunciation.” The monastic life is one of giving up worldly ties, devoting oneself to contemplation, and dedicating oneself solely to the goal of Liberation or spiritual Realisation.
3. Hermitage
4. The meeting took place in Lyon (France), in January 1969. Marc wrote in his journal that the darśana [sight of a sage] of Swamiji was his first living spiritual encounter with India.
5. Swami Abhishiktananda.
6. A devotee or worshipper of God.
7. A believer in non-duality or absolute oneness; a follower of the School of Advaita Vedanta.
9. The real Self; one’s innermost divine Reality, identical with Brahman.
10. Marc went at night in the nearby forest where he had a devastating experience of the Absolute.
11. Marc refers here to the satsang and chanting in which he took part the evening before, at Shivananda Ashram, Rishikesh.
12. A general term for spiritual effort.
13. Full moon.
14. Lit. “the full bliss.”
15. Immensity or infinitude (i.e. Brahman, or the Absolute).
16. A place in the forest, south of Kaudiyala, with a small Shiva temple overlooking Ganges, where the Swamis Abhishiktananda and Ajatananda had spent a few days in July 1973. This time was referred to as “the great week” as guru and disciple underwent then mystical experiences of incredible density.
17. “That thou art” (Chandogya Up. 6.8.7)
18. Lit. a “sign,” “symbol;” the aniconic symbol under which Shiva is most often worshipped.
19. Lit. “womb;” when associated with the lingam, it is a typical symbol of the divine procreative energy.
20. Temple.
21. Divine force or power, personified in the Goddess.
22. Lit. “I am He” or “I am That;” one of the sacred formulas of non-dual Vedanta, expressing the identity of Aham and Brahman.

[The text has been annotated and edited by Swami Atmananda]
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* * *
Patriot, Theologian, Dialogist: Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1867-1907)

by G. Gispert-Sauch, S.J.

The 27th of October 2007 will mark the hundredth year of the martyrdom of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, born in 1867 as Bhavanicaran Bandopadhyay (anglicized as Banerji), a significant figure in the struggle against colonialism that took shape in Bengal in the first decade of the twentieth century. He deserves the title of ‘martyr’ as he died as a prisoner of the British power, his death being the result of a tetanus infection subsequent to a hernia operation made necessary by his court trial. At this trial, after owning “the entire responsibility” for the publication of the incriminated articles, he declared:

“I do not want to take part in this trial because I do not believe that in carrying out my humble share of the God-appointed mission of Swaraj, I am in any way accountable to the alien people who happen to rule over us and whose interest is and must necessarily be in the way of our national development.”

Upadhyay had been a friend and admirer of Narendra Dutt (better known to history as Swami Vivekananda), a colleague of Rabindranath Tagore at the beginnings of his educational experiment of Shanti Niketan, and an admirer of the Brahmo Samaj leader Keshab Candra Sen. Partly due to the latter’s influence he was attracted to the personality of Jesus Christ and became his explicit disciple by the baptism he requested and received in 1891. After his baptism he remained what he had been from his youth, an ardent patriot in love with his spiritual tradition and longing to contribute to the spiritual health and welfare of India. As a young boy he thought of joining an army of an Indian state to fight the British colonialists out of the country. Soon he learned that his fight would be not with the sword but with the pen, and devoted most of his time to teaching and nationalist concerns. By his life and by his numerous writings he made a very important contribution to the emerging Indian Christian theology, for at all times he declared himself as a Hindu Christian.

Both as a patriot and a theologian he spread his ideas mostly through journalism. He started no less than seven different journals and the last three years of his life he edited a daily evening paper in Bengali called Sandhya, through which he arose the patriotism of the people by denouncing the evils of the colonial economic and cultural exploitation and asking for full independence. At a time when ‘home rule’ was still the goal of most freedom fighters, he dared to demand a more radical full independence. On the basis of his articles in Sandhya, he was imprisoned with charges of sedition.

In an effort to reclaim this figure for our history of the freedom struggle and of interreligious thought, the Vidyajyoti College of Theology, 4/A Raj Niwas Marg, Delhi 110054, held a Seminar on January 22, 2007. The theme of the Seminar was “The Contribution of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay to the Freedom Movement and to Indian Theology.” The inaugural Lecture by Professor Julius Lipner, of the Cambridge University, U.K., a biographer of Upadhyay (OUP, 2004), has been printed in the April issue of the Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection and it is hoped that will be published with the other papers in a book form in the near future. The Indian Theological Association has taken the contribution of Upadhyay as the main topic of reflection in its annual meeting in April 21-25 in Bangalore. On October 7th a public programme is being prepared by the Goethals Library management, St Xavier’s College, Kolkata, where most of the extant writings of Upadhyay are preserved.

The following basic bibliography could help people desirous to discover Brahmabandhab Upadhyay:


Readers of Setu will be interested in knowing that as early as 1965, in an Appendix of his book Sagesse hindoue, mystique chrétienne, Swami Abhishiktananda devoted sixteen pages to offer to his French readers the text and a translation of, and a commentary on, Upadhyay’s ode to Saccidānanda, Vande Saccidānanda. When the first edition of the English translation of the book appeared in 1974, under the title Saccidānanda. A Christian Approach to the Advaitic Experience, the Appendix was not included. But it was included in the second edition of 1974 and 1990 (pp. 203-214). Swamiji's commentary ends with these words:

"We can thus take account, at least in a preliminary fashion, of the theological and spiritual riches which can emerge from a Christian meditation on the great themes of Hindu contemplation. In fact, only a few of these themes have been made use of here. There are plenty of others which await their rethinking by the Christian heirs of the Vedic seers. That will not however be a matter of dictionaries and concordances. It will be necessary first of all that these themes should be slowly and deeply assimilated by Christian thinkers, and not simply by speculative, or even devotional, meditation but rather by entering into the ‘depth’ at that very point from where they first arose from the silent contemplation of the ancient sages. In this ‘place of the heart’ — the ‘place’ (pada) that is hidden (guhā) and ultimate (caruṇa) — they will meet with the Christian themes already laid up there by grace and

by their constant use of the Christian scriptures. Christian and Vedic themes will mutually interpenetrate, not in a synthesis or harmony constructed by human reasoning, but under the guidance of the exalted wisdom of the Spirit, the Master of these depths and the Revealer of the transcendent Word which arises from them. The intuitions of the Upanishads will stand out, shining with a new brightness, but the light which will illuminate them will shine out of their own depths; for, as happened with the intuitions of the Old Testament prophets, their own truth and their own most spiritual and inward meaning will be opened up by the word of Faith. And on the other hand, the truths of the Faith will henceforth be charged with the deeper harmonies that will have been released in them by the Upanishadic “descents” into the most hidden abysses of the guhā of Being and of the Self — “that which the Lord will deign to manifest by the Holy Spirit in his servants, now cleansed from their vices and sins” (Rule of St Benedict, 7, end).” [loc. cit., pp. 213-214].

