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PURUSHA AND GURU (PART II) Cyprian Consiglio

Guru

In the last issue I wrote about a beautiful Sanskrit verse that was dear to both Fr. Bede and Abhishiktananda, the *Vedahametam*—hymn to the Purusha. In this issue I'd like to explore another verse, dedicated to the *guru*, which I also discovered through them.

*Tvameva mâtâ cha pitâ tvameva,
tvameva bandhuscha sakhâ tvameva
tvameva vidyâ dravinam tvameva
tvameva sarvam mama devadeva*

This verse is usually associated with the *Sri Guru Gîtâ*. The first time I encountered it was in Abhishiktananda's *Secret of Arunachala*:

Ramana laid a fatherly hand on her, and she, absolutely beside herself, looked into his eyes and sang the famous Sanskrit verse: *Tvam eva mata...*

You are my mother, my father, my brother,
You are my whole family, all my wealth,
You are my all, absolutely all, O my Lord!"¹

The other time I encountered this beautiful little hymn was on the recording of a talk that Fr. Bede gave, where he noted this hymn in relation to the fact of how Western religion must come to recognize the feminine aspect of God.

The *Sri Guru Gîtâ* is a beautiful poetic text addressed by Lord Shiva to his consort Parvati. It contains elements from two different sources, Vedanta and Kashmir Shaivism. From the Tantric scriptures of Kashmir Shaivism it gets its *via positiva* and its devotional elements; and so references to the guru-mandala and the five functions of the guru, descriptions of the guru's feet, instructions about seats, places and directions, etc. But from Vedanta it gets the notion that the guru is actually Absolute Brahman, its apophatic strain, if

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DIVERSITY, UNIQUENESS AND UNITY (PART II)

John Martin Sahajananda

Christ and Christianity

We can also see *four* important *stages* in the spiritual journey of Jesus.

1. Jesus, the Man The first stage of Jesus was his physical birth and physical identity. He was a man. As a physical body he had an individual consciousness of his own. This was his waking consciousness.

2. Jesus, the Jew After his circumcision Jesus became part of Jewish collective consciousness. He was not only a man physically but also a Jew. As a Jew he was united with all the Jews but separated from the non-Jews, the so-called Gentiles. As a Jew he had the Law, the Torah as his ideal and great personalities of his tradition like, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses as his ideals and he might have tried to imitate them. Jewish belief structure was his dreaming consciousness. In this stage Jesus was not original as he was still belonged to his spiritual tradition and gave continuity to it. Here he was guided by the moral code of his religion. But he began to realize the limitations of his religion. He was not satisfied. That brought him to the third important moment of his life: his baptism.

3. Jesus the Christ, the Son of God At the moment of his baptism Jesus moved away from the collective consciousness of Judaism and entered into the Universal mind or consciousness. He realized himself as the Son of God, which can be understood as the universal consciousness and experienced the New Covenant, the Law within or Truth within. Here his identity was just "I am", which was freedom from the past and the future. He went beyond the Torah and said: "It is written in your Law but I say unto you". He became free and original. He proposed his own way and the Truth. He became an authority based on his experience. We can say that at the moment of his baptism Jesus came out of his dreaming consciousness (Judaism) and entered into the deep sleep consciousness. Here he could say: *I am the way, the truth and the life*. The Son of God is the bridge between God and the people.

4. Jesus Christ identical with God Jesus moved one step higher and realized himself as being identical with God: *I and the Father are one*, he declared. He established himself in that eternal identity with God. This was his fourth level of consciousness.

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Diversity, Uniqueness and Unity (Continued from page 1)

We can also say that Jesus has four bodies. The first one is Jesus of Nazareth, the physical body (*Nirmanā Kaya* or waking consciousness). It appeared two thousand years ago and ended after thirty-three years of his earthly life. The second one is his teachings (*dhamma kaya* or dreaming consciousness), which are two thousand years old and continue to guide a large section of humanity today and the third is his universal body (*samboghya kaya*, the risen Christ), which is not confined to time and space but present everywhere. This universal body was before his physical body and teachings. The final, the fourth one, is his unity with the Father, God, (*Dhamma Kaya*). St. John says: "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and dwelt among the people." God manifested everything in and through that Word. Jesus' teachings are higher than his physical body as they last longer than his physical body. His universal body (Word) is higher than his teachings as we cannot reduce the Word to words, to his teachings.

The Son of God is not identical with his teachings. He can even change his teachings according to the situation in which he gives his teachings. His divine identity is higher than his universal body because the universal body still belongs to the level of manifestation. The Word was God. His divine identity is foundation of all the other three levels like the hub of spokes. Jesus came from God and returned to God. In Christianity we say that Jesus is hundred percent divine and hundred percent human. He is hundred percent human in the lower three levels and he is hundred percent divine in the fourth level. This applies to the Upanishad sages and Buddha. The Upanishad sages were hundred percent divine in the fourth level of consciousness so that they were able to say: *aham brahma asmi*- I am Brahman. But they were also hundred percent human in the lower three levels so that they would pray to lead them from the unreal to the real. The same applies to Buddha. He was hundred percent divine in his *Dhamma Kaya* and he was hundred percent human in the lower three bodies.

