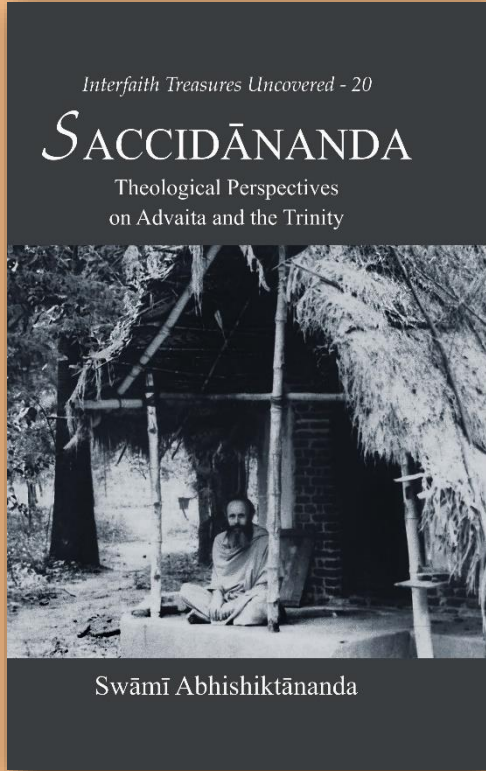


Swami Abhishiktananda, *Saccidānanda: Theological Perspectives on Advaita and the Trinity*. Edited by Swami Atmananda Udasin. Translated by James Stuart. 3rd ed. Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2023. Revised English version by the author of the French title, *Sagesse hindoue, mystique chrétienne* (Paris: Centurion, 1965)



This publication is the third edition of *Saccidānanda*, written by Swāmī Abhishiktānanda during his first long stay in solitude from 2<sup>nd</sup> May to the end of June 1962, in his Himālayan hermitage at Gyānsū, near Uttarkāshī.

After the intense spiritual experiences he had in the Arunāchala caves between 1952 and 1955, he felt the need to share with Christian readers in France his deep understanding and appreciation of the spiritual values of the Hindu tradition, particularly his fascinating discovery of Advaita, and his life-changing encounter with the teachings of Shrī Ramana Maharshi.

This book, which was essentially aimed at a Western and Christian readership, represented his first attempt at synthesizing, on the one hand, his profound experience of Advaita and the Upaniṣads in the caves of Arunāchala, and on the other hand, his faith in Christ and the Trinity. The great tension he had endured in the past in an attempt to integrate the two was significantly attenuated when he openly adopted the ideas of the “fulfillment theology” that is, of assuming the convergence upon the historical Christ and the

Church, of all the religious and spiritual experiences of mankind to which more and more Indian theologians were referring at the time.

The first French version of *Saccidānanda* was published in 1965 in France under the title: *Sagesse hindoue mystique chrétienne: du Védanta à la Trinité* [lit.: Hindu Wisdom, Christian Mysticism: from Vedanta to the Trinity]. The choice of the title itself was very meaningful and reflected his initial vision inspired by the “theology of fulfillment”.

Although this book is generally considered the epitome of Swāmī Abhishiktānanda’s theological thought, it was also the one in which he least recognized himself towards the end of his life in 1971, at the time he reviewed the French edition of *Saccidānanda* (1965) – intending to publish the English version in India. He did not intend it to be merely a translation, but a revised version that would correspond more closely with his present standpoint. Despite his many corrections to the first version, a year and a half later he admitted to his friend Raimon Panikkar that “it is only the patching up of an old wall. I would never write it now”.<sup>1</sup>

The author’s theological position had significantly evolved and he could no longer recognize himself in his laborious synthesis based on the “fulfillment theology”.

The Swāmī’s dissatisfaction with his early 1965 essay was that it was, as he wrote, too “mental”, too “Greek”,<sup>2</sup> too theological, and that the importance of experience did not emerge sufficiently from the text as a whole. It is clear that, in the early seventies, the contents of his theological thought dealt more and more with the primacy of experience inspired by his direct intuition of the Truth of Advaita. Furthermore, this approach laid

the foundations for an in-depth interreligious dialogue based on inner experience and inspired other Catholic monastics to engage in this new direction.<sup>3</sup>

“Dialogue... only becomes worthwhile when it is accompanied by full openness to one another and when both sides accept the fact that each has something to receive and learn from the other, not merely at the intellectual level, but with regard to his inner life in the Spirit. Dialogue about doctrines will be all the more fruitful when it is rooted in a real spiritual experience at depth and when each one understands that diversity does not mean disunity, once the Centre of all has been reached (...). This is the perspective from which this book, now offered to the English-speaking public, was originally written.”<sup>4</sup>

Swāmī Abhishiktānanda realized that the “fulfillment theology” was a definite obstacle to a genuine dialogue which believes, right from the outset, in the equality of all religious traditions. The former, on the contrary, asserts the superiority of the Christian tradition over Hinduism and more generally, over all other religions.

But the most important reason for his ultimate rejection of the theses developed in *Saccidānanda*, notwithstanding his corrections, was his new and profound spiritual insights after the arrival of his disciple Marc Chaduc, which would lead him to his ultimate Awakening.

Although *Saccidānanda* does not represent Swāmī Abhishiktānanda’s vision after his spiritual Awakening, these theological reflections on Advaita and the Trinity nevertheless mark an important stage in the development of his insights regarding the meeting of Christianity and Hinduism.

They are still vibrant with his lived experience and his passion for Truth, and are inspired by a genuine concern for the reader, the seeker, the contemplative aspirant. Many of the passages and quotations in this book still retain their power and ability to inspire and draw the reader to recollection.

*Saccidānanda* being out of print for more than fifteen years, the editorial team of the Abhishiktānanda Centre decided to publish this new and third edition, on the auspicious occasion of the 50th Anniversary of Swāmī Abhishiktānanda’s *mahāsamādhi* (1973-2023).

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<sup>1</sup> Letter dated 18 October 1972 to Raimon Panikkar in James Stuart, *Swami Abhishiktananda*, 278.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated 16 January 1973 to Thérèse Lemoine in J. Stuart, *Swami Abhishiktananda*, 282.

<sup>3</sup> It is for this reason that Swāmī Abhishiktānanda is rightly considered to be one of the emblematic figures of the monastic interreligious dialogue on an experiential level.

<sup>4</sup> Author’s Preface, xxviii.

### **New Edition:**

This new and revised edition of *Saccidānanda* has been prepared by the Editorial Board of the **Abhishiktananda Centre for Interreligious Dialogue** (Delhi Brotherhood Society).

Website: [www.abhishiktananda.org.in](http://www.abhishiktananda.org.in)

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