**OBITUARIES**

C. Murray Rogers (May 16\(^{th}\), 1917 – October 17\(^{th}\), 2006)
Mary Rogers (April 6\(^{th}\), 1916 – January 6\(^{th}\), 2007)

**Message from Raimon Panikkar**

Mary and Murray were two saintly persons. They were ordinary people with an extraordinary depth and intensity. They were really authentic, nothing more, but nothing less. They are among the saintly people who maintain the existence of the universe: loksāṅgraha. I was also blessed by their friendship and confidence. Amen, Alleluia! Aum!
Remembering Charles Murray Rogers

by Monodeep Daniel

Murray as I remember him as a child in Jyotiniketan Ashram in Bareilly was a delightful person. His coming to our home on bicycle along with Mary his wife and Heather a member of the Ashram from Kireli village just outside the town brought great joy to us as a family. Besides their long standing friendship with my grandmother he also was a pastor like figure to our small community of Anglican families. He would also be called upon to take Services at St Stephen’s Church and St Michael’s and All Angel’s Church in the absence of diocesan priests.

Murray was born in Croydon in the UK in 1917 and was educated in Cambridge. He did his theological studies and training in Westcott House Cambridge where he met Fr C.F. Andrews who would come to be known as Deenabandhu in India. Deenabandhuji was a close friend of Mahatma Gandhi, and a member of the Cambridge Brotherhood in Delhi. Such associations attracted Murray to India. In 1945 along with Mary he arrived in India as a CMS Missionary. He began as minister as Chaplain at the Allahabad Agriculture College, but soon his reflection on the context began to raise questions in his heart. He increasingly found it difficult to reconcile his standard of life with the poverty of the people in India.

His fascination with Mahatma Gandhi brought him to Wardha. Spending ten years at Gandhiji’s Ashram changed his whole outlook and lifestyle.

The answer came with his meeting with Brother Roger of Taize. He realized the possibility of living a Christian community life based on simplicity along with the poor. In this way he could share and live the gospel among the people. He began to share his ideas with others. A French friend offered him land to establish an Ashram which he owned in Kireli, and in 1953 Murray started Jyotiniketan (“Abode of Light”). The life involved a common fellowship of prayer, of hospitality and work. They constructed a chapel in the middle of the garden with large windows for the morning sun that brightened up the altar. Each fresh morning would also bring along with it fresh songs of birds, peacocks, sparrows, doves, magpies, and many more Indian birds. They cultivated the fields, grew fruits, planted groves of mangoes bananas and guavas, and had goats for milk and two oxen to plough. For this they found Fida Hussain, a sturdy farmer to help them. He soon became part of their extended Ashram family and continued to cultivate the ashram fields, take care of the animals, and groves of fruit trees long after the Rogers left India till he died.

Murray’s life was to give much more to India and the world Church. It was his inter-religious dialogue that impacted every one. The Ashram Community of the three decisively wore Indian clothes, learnt Hindustani for communication and made friends with people of all faith communities. In this endeavour the entry of Swami Abhishiktananda was a landmark.

The night when Swamiji arrived at Jyotiniketan he was welcomed by Murray, Mary and Heather. The three stepped out of the Ashram Chapel holding hurricane lanterns in their hands. The mutual attraction between the Ashramites and Swamiji was spontaneous. Murray at once sensed that the man who stood before them had deeply meditated. For Swamiji this was the first contact with those who were outside the Church of the Roman obedience. Their first visit from Kireli Village to my home in Bareilly brought a great joy to us. After the evening meal we organized them to see an Indian wedding of our friends nearby. The party, Swamiji, Murray and the family folks went off happily. On the road there was another wedding procession of the neighbours. What else could be expected but confusion! Murray and Swamiji went in to join the wedding procession. Our family

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1 The architect who designed their ashram and the chapel was Laurie Baker, who became a life-long friend of the Rogers. He was a pioneer in low-cost housing for the poor.
lost track of the two in the crowd of people. Murray and Swamiji watched all the details of the Hindu wedding ceremony, of course in the wrong one. Nonetheless they were both welcomed. Over the years Murray, Mary and Heather were to accompany Swamiji in the pilgrimages to the source of life, which was to include both journeying externally to the further most sources of holy rivers in the Himalayas and also interiorly into the cave of the heart.

Swamiji to whom silence was so dear and so vital for spiritual voyage said a lot. What he had to say he meticulously wrote down. Every exploratory experience of the voyage had to be written down. He wrote in French, which included his letters, his diary, his books, especially Prayer, a beautiful little book. Many of the early writings Heather and Mary translated into English. The Eyes of Light stood as a good example of this. Friendship with Swamiji had a lasting impact on the Ashramites. They always felt his presence with them especially in times of prayer and meditation. Murray later wrote a lovely piece on this friendship called Swamiji the Friend.

In 1971 Murray, Mary and Heather left India. It brought great sadness to the little community of the Anglican Christians in Bareilly. Some went in turn to live with them in the Jyotiniketan Ashram including my grandmother. That evening when they boarded the train to New Delhi a small band of people had gathered to say good bye to them. They loaded them with garlands of flowers. There were tears in many eyes as the train pulled out of the little railway station. The Jyotiniketan Ashram was given to Swami Deenanbandhuji [Fr Augustine] a Capuchin and a Catholic priest. He was to carry on the good work of that little band which had now left for good to Jerusalem.

Murray was invited to Jerusalem due to his experience of ministering in the religiously and culturally pluralistic Indian context. Mary and Heather constantly wore their simple cotton saris and came to be called as Indians. The city being a multi cultural centre of the three great religions of the world needed someone like Murray and his group to make people sit together and talk. He was able to create a dialogue group of leaders of the three world faiths. Murray soon understood that many injustices the Palestinians had been undergoing had to be shared with the rest of the world. This he did bravely.