Individual Sages and Universal Mind We need to distinguish between the individual sages of the Upanishads and the Universal mind. The individual sages, as physical bodies, are not identical with the universal consciousness. The universal consciousness was there before the individual sages. It manifests through them but it does not exhaust in them. It is for this reason that the same truth is communicated through each sage in a unique way. Each Upanishad explains the same truth in its unique way. No sage has the lost word on it. Interestingly the Hindu Tradition does not give much importance to the physical bodies of these sages. There is not much worship and veneration of the Upanishad sages. The emphasis is on their teachings and on the eternal—Brahman and Atman. The uniqueness of the Upanishad sages was their focus on the Siddhartha and Buddha: we also need to make a distinction between Siddhartha and

Buddha. They are not identical. Buddha consciousness is before Siddhartha. Buddha manifested in Siddhartha but does not exhaust in Siddhartha. Siddhartha has entered into the consciousness of Buddha but Buddha is greater than Siddhartha. There were many persons who were awakened to Buddha consciousness before Siddhartha. Siddhartha was not the only Buddha but one of the Buddhas. Even though in Buddhism the emphasis is on finding Nirvana, there is much veneration and worship of the physical form of Buddha.

Jesus and Christ The same principle applies to Jesus also. We need to make a subtle distinction between Jesus and Christ. Jesus, as a physical body, is not identical with Christ, the universal consciousness. Christ Consciousness was there before Jesus. Christ Consciousness manifested in Jesus but it does not exhaust in Jesus. Jesus, as a physical body, has a beginning and an end but Christ as the universal consciousness has no beginning and no end. Jesus, as a body, is one leaf on the tree. Christ is the trunk. The leaf has entered into the consciousness of the trunk but it is not identical with it. There are also so many other leaves the trunk has. But it seems that in Judaism this experience has no precedent. No one had this experience before Jesus. He was the first one to claim this experience and for that reason he was in difficulty with the spiritual authorities of his tradition. He was accused of blasphemy and met a violent death.

Diversity, Uniqueness and Unity

In the first level of consciousness, which is the physical level, the Upanishad sages, Siddhartha and Jesus are different. It seems that the search of the Upanishad sages began during the period where belief in the efficacy of Vedic rituals was declining and there was economic prosperity in which people had time and leisure to ask fundamental questions of life. They focused on the eternal, the Real. The answer they found was *Atman* and *Brahman*. They kept their discovery as a secret and communicated it only to those whom they thought were worthy of it. They were not missionaries. We know that Siddhartha was born in the royal family. He was born 500 years before Christ. He had his own personal questions. He was not happy with the Vedic sacrifices. He was dissatisfied with the extreme intellectualism of the Vedic sages. He was not happy with the caste system and division of life into different stages. He renounced his wife, son and the kingdom and went in search of freedom. After his enlightenment he became an itinerant missionary who dedicated his life to help sentient beings to find freedom from *samsara*. He died at a good old age. Jesus was born in Palestine, which was under Roman occupation. He was born to a carpenter family. His people were looking for a Messiah who would liberate them from Roman oppression. After his enlightenment he began to preach his message of the kingdom of God. His teaching became controversial. He was accused of blasphemy and met a violent death in the prime of his life. Before his death he entrusted his mission to his disciples, who propagated his message.

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Diversity, Uniqueness and Unity (Continued from page 2)

The starting conditions of the Upanishad sages, Siddhartha and Jesus were different but the essence of their discovery seems to be identical though the manifestation and emphasis are different. In the third level of consciousness, which is universal consciousness, the Upanishad sages, Buddha and Christ are essentially one. The universal consciousness is like the Trunk. There is only one Trunk. In the second level of consciousness, which is dreaming consciousness, they are all unique. Their backgrounds are unique and their manifestations are unique. The Upanishad sages manifested their discovery in a unique way, Buddha manifested his discovery in a unique way and Jesus manifested his discovery in a unique way. Though they discovered the same Source their emphasis and manifestations are different. The way we encounter the Universal consciousness depends on the questions with which we make our journey.

The Upanishad sages were preoccupied with the Eternal: “What is that by finding which we find everything and what is that by knowing which we know everything” was their question. The answer they found was Brahman and Atman. “What is the source of suffering and how to be free from suffering” was the question of Buddha. The answer he found was freedom from Desire. “How to establish a just society where there will be love, freedom and equality” might have been the question of Jesus. The answer he found was the kingdom of God, the radical love of God and the radical love of neighbour. In the fourth level of consciousness, which is the unitary consciousness, the Upanishad sages, Buddha and Christ are all essentially one. There is no essential difference. The unity at the fourth level is not based on concepts, which is artificial and which will be gone once a person changes his concepts. There the unity is essential.