In 1980 he had to leave Jerusalem for good. He agreed to go to Hong Kong. Here he made his Jyotiniketan Ashram of bamboo. The little Community of the Ashramites became four with Rosemary joining them. She played lovely pieces on her flute for uplifting the spirits. Each morning they would go for a walk through the woods in silent contemplation, an exercise that their neighbour, a merchant of antique-items, thought for some reason to be bizarre. Their low and small round table had unending capacity of providing space for any number of people to sit around it in circle. They decorated their new Ashram with little objects from India and Jerusalem. His dialogue with Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism further deepened his faith.

From 1989 to 1998, Murray and the three Ashramites shifted to Deseronto in Canada. Their life-style of Indian simplicity, prayer and hospitality was of great appeal to the people. In 1998 he finally along with the rest of the group settled in All Saints [Anglican] Convent, in Oxford UK. Rosemary had died and the group of original three survived. Mary and Heather always did the evening prayer that included rich spiritual insights from various faith traditions of the East. Murray cherished celebrating the Indian Mass he had received from Swamiji till the end of his life.

The World is Poorer Without Him:
Remembering Murray Rogers

by Shirley du Boulay

I came to know Murray largely through spending many long happy hours talking about his great friend Abhishiktananda. What Murray loved about his friend tells you much about him; the points he
constantly stressed and repeated with most enthusiasm were those that reflected something of his own life, his own ideals.

To each other they were not Abhishiktananda and Murray, but Swamiji and Moorayi – the nearest the Frenchman could get to this Scottish name. Perhaps the remark that is to me the most indelible was to hear Murray repeating the way Abhishiktananda once whispered, in awe-struck tones, ‘Moorayi, is there anything but God?’ Both loved humanity, both loved life, but God was their all-in-all, the constant pulse at the heart of their universe.

Both loved India, both valued experience over theology – and sometimes the two came together. Swamiji would talk of the way the West tended to judge people by their intellects, their manner of speaking; but how in the East what matters is the look in the eye, the respect you show for another person’s culture. One of Murray’s most loveable characteristics was his total acceptance of the culture of people he met. On one of the rare occasions when he took a taxi, the driver was a Sikh and immediately Murray asked him how he was celebrating the birthday of Guru Gobind Singh which, unlike most of us, he remembered took place the next day. So with theology – he had the basic training of his calling, but it was not theology that was important to him, it was living, loving and sharing the joys of the earth.

So with poverty. Murray loved to remind me that however little money Swamiji had, he always tried to send something to a family he had supported for years. There was a time when, though he was not in good health and needed to drink milk, he refused to do so, as it would have meant he could not send money to this family. For Murray poverty was central. For all the years the Jyotiniketan Community lived together they never had anything but rice, dahl and vegetables for lunch; if there was cheese it was a square inch; on the rare occasions there were sweets, then each person was handed one chocolate. It was enough – and so much better than the indulgence with which most of us feast.

So with clothes. I was always conscious of what I was wearing when I was going to see him – I did not feel I could wear a new jersey when I knew he might show me the patches in his trousers, proudly saying he had worn them for eleven years. Or apologise that they only made a tea bag last for six cups of tea – they had some friends who squeezed eleven cups out of one tea bag. His lived ideals about poverty, learned first from Gandhi, were not a competition, nor was it just charity. He shared Swamiji’s thinking – that only the person who has renounced everything is truly free.

Then there was the question of silence. Murray’s life did not allow for the long stretches of solitude spent by Abhishiktananda, but he loved to talk of Swamiji’s attitude to silence, for instance when he came to stay with them at Bareilly and Murray solicitously asked him whether he would like to be left alone. ‘Good heavens no,’ says Swamiji, ‘I have come to talk! So Murray loved both, the talkative Swamiji and his need for silence, especially the way he used it. He once saw his friend meeting another on the banks of the Ganga when both were keeping silence. They gestured expansively to each other, a sweep towards the river, a look up to eternal snows, in silence, and Murray knew they were saying ‘Isn’t God wonderful?’

Last Christmas Murray gave me a notebook in which to record my ‘treasures.’ His inscription was from Swamiji’s writings and is surely a summary of his own beliefs:

“There is but one Reality and one alone, the community of life which exists at the heart of Being between the Father, and the Son, in the unity of the Spirit. That alone is: and it is within this community of life that the man who is has his existence.”

They were both holy men and the world is a poorer place without them. Murray, in saying these words about his friend, could have been talking about himself.
“He was a very holy man, I think. It doesn’t mean he was perfect. Oh he had his weaknesses. I was always thankful for them, you know. Because people who are too good for words, they’re no good to me, that is all I can say! I just need somebody who is an old sinner like me, and in a way Swamiji was, but he had transformed it all in an extraordinary way.”

Dear Murray, you too have transformed yourself and perhaps you have had a share in effecting some transformation in those who were lucky enough to know you.

Murray and Mary Rogers: A Unique Life

by Bettina Bäumer

Words fail as I try to express what the two great souls who left us at a short interval mean to me (I do not want to use the past tense). Many things connected us deeply – they were like parents in one way (also age-wise), but without ever asserting their authority. Ever since my first visit to Jyotiniketan in Kareli near Bareilly in 1968, and the most memorable meeting at Easter 1969, the inner – and even outer – link has continued unbroken, in a spiritual friendship of give-and-take. No doubt, Swami Abhishiktananda was an important link between us, as also Panikkar. The Easter celebrated together in their ashram was a landmark for all who participated. But I cannot write a history of this great friendship which bound me, the Jyotiniketan community, Swamiji and Panikkar together, in search of an authentic Indian Christian spirituality. What I loved was their Gandhian ashram life style, their option for simplicity, their solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, the underprivileged – be it the Harijan villagers in North India, the Palestinians in Israel, the Canadian native Indians, the refugees and migrants.¹

The friendship with Mary was deepened when she joined Panikkar and our group in the preparation of The Vedic Experience² in Varanasi. It meant a coming and going between Bareilly and Varanasi, and a wonderful collaboration on the Vedic texts for a number of years (in the early seventies). Mary was a poet, who celebrated the rhythm and metre, but it was also a discovery for her of the treasures of the Vedas and Upanishads. She became my regular English editor, ever respectful of the intended meaning, but transforming every text into her beautiful poetry. In our team she was essential, not only because she gave the final shape to the language, but she did it with such humility and adaptability which I have never found again in an editor.

Even after the whole community left India – to the great disappointment of Abhishiktananda and of us all – I visited them on every station of their pilgrimage: Jerusalem, Hong Kong, Canada, and finally Oxford. I admired their adaptability even at an advanced age – though ever remaining faithful to their way of worship which they had developed together with Swamiji. It was not a matter of agreeing on all aspects of religious life, but of feeling their total commitment and sincerity to their own life-style, combining the Gandhian and the Abhishiktananda elements, it may simplify. They were truly alternative: no wastage, an awareness of the ecological balance, a critical attitude towards all kinds of cultural (and religious) imperialism, an opposition to injustice and oppression of any kind. Although they had certain rules and set ways, they were open to new ideas from other cultures and religions. I learnt my first lessons in Chi-Gong from them in Hong Kong, which they faithfully continued to practice!

I only recount one moving incident with Murray. When he got to know that I have a great Master in Kashmir (belonging to the Kashmir Shaiva tradition), he expressed his interest to meet him. On a visit to India he could arrange a trip to Srinagar while I was there, and one Sunday afternoon I took him to Ishvar Ashram in Nishat, to the presence of Swami Lakshman Joo (he was above 80 at that time). No words were exchanged between the Anglican priest and the Shaivite Guru. Murray observed the spontaneous ways of Swamiji in dealing with and teaching his disciples. His comment
when we met again was simply: “Now I can imagine how Jesus was dealing with his disciples!”

What Murray experienced was explicitly stated by his great friend Abhishiktananda in his Diary when he wrote: “Jesus is every human being on whom the Spirit has rested, Jesus manifests himself in any actual Guru (lit. “heavy” with the Spirit).” (Entry: July 1969, p. 300).

At my last telephonic conversation with Murray, about a month before his death, he spoke nostalgically about India (I was calling from Shimla), how he “envies” me to be here, in his beloved country. Then he suddenly asked: “What about your Man in Kashmir?” meaning my Guru, who left his body in 1991. It was another kind of nostalgia for a Hindu saint whose perfection he admired after a single meeting. When asked about their health he replied with his usual sense of humour: “Well, we are too ancient…”

To show his spirit I want to quote a passage from an interview which Murray gave to a German film team about Abhishiktananda in July 2006, exactly three months before he passed away. On several occasions, when speaking about his great friend Abhishiktananda, he broke into tears.

Replying to the question what he would ask Abhishiktananda if he were to meet him, his answer was: “I’d ask him if he could share with me what he had learnt after he went and died. After this world. (Silence) I have the feeling that we are just beginners… There is a world of wonder, a mystery beyond all our poor theology. There is completeness. Pūrnam adāh… it is really Swamiji’s favourite mantra. Fullness. Fullness here, fullness there. When fullness is taken from fullness, fullness remains. There is a fullness about this world. We come back to Swamiji’s saying: ‘Moorray, is there anything else but God?’ And in that distant way that we are hardly capable of approaching it, there is a fullness beyond anything we’ve reached yet. Beyond, beyond…that thought came again and again. Never settle down, never think you got it. There is always a beyond. The mystery of our wholeness which we can hardly conceive of.”

Has he not reached now this wholeness?

Notes:
1 A collection of Murray Rogers’ sermons and talks is under preparation for publication: ‘No More Humbug!’ Says the Fool. Some Sermons, Talks and Articles by Charles Murray Rogers (1917-2006), edited by Michael Perrott.
2 R. Panikkar, Mantramanjari, The Vedic Experience, 1st ed. 1977, republished in India a number of times, Delhi (Motilal Banarsidas).
3 Reproduced with kind permission of Gunther Franke and Christian Hackethal.

REPORTS

Foundation of the “Association Internationale Ajatananda”

When Swami Ajatananda (Marc Chaduc), the foremost disciple of Swami Abhishiktananda, disappeared mysteriously from his hermitage in Kaudiyala in 1977, he left behind him a collection of lofty, mystical writings. In several notebooks he bequeathed to posterity a rich spiritual legacy comprising - among other things - his spiritual diary (covering the years spent with Swami Abhishiktananda) and the story of his pilgrimage on foot in the Himalayas (1976). These writings, which had been carefully prepared from his own personal notes following the wise advice of both the Swamis Abhishiktananda and Chidananda, were kept safely for about three decades by the late Mrs Odette Baumer-Despeigne who had received them, but who chose to not circulate them. Feeling that the right time had now come to make known the extraordinary spiritual journey of Swami Ajatananda, Prof. Raimon Panikkar convened a meeting in Calitjas (Rosas), Spain,
On that day, 4th November, the Sacred Havan ceremony was performed on the upper terrace of “Shanti Sadan” and was attended by a group of monks and nuns of different religious traditions who had come from all over India. Already a deep feeling of unity beyond religious barriers pervaded the whole ceremony, as if heralding the extraordinary celebration of the 5th November. Other intense moments of the first day’s programme included the Ganga Arati on the upper terrace of the Ashram and the silent meditation sessions in the “guhā.” It is an underground room where the ashramites sit quietly daily and regularly and whose peaceful atmosphere is very much conducive for meditation.

The following day, Sunday 5th November, was particularly auspicious, being pūrṇimā (full moon) and Sri Guru Nanak Dev Sahib Jayanti (Birthday). It was also the Anapanasati Day, the Sutra of Lord Buddha on mindfulness of breathing (especially celebrated in the Theravada Buddhist Tradition) and the Amitabha Buddha Day.

Early morning, H.H. Sri Chandra Swami Udasin presided over the Sacred Havan ceremony for the consecration of the Ajatananda Ashram. It was one of the most wonderful and luminous moments of the Inauguration. The spiritual communion between the sannyasis, monks, nuns and about a hundred participants became especially radiant and tangible when the Buddhist monks started chanting universal prayers in Tibetan and a Christian monk sang a Sanskrit hymn in praise of Saccidānanda. After the final Arati, some beautiful kirtans were intoned and thereafter prasāda was distributed.