Inter-religious Dialogue. In the inter-religious Dialogue our focus is on the teaching body of the Upanishad sages, Buddha and Christ. This belongs to the second level of consciousness. It is not possible to arrive at a consensus at that level. We tend to imprison the Sages, Buddha and Christ in their teachings. We are looking at the trunk and the roots with the eyes of a leaf and a branch. We need to have a radical change in our perspective. We need to move away from their teaching body into their universal body and the unitary body. We need to look at the leaf, at the branch and at the trunk from the roots, only then we see the uniqueness of each branch and leaf and also their limitations. It helps us to find creative answers to the questions that we are asking today. It means we need to liberate the Upanishad sages from their teachings, we need to liberate Buddha from his teachings and we need to liberate Christ from his teachings. The Upanishad sages are not identical with Hinduism. Buddha is not identical with Buddhism and Christ is not identical with Christianity. The Universal Mind is one. It has manifested in a unique way in the Upanishad sages, it has manifested in a unique way in Siddhartha and it has mani-

Purusha and Guru (Continued from page 1)

you will, its *via negativa*.

When we are speaking about a human guru, as I understand it, first of all, we initially venerate the outward form of the one we consider to be our guru. And so the other famous song to come from the Sri Guru Gîtâ:

*Dhyâna mûlam gururmurtih
Pûja mûlam guroh padam
mantra mûlam guror vâkyam
moksha mûlam guroh kripâ*

The root of meditation is the image of the guru;
the root of worship is the feet of the guru;
the root of mantra is the word of the guru;
the root of salvation the grace of the guru.

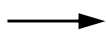
But this is only the beginning of the understanding; we soon realize that what we are venerating is not the outward form at all, not him or her at all, but the shakti that dwells inside that outward form, in that body. The guru is not a person with a physical body; the guru is Shakti—the Divine Power, Spiritual Energy. The true guru is the “awakened spiritual power that is established in the physical body of the guru.” The physical body is merely the means for the manifestation of Shakti.²

But there is of course a further step yet: venerating that outward form of the Shakti that is the guru’s body and recognizing the indwelling Shakti that is actually the guru awakens that same Shakti in the disciple. The Divine Shakti that is manifest in the physical body is engaged in the welfare of the disciples. “By the path of the Guru knowledge of one’s Self arises (v. 110)” That is when we discover the guru in the cave of the heart. At first we apprehend this guru too in a form of some sort. Here is a sample from verse 91, with an obvious influence from Kashmir Shaivism:

One should meditate on the divine form of the guru

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festated in a unique way in Jesus. It is the same Universal Mind that has been enlightening them and manifesting in them. But its manifestation is not exhausted. It will manifest itself in a unique way for our times. For this we need to make our journey with our own specific questions. We cannot begin with some one’s questions and some one’s answers. It would be mechanical. We need to ask original questions. That was what the Upanishad sages, Siddhartha and Jesus did. For this we need to have a pure mind and pure heart; a mind and heart that are willing to free themselves from their conditionings and become a virgin so that they can give birth to the original and creative truth. “Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God (Truth)”. ■



Purusha and Guru

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seated on the throne situated at the center of the pericarp of the heart lotus,
shining like the crescent moon,
holding the book of knowledge and bestowing the desired boon.

But this devotion to the guru in the cave of the heart is then meant to give way to non-duality and non-discriminative vision. Then *Gurureva jagat sarvan*: “the entire universe appears to be filled with the guru...” It is realized that the form of the guru is the infinite reality that encompasses the entire sentient and insentient creation. Not only is the guru the revered master of the Universe, but the guru is my very *Âtman*, self-soul, is the *Âtman* of all creatures.³ There is of course the famous saying that when the disciple is ready the guru will appear; a corollary to that follows on it: when the disciple is ready the guru is everywhere. This is a marvelous teaching. Yes, *gururbrahma, gururvishnur, gurur devo maheshvarah*—“the guru is Brahma, Vishnu, Lord Shiva”; but ultimately *gurur eva parabrahma*—“Indeed the guru is supreme Brahman.” The guru is the ground of being, the guru is the ground of consciousness. Or, to put it conversely: the ground of being itself is the guru, the ground of consciousness is the guru. The guru is the pure blissful consciousness that permeates the entire universe. Dare we say, *sat-chit-ananda*—the very nature of being is this bliss consciousness so ultimately, it is *this* form of the guru that is the foundation of meditation, worship, the word from which comes mantra and whose grace is the root of *moksha*—salvation.

Abhishiktananda writes at length about the concept of “guru” especially in his book *Guru and Disciple*. There he explains that the guru is most certainly not simply a master or professor or preacher nor even a spiritual guide or a director of souls “who has learned from books or from others what in turn is passed on to others.” The guru is one “who has first attained the Real”, and the guru is one who knows from personal experience the way that leads to the Real. The guru is one who is capable of initiating the disciple and of making well up from within the heart of the disciple the immediate ineffable experience which is the guru's own—“the utterly transparent knowledge, so limpid and pure, that one quite simply is—the mystery of I AM.” The mystery of the guru is the mystery of the depth of the heart. The experience of being face to face with the guru is that of “being face to face with oneself in the most secret corner, with all pretense gone...”⁴ Certainly the meeting with the guru is the essential meeting, the decisive turning point in one's life, but it is a meeting that can only take place when one has gone beyond the level of sense and intellect. “It happens in the beyond, in the fine point of the soul as the mystics say.” What the guru says actually springs from the very heart of the disciple. “It is not that another person is speaking to one. It is not a question of receiving from outside oneself new thoughts which are

transmitted through the senses.” What the guru says springs from the very heart of the disciple.⁵