The second part of the Inaugural Ceremony took place under a large tent soberly but nicely decorated and included a number of spiritual discourses. The Chief Guest, H.H. Sri Chandra Swami Udasin, assisted by Sri Swami Prem Vivekananda, presided over this interreligious gathering and was seated on the dais among saints of different denominations and traditions. Scott Morrowji, a friend of the Ashram, led the ceremony with the greatest skill. After the
Lighting of the Lamp, Sri Swami Prem Vivekananda read the Message of the Chief Guest, who has been keeping silence for the last twenty-two years: "I extend my hearty good wishes, and pray that Ajatananda Ashram may become a genuine place of sadhana for seekers of Truth from different traditions and that it may foster love, understanding and harmony among individuals and within society (...) There is one supreme Reality/Truth underlying all apparent diversity. In fact, all the diversity belongs to that "One without a second" – ekam eva advitiyam. This endless diversity is not the limitation but the glory of the infinite Lord who is the inmost essence of all beings. The ultimate aim of human life is to realise this timeless immortal Reality which is life absolute, bliss absolute, truth absolute and love absolute. By abiding in this absolute Reality alone, one feels fulfilled in all the ways and for all the times (...) The true saints of different traditions feel a natural spiritual affinity and brotherhood with all, because they have tasted that "One without a second." So, there cannot be disharmony amongst inspired sages (...) The spirit of tolerance and acceptance of diversity needs to be strengthened more and more. The saints and sages of different religious traditions can contribute a lot in this direction and promote interreligious harmony. A true spiritual life is the deepest spiritual meeting point of all humanity, and the ashram life lived purposefully and rightly is a most conducive way for the Realisation of Truth and spiritual oneness of all beings. May the Lord bless the Ajatananda Ashram, its monks and seekers who would live here in future, that they be able to see the Light divine and radiate love and harmony amongst all beings."

Another highlight of the gathering was the Message of H.H. Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj, President of the Divine Life Society, who was the dikṣā guru of Swami Ajatananda — whose name has been given to the Ashram. The Message was read by Sri Swami Padmanabananda, Secretary of the DLS and Professor at the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy of Shivananda Ashram. Sri Swami Chidanandaji spoke of Swami Ajatananda in very high terms: "[He] felt the all-pervasive Presence of God and experienced His omnipresence while he was absorbed in his renunciation, in His Presence, and his meditation...He lived a life where God-Realisation was the centre of his experience...The Sanskrit word "ajāta" means, "that which is not born." It is the human body that takes birth. [Swami Ajatanandaji] did not identify himself with the body. He identified himself with the Immortal Soul which is all pervading, eternal, immortal and infinite. Time, space, birth or death do not have any meaning in this state." And concluding: "...May the hearts of all attending the function be elevated into a state where they feel the presence of Almighty God and Swami Ajatanandaji as well. May the Ajatananda Ashram be a centre of prayer, meditation, God-Absorption and spiritual retreat."

After Swami Padmanabananda's address, the other Guests of Honour followed one another to address the participants: Venerable Dr. Tashi Samphel, with a Message of H.H. Drikung Kyabgon Chetsang Rinpoche, spiritual Head of the Drikung Kagyu Order of Tibetan Buddhism; Swami Tirthananda, Secretary of an important monastic association, the Bharat Raksha Sant Samiti (Rishikesh); Venerable Kuga Rinchen, carrying a Message from the 41st Sakya Trizin, spiritual Head of the Sakyaapa Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism; Swami Prakashatmananda, Monk of the Ramakrishna Mission (Ramakrishna Kutir, Rishikesh); Swami Suddhi Chaitanya, from the Tradition of Guru Sri Narayana (Narayana Gurukula, Kerala); Venerable Ani Tenzin Namtrul, Nun and disciple of H.H. the XIVth Dalai-Lama (Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, Himachal Pradesh); Reverend Father Korko Moses, SI, president of the North India Ashram Aikya (An Association of Christian Ashrams). The addresses were so inspired and inspiring that everyone felt that they were attending an actual satsang.
The Abhishiktananda Society was present through its Vice-President, Swami Atmananda, its Treasurer, Sri Alias M.V., as well as two more members of its Executive Committee, Sri Swami Magni Ram Shastri and Dr. Uma Vesic. The President, Dr Bettina Bäumer, could not be present on that day due to academic obligations in Kashmir, but joined spiritually in the celebration and sent her blessings and good wishes.

Swami Atmananda, as President of the Ajatananda Interreligious Trust, the governing body of the Ashram, gave the closing address in which he shared how deeply he had been inspired by the lives of the French saints, Swami Abhishiktananda and Swami Ajatananda. He further described the main outlines of the new Ashram: an interreligious and intermonastic community dedicated to spiritual Realisation. He also pointed out that the Ajatananda Ashram is not meant at all to be another institution but a simple place whose only purpose is to provide an appropriate setting where monastics and seekers of Truth will practise meditation, silence and spiritual sādhanā.

After a heartfelt vote of thanks, a bhāndāra started immediately. All the saints went up to the upper terrace and received cādars and dākṣinā. All the participants had their food under the tent and each received a woollen shawl. Then the villagers were also invited to take part in the bhāndāra and were given blankets. All in all approximately 300 people were fed. All were deeply touched by the luminous Presence of H.H. Sri Chandra Swami Udasin and the radiant and extraordinary peace of the place. Although there were many hectic hours spent preparing for the extensive programme and many potential obstacles, everything came off quite effortlessly and spontaneously! There was a tremendous Grace permeating the whole Blessing Ceremony and all those involved felt truly blessed to have had the opportunity to participate.

Note: Ajatananda Ashram is an independent and intermonastic community which is not formally affiliated to any religious organisation or institution. It is administered by the Ajatananda Interreligious Trust [See Ajatananda Ashram. An Interreligious Ashram in Tapovan. Current Situation and Vision for the Future, in Setu No 26, January 2006, pp. 45-48.] For any information, please write or email to Ajatananda Ashram, P.O.Box 45, Rishikesh 249201 (Uttarakhand), India; email address: ajatananda@rediffmail.com

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Film Project on Abhishiktananda: An Interim Report

A German film team under the direction of Gunther Franke and with Christian Hackbarth-Johnson as advisor is planning a new film on Swamiji for the German TV (and possibly other countries and languages). As compared to the French film “Swamiji: An Interior Voyage”, this film is more based on interviews. The shooting started in March 2005 at Rishikesh, Phulchatti and Ranagal with my help. Especially the pilgrimage to Ranagal as documented by the team was an unforgettable experience.

The next phase was planned for Tamil Nadu in December 2006. The enlarged team was shooting in Chennai and went to Tirukoyilur and Sri Gnanananda Niketan, where they interviewed Swami Nityananda Giri. I joined them there and proceeded to Tiruvannamalai for preparing a three-day shooting at Sri Ramanasramam, at Arunachala and at the Temple. The President of Sri Ramanasramam kindly gave permission for shooting in the ashram. The Dipam Festival was just over, and every evening the huge flame on top of Arunachala was lit – an event that was also documented. An interview with Sri Ganesan (grand-nephew of Sri Ramana) was revealing, it showed the respect that Swamiji enjoyed for the seriousness of his sādhanā, and for bridging the two spiritual traditions of Christianity and advaita.

The next important place was Shantivanam where the ashramites were busy with the preparations for Fr. Bede’s Birth Centenary which was celebrated in a grand scale from December
14th to 17th. Interviews and shootings in the ashram kept us busy. I was asked by Fr. John Martin to give a talk on Abhishiktananda, mainly on my personal association and memories – 43 years since my first meeting in Shantivanam! It was moving for me to be back, and at the same time a reminder that everything has changed. Contacts with Sr Sarananda and Sr Marie-Louise were also enriching.

The next and for me the last stop on this film tour was Kumbakonam. I had well known its temples, but had never discovered the Mauna Mandir in which Swamiji spent 32 days in total silence in 1956. That was a real discovery: the family of rich diamond-merchants who are looking after the Mauna Mandir, Sri Gopaldas and family, were extremely kind and hospitable. They still remembered Swamiji! This place of retreat is on the bank of the Kavery and is open to any sincere spiritual seeker who wants to spend a time in silent retreat.

The future plan and the last part of the shooting will most probably take place in June 2007 in Garhwal (Uttarakhand), especially the pilgrimage to Gangotri and Uttarkashi. We hope that the script and the editing of the film will be a true reflection of Swamiji’s spirit and of his Indian pilgrimage.

Bettina Bäumer

BOOK REVIEWS


This is an important theological book on the work and writings of Swami Abhishiktananda. It is solid, well-researched and fair in its assessments. Its main defect is that it is published too late! The thesis was worked out in the late seventies and early eighties of last century, before the Spiritual Diary of the Swami was published either in French or in English. It presents therefore, well indeed, the theological thought of the Hindu-Christian monk in the mid-years of his public activity. It does not clearly outline the important changes he and his theology went through in his mature years. It may indeed be an advantage to have now a study of the period when the monk of Gyansu was most articulate in his reflections on his own experiences and his dialogue. But published in the 21st century a note could at least have been made on later publications and perhaps also of his evolution of his articulation of the faith.

There are other limitations to the thesis which may discourage potential readers or buyers. The proof-reading is very poor. Moreover, in a book with more than a thousand notes most of them using abbreviations, a list of these abbreviations is absolutely necessary, and unfortunately missing! Footnotes called 24 and 25 on pp.13-14 should be 26 and 27. Vande Saccidânam of Brahmapandhab Upadhyay was not composed “a few months before his death,” which occurred in 1907, but was published in 1898 (p. 52). And now there is an “adequate biography” of Upadhyay, by Julius Lipner (Oxford University Press, 1999). The text from Vatican II quoted on p. 149 is not from Nostra Aetate but from Lumen Gentium. Bareilly is in Uttar Pradesh, not in Uttar Kashi (p. 76). There is an annoying custom of using dashes instead of hyphens and vice versa. In general the thesis is too prolix and contains a fair amount of overlapping ideas.

In spite of these and other weak points I consider it an important thesis. The author takes into account all the relevant literature known at the time and uses it competently. Few authors writing on Abhishiktananda make sufficient use of his writings directed to the Church in India (i.e., The Church in India, 1969, and Towards the Renewal of the Indian Church, 1970). Yesurathnam does, and competently.
The thesis has two parts and a conclusion. The first part has two chapters, one biographical and the other on the dialogal commitment of Abhishiktananda. The second part has three chapters, one on the context and setting of Abhishiktannada, the second on the presuppositions and process of his dialogical theology and the third on the “unique shape” of this theology. I was particularly impressed by the way in which the terms are analyzed, like the meaning of guru or of dialogue, fulfillment theology, the concept of *epoché*, etc. The meetings of the “Cuttat group” both in the presence of the Swiss Ambassador and after his departure, are very well described and discussed, using sources not easily available to scholars, although I do not think it is necessary to keep the anonymity of its participants.

The title of the thesis is appropriate. The stress is not a biography of the French-Indian monk, but his theological output as found in the sources then available (in English: quotations of French sources are taken from secondary literature. *Intériorité et révélation*, 1982, is not mentioned even in the Bibliography). Chapter II of the second part explains the presuppositions of the Swami’s theology: 1. Not a personal mission of “conversion” of individuals in the Church but of Christianization, which actually means both absorbing the values of the culture and religion around and influencing them from within; 2. Christ is already present in India; 3. India’s charism and gift of “Interiority” (which is competently explained); 4. *Sannyāsa*, like Christian monkhood, is *dharmātta*, i.e., beyond normal structures of religion. Hence the two meet easily; 5. *Advaita* as experience. Conceptual knowledge, valid to some extent, is temporary and to be transcended. There is also a rather long explanation of the meaning of religion and religions, and of faith and its contents.

The next chapter attempts to give a shape to Abhishiktananda’s theology under five main headings: 1. *Succidānaṇḍa* and the Trinity, 2. Creation and the problem of duality, 3. The Cosmic Covenant and the Pleroma of Christ, 4. The Church and the quest for community and 5. *Sanyāsa* and the Christian life-style in India.

Though the author is very favourable to the theology of the monk of Gyansu, he is not afraid of being critical of him in a few places. I think his reservations are generally called for. (I doubt if the doctrine of *sāravatāryāmī* need imply pantheism, p. 392.) The thesis treats all the theological articulations of the Swami synchronically, while a better understanding would demand a diachronic analysis. Also the literary genre of the various writings should be taken into consideration: the journal, the printed books or booklets, the letters, the conversations, have different scales of value.

The basic insights of the monk are well brought out: the primacy of experience over concepts, the importance of contemplation and “interiority,” the need of dialogue (the author quotes a bon mot of D.T. Niles: “Evangelism is a beggar telling another beggar where food is to be found.” Could one say that it is “beggars telling one another where good food is to be found?”), the call to a new way of living the Gospel. Perhaps the substance of this message is encapsulated in the title of the French version of the booklet *Prayer*: “Eveil à soi, Eveil à Dieu,” “Awakening to oneself, awakening to God.” For the Swami did not think God to be outside oneself: the Trinity has to be discovered in the depths of our own being. But that presence has to be “awakened” in our consciousness.