In that context we understand the full weight of what he wrote about Gnanananda, that he “was the first man before whom I have been willing to prostrate.” Then on March 10th—after he went back to stay with Gnanananda again in Tapovan in early 1956 for two weeks of immersion in Hinduism—he wrote: “I would in all simplicity die in the arms of my guru, trusting in my guru.”⁶

The other important element to add here is how essential the role of the disciple is. It's interesting to read this, written so many years before that monumental day of Marc-Ajatananda's diksha, in the light of that event. First of all Abhishiktananda insists that one should not even use the word “guru” let alone even call someone one's guru unless one has the heart and soul of a disciple. “Only those who are not yet worthy spend their time running after gurus.” Again, as the famous adage says, when the disciple is ready the guru will appear. Then the guru and the disciple form a pair, two elements that attract one another. Normal human encounters always have some element of duality about them, even though in the deepest of encounters there is a kind of fusion in which the two become one in love and desire. But there is something different in the meeting of the guru and disciple: there is no longer even fusion, for we are on the plane of the original non-duality! In other words, there are not two to fuse or, better put, there are not two at all—which of course is the literal meaning of *advaita*—“not two.” As a matter of fact, Abhishiktananda says that this is the way *advaita* becomes comprehensible, by having first lived it with another human being; identity comes from having experienced communion existentially in the meeting with the guru.⁷ And of course he felt that he had finally become a guru in his relationship with Marc-Ajatananda.

Bede didn't write often about guru except in *Universal Wisdom*.⁸ There he wrote about the medieval Sant movement in India that grew out of the bhakti tradition, which in turn had grown up out of the Bhagavad Gîtâ and inspired a monotheistic devotion to a personal creator God. Whereas the typical Hindu normally conceived of God descending as an *avatara* in the form of Krishna or Ram etc., the Sant movement conceived of God as totally without form, totally transcending the universe and yet immanent, especially revealed as an immanent presence in the heart. The greatest exponent of this was Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion. For Nanak, God expresses himself in the Word (*Sabad* or *Sabda* in Sanskrit), a Word that is both revealed in creation and makes itself known in the heart. But this Word is *anahat*—unstruck or unheard; in other words it is an interior word. (As a matter of fact in the Yoga tradition the heart chakra is the *anahata* chakra, the place of the unstruck sound.) When the Word is expressed it is referred to as the *Nam*—the name,” which bears the content of God's revelation both in creation and in the human

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heart; and both this Word and this Name are what are revealed by the guru. Consequently this principle of the “guru” is the key concept for the Sikhs, but primarily understood as an inner guide, and any external guru “exists only to awaken the disciple—*sikh* to this guru within, the inner light and truth.” The guru reveals the will of God, the *hukam*, which is the divine order in nature that can be discerned beneath all the violence and conflict around us, “the truth, the reality behind all appearances.” This discernment of the divine comes through the guidance of the guru, whoever he or she may be, “who awakens us to the inner light, the word of truth within, and enables us to know the Name, the character, the person of the indwelling spirit, and all this comes to us by the ‘grace’ of God. This contact with the supreme mystery guides and directs our life, if we empty ourselves, surrender our ego and allow the divine truth to take possession of our being.”⁹

I have a beautiful batik of Jesus as *satguru* over the altar in my hermitage that I am fortunate to gaze at each day. And when I sing this chant, *Tvameva mata...*” to Jesus as my guru, all of this awakens in me: there is Jesus adored in the outer form of his body, Jesus who pours forth the Spirit from his own wounded side on the cross into the cave my heart. I begin gazing at Jesus but, as St. John teaches, “we shall be like him when we see him as he is” until, as St. Paul writes, “it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.”

the purusha and the guru

I want to give Abhishiktananda the word here, in a way that ties both these themes—*purusha* and *guru*—together. First from *The Further Shore*, where he writes that the “initial call is the testimony of the scriptures and the guru”:

But the day comes when the faith is direct, when faith has reached its fullness in experience... The eyes of the soul are now wide open: they contemplate the great light, which has taken over the darkness.

... and then he quotes again the “*purusha* hymn” from Svetâshvatara Upanishad: “I know the great *Purusha*” but then he adds in parentheses, “that is finally myself in very truth.”

Finally, in his diary (April, 1973) Abhishiktananda was writing about the idea of God as Father, and he stated that God’s “paternity” probably implies likeness more than origin. And then he says again that it is specifically the concept of the guru that can help us grasp this, because—and let this luminous section be our conclusion:

The guru is the one in whom I see myself.
God is myself in what is most beautiful,
most true, deepest in me.
When I look down to the bottom of the abyss, of the GUHÂ,
it is my very own image that is reflected back to me—



that is why I say ABBA, *Pîta*—
but an image that is so beautiful,
so beautiful,
completely radiant with glory,
a glory that has no beginning or end—
beyond all birth and equally beyond all death.
The *tejomaya* Purusha, the self-luminous light—*svayam
jyoti*,
the supreme light—*param jyoti*,
And it is to this Purusha who is myself
—*so’ham asmi*—
sun-colored beyond the darkness—
that I reach out, fervently, irresistibly,
with a view to our coming together, our *advaita*.
This call of myself to myself,
of myself as human to myself as God.