G. Gispert-Sauch, S.J.

* * *


The author is a Canon of St Augustine and lives at the Abbey of Saint Maurice (Valais, Switzerland). He is well known for being an
active participant in the monastic interreligious dialogue. This interest in interreligious dialogue stems from a stay of 15 years in the Eastern Himalayan region of India, which marked the whole of his life. While in India, he became more deeply acquainted with its religious thinking, thanks to a study of Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, different systems of Vedanta, and also of Buddhism — though to a lesser extent. He was thus well placed to write this small and comprehensive exposition of the mystical path according to the different levels of the classical Christian religious anthropology, complemented by many parallels taken from Indian spirituality - the Upanishadic literature in particular. Without falling in the trap of a superficial syncretism, as is the case today for many books dealing with Eastern-Western mysticism, this study will satisfy all those of the Christian tradition who believe that dialogue with other religions will definitely enrich and deepen the understanding of their own spirituality.

J.-B. Simon-Vermot refers now and then to Swami Abhishiktananda. However, the way the mysticism of immanence (as epitomized by the Upanishads) and the mysticism of union are compared and eventually opposed is rather puzzling (see pp. 126-145). For the author, the concept of the non-duality specific to the Christic union and “compatible with the ontological distinction between soul and God” (p.140) definitely differs from the non-duality of the Upanishads. “The upanishadic advaita is not the Christian advaita” (p.141). Other studies though, have shown the deep convergence of the two paths at the highest spiritual level, not to mention the profound insight of Swami Abhishiktananda after having reached the completion of his inner search. The debate on this sensitive issue is far from being closed and it is hoped that the interreligious dialogue will contribute more and more to a deepening of the interpretation of Christian mysticism in the light of spiritual experiences beyond Christianity. As Fabrice Blée quite rightly points out in his Foreword: “The mystery of Christ goes beyond the bounds of what Christian devotion can say” (p. 9).

Swami Atmananda

Notes:

1 Shirley du Boulay has remarkably shown, in her biography, the different stages of understanding in Swami Abhishiktananda’s spiritual journey, leading to the final Awakening. See The Cave of the Heart, The Life of Swami Abhishiktananda, (Foreword by Raimon Panikkar), Maryknoll (Orbis Books), 2005, 276 pp.

2 As a matter of fact, the diverse contents of the Upanishads have given ample scope to the later commentators to philosophically interpret them in different ways and consequently, various schools of Vedanta - and non-dualistic Vedanta in particular – came into being.

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Felicitation Volumes are a wonderful occasion not only to express appreciation and gratitude for the work and life of the person who is felicitated, they also present an occasion to reflect on the issues with which the person was and is concerned, and to develop such a reflection further, in a dialogical way. This is what the present volume dedicated to Fr. George Gispert-Sauch on his 75th birthday achieves. It not only throws light on the thought, work and achievements of Fr. Gispert who, in his humility and self-effacing way has never made much ado about it, deserves such appreciation, it also carries his ideas forward by raising the fundamental questions connected with his life’s work. First of all, life, work and thought cannot be separated, and it is this connection which a Festschrift can bring out.

“Many years of intermingling with people of different cultural and religious traditions in India with a welcoming and open mind to their rich resources of scriptures and symbols have had their transformative effect on George Gispert-Sauch. Born in Spain on
30 March 1930 he joined the Society of Jesus in 1946. In 1949 he was sent to India. He has spent more than 55 years in India. During these years he has identified himself so much with India and her dreams and aspirations that he has become more an ‘insider’ than many insiders (Indians) themselves. He is at home especially with Sanskrit language and classical Hinduism, a daunting task for many Indians. Deeply rooted in his personal love and commitment to Jesus Christ, he has allowed himself to be challenged by the spiritual and cultural traditions of India. In his own person there has been a meeting of different cultures and traditions. And he is all the richer for that. In his many writings he has shared some of his experiences, insights and viewpoints on theological issues that centre around Jesus Christ and Christian communities in the context of many religions.” (Leonard Fernando, p.1)

The articles are by most of the leading Indian theologians and therefore throw light on the advancement in the reflections on dialogue and theology in the Indian context. In this short review I may mention only a few examples: Michael Amaladass reflects on the criteria of “Which is the true Religion?” Anand Amaladass gives an extremely useful survey of the “Indian Image of Christ” – but I do not understand why he does not use the plural! Since he lists a number of very different images of Christ, including those by artists. His article would be useful for all who are teaching about the encounter of Christianity and Hinduism. Francis D’Sa examines the relationship between “Christian Eucharist and Hindu Yajna” in his usual depth and clarity, both as an indologist and as a theologian. He arrives at great insights into the Indian background for an understanding of food and hence of the Eucharist. My only request would be that we should slowly but surely give up the use of “Hindu” and “Hinduism” – either we are speaking about general categories of Indian thought and spirituality, or we have in mind a particular tradition, scripture, spirituality etc. T.K. John reflects on Compassion and contextualises it in the present Indian context.

Sebastian Painadath, one of the editors, compares the Mystical Way of Meister Eckhart and the Vedantic Path of the Upanishads.

What is extremely useful is the list of publications of Fr. Gispert. The title shows the two great themes of Fr Gispert’s life: to be a co-worker, in many ways and with many people, and to be inspired by joy, which was the very theme of his thesis: Ānanda in the Upaniṣads. The cover design could have been more simple and artistic.

Along with this Festschrift we wish him a long, creative and blessed life!

NEWS AND PUBLICATIONS

Sri Alias M.V., member of the Executive Committee, has been elected Treasurer of the Abhishiktananda Society by the Executive Committee (July 29, 2006) and shall hold office for three years. The outgoing Treasurer, Dr T.K. John, SJ, was thanked for his services.

Swami Atmananda has been elected as President of the Abhishiktananda Society in the Executive Committee Meeting of 13th April, 2007. The outgoing President, Dr. Bettina Bäumer, has been elected Vice-President of the Society in the same Meeting. All the Members of the Executive Committee placed on record their gratitude for the outstanding service rendered by Dr Bettina Bäumer as President of the Abhishiktananda Society for the past 19 years.

Dr. Bettina Bäumer has been appointed as Advisor to the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID), in recognition of her contribution to interreligious dialogue and to making the message of Swami Abhishiktananda known. This new role will further intensify the already existing links between the two associations,
and hopefully contribute to the Hindu-Christian dialogue as embodied in Swamiji. See their website: www.monasticdialogue.org.