I had lost God,
and in my search for him
it is I myself I have recovered,
but myself, what a myself!
I have disappeared from my sight
into my *tejas*, my radiance.¹⁰

Notes:

1. Abhishiktananda, *The Secret of Arunachala* (Delhi, SPCK, 1997), 99.
2. Swami Shivom Tirth, *The Divine Song of the Guru, Shri Guru Gitâ, Meaning and Commentary* (New York, Swami Shivom Tirth Ashram, Inc., 2005), 6.
3. *ibid.*, 11.
4. *Ascent*, 147.
5. *Guru and Disciple*, 29.
6. *Ascent*, 147.
7. *Guru and Disciple*, 28-29.
8. An interesting side note: having attended both centenary celebrations — of Fr. Bede and Abhishiktananda — I noted how many people referred to Fr. Bede as her or his “guru.” On the other hand, outside of the relationship with Marc-Ajatananda, that was rarely said of Abhishiktananda, who was usually referred to as “swamiji.” One can only speculate as to the why of this (and some did). I want to suggest that this may also be the result of Fr. Bede’s penchant for communion and community relationships, in contrast to Abhishiktananda with his passionate independence.
9. *Universal Wisdom*, 28-30.
10. *Ascent*, 378-379 . ■

Abhishiktananda on advaita and Christianity

Only the [one] who is ready to go to the end in the experience both of the Christian faith and of *advaita* will find the solution to the apparent antinomy. It is to be found in a higher light, which human reason alone will never be able fully to account for. Even when enlightened by faith and guided by scripture and tradition, has man’s reason ever been able to find an adequate expression of the mystery of grace, of God’s concurrence in his own free action?
Hindu-Christian Meeting Point, pp. 97-98), ■

SPIRIT, SOUL AND BODY: I
COMBATING DUALISM
Cyprian Consiglio

We find out along the way as we study theology and spirituality that for the most part all of our theological and philosophical questions, including and maybe especially our questions about spirituality and the spiritual life, are at the same time usually also (or really) anthropological questions. We are not just asking who God is, or what Absolute Reality is. We are asking, “Who am I?” and how those two things go together. “What is Absolute Reality, and how should I live my life?” Because who we think we are and where we think we are heading is going to determine the way we live each day, and the praxis of our spiritual life.

Practically speaking, we in the West have inherited a kind of mistrust of the body that we can never quite shake no matter how far we try to distance ourselves from Christianity. Of course there are countless horror stories about Christians (especially Catholics?) being so uptight about anything dealing with the body and bodily functions, and especially a deadly silence around anything dealing with sexuality. This could be interpreted as a kind of “noble shame,” but practically speaking it has led to an enormous amount of oppression, suppression, and repression, instead of sublimation. And what we learn from the science of psychology is that any kind of oppression, suppression or repression ultimately leads to some kind of obsession; and obsession leads to compulsivity, and compulsivity leads to shame, and shame leads to oppression, repression, etc. The cycle goes on and on—the gift that keeps on giving.

The Italian philosopher Marco Vannini puts it this way: it is essential for us human beings to have an experience of sexuality, for example—and I want to expand that to say that we need to have an experience of our erotic-physical self or simply of our corporeal existence—in its deepest reality, because without such an experience our physical self remains something unclear. And whatever is not brought to the light actually becomes a tie, a bond. As a matter of fact, there could really be no better place to talk about the human body than in the context of spirituality because, quoting Vannini again, one also does not, indeed cannot, even have true knowledge of soul and body without experience of the spirit.¹

We only have to remember the pessimism of Greek philosophy regarding the body to understand where we come from. According to the Greeks,

Life is destined to death; since the body (*soma*) is a tomb (*sema*), salvation can only consist in being freed of it through evasion. One thinks of the contrast between the Greek belief in the immortality of the soul and the Christian faith in the resurrection of bodies...²

Unfortunately this pessimistic “body-as-tomb” finds its way immediately into the anthropology that we most of

us inherit instead of “Christian optimism,” even—especially!—among the early Christian writers. Tomas Spidlik gives a list of the most famous invectives. It starts out with the ancient Orphic formula *soma-sema: The body (soma) is a tomb (sema) for the soul*. And from that the earliest writers of Christianity riff on: Clement of Alexandria says that we must *free the soul from the fetters of the flesh*, or as Gregory Nazianzen writes, *from its bond (desmos) with a corpse*. The body is like mire where the soul can only be fouled and defile itself. Gregory of Nyssa taught that *the body is a stranger to the soul* and an ‘ugly mask,’ so we should *free ourselves from the body* and “lay down this burden,” or, as Basil wrote we should “take care of the soul” and never mind about the rest. The monks are just as bad. Palladius, the great monastic chronicler records the sayings of Macarius the Great that we should *despise, mistreat, and kill the body*: “It kills me I kill it.” Antony the Great likewise says of the body, “It flays me I flay it.” And John Climacus says that he body is an ungrateful and insidious friend of whom we should be suspicious.³

In this light we can understand why someone like Sam Keen would write in his book *To A Dancing God* that neither the Christian nor the secular culture, in which he had been jointly nurtured, gave him adequate categories to interpret the warmth and grace which pervade his body nor taught him how to interpret the sacred in the voice of the body and the language of the senses. “In the same measure that Christian theology has failed to help me realize the *carnality* of grace, secular ideology has failed to provide me categories for understanding the *grace* of carnality...”⁴ But it is not just Christianity. On a practical level I have found that this issue—what we call “dualism”—comes up in almost every tradition I have studied, all the way to the teachings of great advaitin saints such as Ramana Maharshi. It seems like the right thing—body bad, soul good! Cast off the body to free the soul. Here is an example from the *Dhammapada*, the early Pali text of Buddhism.

Look at the body adorned,
A mass of wounds, draped upon a heap of bones,
A sickly thing, this subject of sensual thoughts!
Neither permanent nor enduring!
The body wears out , , ,
Fragile, disintegrating,
Ending in death.

Bernie Clark put it very plainly in his book on Yin Yoga, that very few yoga teachers realize that Samkhya philosophy, and thus the classical Yoga of Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras, are also dualistic philosophies. In them the dynamic is between *purusha* and *prakriti*, with *purusha* as the soul, pure consciousness, and *prakriti* as that which is created. *Purusha* does not create *prakriti*, though it is responsible for *prakriti* becoming animated and alive. But, according to Samkhya, this union of the two of them was a horrible mis-

(Continued on page 7)

Combating dualism (Continued from page 6)

take, an unfortunate marriage that never should have happened. So, as Clark explains it, “Samkhya and Classical Yoga are *not* about union. The yoga of the Yoga Sutra is about getting a divorce, as quickly as possible.” (He doesn’t eschew yoga altogether, of course. He espouses a return to a type of Tantric Yoga which he among others refer to as “Yin Yoga.”)⁵ This is a major theme of Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga as well. Warning too about an incipient dualism, he wrote that in the past the body has been regarded by spiritual seekers rather as an obstacle; the body has been regarded “as something to be overcome and discarded” rather “than as an instrument of spiritual perfection and a field of the spiritual change.” But, he writes, “if a divine life is possible on earth, then this self-exceeding (i.e., perfection of the body) must also be possible.”

I have noticed how often people flippantly say that “we are not our bodies.” I am not sure that that is accurate; at least it presents us with a slippery slope toward a whole new kind of dualism. Sam Keen writes that we have to be careful of being seduced by the dualism implicit in the language that encourages us to speak of “having a body,” as if the possessor and the possessed were different entities, what I’ve come to call an “enlightened dualism.” All human knowledge, all human value and aspiration are stamped with the mark of the body. Keen says that the insight we gain from existential philosophy into the incarnate nature of human existence could be stated like this: Our body is our bridge to and model of the world; therefore *how we are in our body so will we be in the world.*⁶ This is very important! “As I trust or mistrust the rhythm of my body, so I trust or mistrust my total world. If we lose the self we lose the other; if we lose the body we lose the world. Thus the danger of not loving one’s body. Love of both neighbor and cosmos rests upon love of self. But even more, the sacred rests upon the carnal.”⁷ And, furthermore, Keen continues, as we are in the world, so will we be in that mystery that founds, sustains, and engulfs the known world: there is a correlation between our attitudes toward our body, our social and material context, and our absolute context.⁸

Cipriano Vagaggini writes that the root of the defect is to be found in a contemporary anthropology that is unwittingly faulty. “Without our realizing it,” he says, “there is a survival in us of a kind of dualism resulting from an exaggeratedly spiritualistic idea” of the human person, in which “the body and its functions in human nature are scorned in favor of the soul.”⁹ In one of Ken Wilber’s early books, *No Boundaries*, he points out that biologically even though “there is not the least foundation for this dissociation or radical split between the mind and the body, the psyche and the soma, the ego and the flesh, but psychologically it is epidemic. Indeed, the mind-body split and attendant dualism is a fundamental perspective of Western civilization...”¹⁰ As individuals grow in years and begin to draw up and fortify all kinds of boundaries between “self” and “not-self” we also start to look at the body with mixed emotions. And by

the time we have matured body becomes foreign territory, almost (but never quite) as foreign as the external world itself. (As Keene reminded us, “how we are in our bodies is how we will be in the world.”) The boundary line is drawn between the mind and the body, and the person identifies squarely with the mind, and we come to live in our heads as if we were a miniature person in our skull, giving directions and commands to the body, which may or may not obey.¹¹

Let’s add one more voice to this, Wendell Berry, the great novelist, poet, farmer and social critic. Berry uses similar language when he refers to “the isolation of the body.” He says that at some point “we began to assume that the life of the body should be the business of grocers and medical doctors who don’t have to take any interest in the spirit; and the life of the spirit should be the domain of churches who would have at best only a negative interest in the body.” But this isolation of the body puts it into direct conflict with everything else in Creation, and “gives it a value that is destructive of every other value.” Of course, speaking of Christianity, “Nothing could be more absurd than to despise the body and yet yearn for resurrection!” But worse, what follows on this way of thinking is that we can also make the body—usually someone else’s body—do things that both insult the mind and degrade the spirit. And then when the soul is set against the body—the soul thriving at the body’s expense—a whole spiritual economy of competition gets set up. The soul lives by denying the body, and as a consequence its relation to the world is too superficial to cope with the world in any meaningful way, and suddenly we are surprised to find out that spiritual values have ceased to carry any weight, or any authority, that our spiritual values lack vigor or power or purpose in the world. *It’s not possible to devalue the body and value the soul!*¹²