**Fr. Bede Griffiths Birth Centenary Celebrations in Shantivanam**

Shantivanam celebrated the great occasion of Fr Bede’s Birth Centenary from December 14th to 17th by holding a Symposium in which about 80 participants took part. It was inaugurated by the Bishop of Tiruchirappalli, Fr Peter Fernando, who displayed a deep understanding for the life and work of Bede Griffiths. Most of the participants were his disciples or inspired by him, and there were moving accounts by many how their life has been transformed by meeting Fr. Bede and by being guided by him. What was striking is that many Indian Sisters were led to discover their own (Indian) tradition and its spiritual riches by Fr. Bede. Many have started ashrams or are living a hermit life, as inspired by Fr Bede.

Sr. Marie-Louise, the ācāryā of Ananda Ashram, gave an impressive talk about the three “founders” of Shantivanam, comparing them to the three seasons: Fr. Monachani represented winter, Abhishiktananda spring, and Fr Bede summer. Interestingly, she concluded by inviting everybody to the celebration of Abhishiktananda’s Birth Centenary in 2010 in Shantivanam!

Note: A detailed account of the event was published by Fr Cyprian Consiglio in the Bulletin of the Bede Griffiths Sangha (Winter edition 06/07). Fr. Cyprian was also very helpful with the German film on Abhishiktananda.

The **Mauna Mandir in Kumbakonam** (Tamil Nadu) is open to any spiritual seeker who wants to spend some time in silent retreat. Contact: H. Gopaldas & Co. (Sri Dilip H. Mehta, Hari), Mira Gopaldas Mansion, 64-66 TSR Big Street, Kumbakonam – 612001. Email: hgopaldas_kmb@sancharnet.in.

**Fr. Frank Gerry** from Australia gives the following news: “For the past four years and more I have given workshops called ‘The Cave of the Heart’, featuring lives and works of Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths. They have been well received.” (Email message from: gerryswl@gmail.com).

**Recent Publications:**


Regunta Yesuratham, **A Christian Dialogical Theology. The Contribution of Swami Abhishiktananda**, Kolkata (Punthi Pustak), 2006, 448 p. (see under Book Reviews)


Fr George Gispert-Sauch, former Secretary and a Member of the Abhishiktananda Society, has edited a book called **Gems from India**. It contains short reflections on 60 important religious or
cultural terms of the Indian tradition that have found, or can easily find, an echo in the Christian hearts of India and elsewhere. The simple presentation aims primarily to help a Hindu-Christian spiritual dialogue in India and in other countries too. Each ‘gem’ is looked at from both the traditional Hindu perspectives and also from the Christian tradition. It is in the line of the work started by Upadhyayji and articulated by Swamiji in the quotation printed above and in many of their writings. Gems is jointly published by ISPCK and VIEWS and may be bought from ISPCK or the Vidyajyoti College at the cost of Rs. 125 ($8, £6) plus postage costs.

Samvidullāsaḥ: Manifestation of Divine Consciousness. Swami Lakshman Joo, Saint-Scholar of Kashmir Saivism, (A Centenary Tribute) edited by Bettina Bäumer, Sarla Kumar, New Delhi (D.K. Printworld) 2007. Website: www.dkprintworld.com Email: dkprintworld@ysnl.net Book review to follow in the next issue of SETU.

Forthcoming Publication:


Life Membership for Members within India: Rs 1,500.00 Members abroad: USD 100.00 or EUR 100.00 (or equivalent) Institutions (in India): Rs 3,000.00

The Abhishiktananda Archives of the Society have been transferred from the Vidyajyoti College of Theology to the new Library Extension of the Brotherhood House (Delhi) where the Society has its registered office. They are accessible to scholars who ask permission in advance from the Secretary.

SETU is an occasional Bulletin of the Abhishiktananda Society circulated privately among the friends and well-wishers of the Society.

Important notice for the readers of SETU: Many subscriptions have been received through the website of the Society. Though the Bulletin is sent free of charge, we have to ask for contributions/donations towards the cost of printing and postage. New subscribers will receive the current issue, but the following issues will be sent only after receiving a contribution (by cheque/demand draft in the name of the Abhishiktananda Society, Delhi).

Please send donations to: The Secretary, Abhishiktananda Society, 7 Court Lane, Delhi 110054 (India)
Kindly let us know of any book, article, research thesis or seminar which refers to Swami Abhishiktananda and is likely to interest the readers of this Bulletin (to be sent to the Chief-Editor: see address below.)

The books by Swami Abhishiktananda in English are available at:
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Videos:

Swamiji. An Interior Voyage
The film produced by Patrice Chagnard evokes in the form of an autobiographical account the spiritual itinerary of Swami Abhishiktananda. It is available at Inner Quest: www.inner-quest.org (Video and DVD catalogue). 86 minutes - colour – VHS PAL. The French version (Swamiji. Un voyage intérieur), is also available at Inner Quest. VHS SECAM or PAL.


Order address: Abhishiktananda Society, c/o Vidyajyoti College, 4A Raj Niwas Marg, Delhi 110054. Ph: +91 11 23947609; Fax: +91 11 23943478; email: vjcoldel@del3.vsnl.net.in
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www.abhishiktananda.org
Unmoving, the One is swifter than the mind.
No power can reach him as he speeds on before,
Standing still, he outstrips those who run:
From him life-power thrills through all things.

He moves and he moves not; he is far, yet is near;
He is within all that is, yet is also outside.

The Man who sees all beings in the Self
And the Self in all beings is free from all fear.

Iśā Upaniṣad 4-6
(Transl. The Vedic Experience)

* * *

There is the aham which is pure élan, spontaneity, and the
aham which is possession. But he who possesses is himself
possessed. Realization is liberation, mukti, from all possession
of another or by another.

The Self, the aham, does not even possess any thought and
is not possessed, imprisoned, by any thought.

The whole evolution of humanity, of the individual, tends
toward this mukti. A person who is pure spontaneity. The
person: one equipped with an ātman (ātmavān), filled with
spirit (pneuma-vāla).... Jesus is the one who is pure
spontaneity. He possesses nothing and is not possessed by
anything...

The Self, ātman, the aham is not identifiable with anything.
Identification with Brahman is simply a tautology. It is the
nonduality of the non-identifiable.

Swami Abhishiktananda, Ascent to the Depth of the Heart,
Diary entry: Uttarkashi, May 22, 1968 (pp. 198-199)