The prototype of this of course is forcing people into slavery and then converting them, or any attempt at spreading religion by the sword or violence of any kind, which is a destruction of the body. Contempt for our own bodies inevitably leads to contempt for other bodies as well—of slaves, of women, of laborers, of the infirm or weak, of animals and plants, and finally of the earth itself. *How we are in our bodies is how we will be in the world!* If the body is set in conflict with Creation itself, of which all bodies are members, then ultimately the body stressing its autonomy is at war against itself—the foot taunting the hand.

Notes: (to be continued)

1. Marco Vannini, *L’Esperienza dello Spirito*, 1991, p. 41.
2. Jacques Dupuis, *Incontro*, 154-155.
3. All recorded in Tomas Spidlik, 109-110; see endnotes.
4. Sam Keen, *To a Dancing God*, 142.
5. Bernie Clark, *Yinsights: The Philosophy of Yin Yoga*, Self-published in Canada, 2007), 150-151.
6. Sam Keen, *To a Dancing God*, p. 148.
7. *ibid*, p. 150.
8. Sam Keen, *To a Dancing God*, p. 155.
9. Cipriano Vagaggini, *Flesh: the Instrument of Salvation*, p.16.
10. Ken Wilber, *No Boundaries*, p. 6-7.
11. *ibid*.
12. Wendell Berry, *Recollected Essays*, 278-280. ■



**From Cyprian Consiglio's
PRAYER IN THE CAVE
OF THE HEART**

Here are a few extracts from *Prayer in the Cave of the Heart: the Universal Call to Contemplation*, by Cyprian Consiglio, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 2010.

Having said all this, let me sum up my own position. We are not angels; we may never deny our humanity. As much as we may think of it as a burden, our humanity is our gift and our treasure. It is so precious that Jesus chose to take it on so that it could be raised up to the right hand of the Father in glory. At the same time, the spiritual dimension of being human cannot be denied. If we deny our spiritual dimension, we are in some way not fully human! So what I will argue from the very start is that our spirituality is not something we add onto ourselves, not something we cover ourselves with, not even something “supernatural” — it is the very center and source of our being. It is what holds us together, body and soul. [chapter 1: ‘The Universal Call to Contemplation’]

Prayer, according to Theophan the Recluse as quoted in *The Art of Prayer*, is “standing before God with the mind in the heart.” As long as we pray with our mind in our head, as long as we depend solely on our intellectual resources, we are never going to be able to have an immediate, personal encounter with God. We need to move from our mind to our heart, from knowledge to love. . .

. . . We are more than just emotional beings. We are also intellectual beings, and our minds and our rationality help us. We need to use our rationality, but we can't stay in our heads either. . .

. . . As we move from knowledge to love, we carry our knowledge with us. In the words of Bishop Kallistos Ware, “we are called to descend not from but with the intellect. The aim is not just ‘prayer of the heart’ but ‘prayer of the intellect (or the mind) in the heart.’

[chapter 6, ‘Put Your Mind in Your Heart’]

The goal of our spiritual life is our total transformation — body and soul — by God's Spirit. When we hear the story of Jesus' Transfiguration, we need to keep in mind what St. Paul says — that the Lord Jesus “will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory” (Phil 3:21). The body is meant to be transfigured by the Divine life; the mind, or the soul, is meant to participate in Divine consciousness. . . . The spirit is meant to be totally open to God's Spirit, so that it becomes the place where we and God meet. [chapter 7, ‘Lectio Divina and the Beautiful Names of God’] ■

WISDOM CHRISTIANITY

THE THREE AGES

Bruno Barnhart

Imagine for a moment that the history of Christianity unfolds in three stages, corresponding to the three persons of the Trinity — Father, Son (or Word) and Holy Spirit. That's a childish naïve idea — much too simple to correspond to the complexities of history as we actually know it, — but. . . let's just suppose. Many have walked this path before us and found something worth keeping.

We can think of 1) the Age of the Father as the period of *original* or *fontal* unity, 2) the Age of the Son or Word as the time of *objective* unity, and 3) The Age of the Spirit as the era of *diversified* unity. The first corresponds to the Eastern or Orthodox churches, the second to the Roman Catholic church and the third to the Protestant churches — each with plenty of irony.

Christianity, in this light, moves from the Age of John through the Age of Peter to the Age of Paul. The first creates the sapiential theology of the Fathers, the second the scholastic theology of the high Middle Ages and the third the multiple theologies of the modern era — incorporating, respectively, the philosophical perspectives of Plato and Plotinus, of Aristotle, and of Ockham and the Nominalists.

The three ages are anticipated in the trajectory of Jesus' life, 1) beginning with his *baptism* (which we can imagine as an experience of absolute Oneness, corresponding to Asian nonduality; 2) continuing with Jesus' period of external *manifestation* and 3) concluding in the ‘breaking of the bread’ — at once the *eucharist* and his *death*, then resurrection and *Pentecost*.

The contemplative monastic spirituality of the Eastern Churches corresponds to baptism, while the spirituality of medieval Catholicism, embodied particularly in the centralized religious orders and congregations, moved out into visible witness in the world and the spirituality of Protestantism ventures still further outward in its multiple, individual expressions, its incarnational thrust and its penetration into the forms of secular life.

If the First Church is characterized — in its plurality — by simple and ‘original’ spiritual *unity* (*koinonia*, *sobornost*), the Second church is marked by its visible, organic *centrality* — a single, objective expression in the papacy, in the Latin language (until Vatican II) and in its dogmatic uniformity — and the Third Church by the principle of *freedom and diversity* at its core.

The three ages are not only successive but concurrent, perennial and cumulative — three faces of the one Christ in his continuing historical incarnation. In our ‘late’ time, happily we can affirm — and desire — the gifts of all three for, as Paul writes, “*all things are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's*” ■

HERMITAGE REFLECTIONS

VIGILS ON HOLY SATURDAY

Elbina Rafizadeh

This morning, on Holy Saturday, the clouds loom above, promising more wet weather and hopefully, the last rain for this season. This time I am in Kairos, the trailer where I reside during this weekend retreat of the Blessed Triduum. Though it is the smallest trailer with the most limited view of the Pacific Ocean, I retreat very well here. I have made my practice during this Lenten season, the practice of gratitude. So during this retreat, I give thanks for the shelter, for the warmth, my own shower, a small refrigerator, hot water, and good food. Eventually the petty distractions that invade my thoughts transform to a peaceful heart and mind. A print of the Sacred Heart of Jesus hangs over the bed and I find comfort in seeing the image of Jesus looking over me as I sleep.

Vigils on Good Friday and Holy Saturday is different than on other days. The monks and retreatants pray in the darkness except for seven lighted candles. One is extinguished after each psalm is read. Before the reading of the first psalm, we kneel. Then the monks take turns to read a psalm, allowing the listener to completely immerse in meditative prayer. The Our Father is whispered in unison, like a quiet symphonic chant that speaks directly to the heart. During this time, perhaps, I am most captivated in the deepest form of contemplative prayer.

Vigils, the prayer before dawn, has always been my favorite, with the exception of the sacrament of Eucharist. This prayer has helped me to prepare for the day, especially for the trials I would have to endure. Through the prayer of vigils, I feel that I can enter into the divine realm to find my center. I also chant the psalms at home, and when time allows, during sunrise. The verbal recitation of the psalms has not only helped to heal my past wounds but affects how I journey through the day. The stability, as a result of this prayer, has manifested in courage to respond to the daily negativity with transformed positive kindness. Once, some time ago, Fr. Daniel who is one of the monks, explained that the daily chanting of the psalms was the prayer of the desert fathers and mothers. I am awed when I think of how this form of prayer somehow connects me to sisters and brothers of centuries past.

The day before, I found a chapter on Vigils in a book, *Music of Silence*, by Brother David Steindl-Rast and Sharon Lebell. I love the opening sentence—"Vigils is the womb of silence." From this womb is where we can realize the possibility of discovering the holiness of each day. And from this womb, we may begin to see and hear the sacred in the land of the living, echoing a verse from Psalm 27, "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!"

To paraphrase the chapter on Vigils in *Music of Silence*,

From this silence, in the dark, lives the hidden mystery of the unseen and unheard. This darkness holds the image of the divine mystery. There is a flame in this darkness which is limitless, containing the divine realm, which holds and embraces everything. There is an energy that is stirred in this darkness. We must trust this darkness, to confront the darkness of mystery, which opens up to life. The darkness shines, and when we can recognize this darkness as light, we can find consolation.

During vigils, we listen to the chants, which become darkness turned into sound. The night wind is the voice of vigils and wind is a symbol of spirit. The Holy Spirit blows in the darkness and chant is the spirit made audible. Vigils is also the hour and the symbol of awakening, this wakefulness to the world, from the world of sleep to the world of awakened reality. This awakening can be manifested in the world through the messages of angels who can be heard if we truly listen. The whisper of the Holy Spirit can be seen in the natural world like seeing the shooting star in the night sky, or in the supermarket, when we are waiting in line and experience a fleeting thought or chance remark overheard. Vigils awakens us to welcome each day so that we may be immersed in the graced fullness of living in the mystery.

Before vigils, I walk slowly and mindfully without the guidance of a flashlight, but instead finding the path to the chapel by the light of the setting moon. The cool air refreshes my face. The moon is bright, still, before dawn arrives. I stop on the roadway where there is a lovely vision of the moon, just slightly northwest of the chapel. During this momentary pause, my senses become even more awake and alive. I love this prelude before the first prayer of the day.

Bede Griffiths writes, in *Return to the Center*,

Reality itself is this eternal procession of self-manifestation, of self-knowledge, and this eternal flow of bliss. This is what is happening in each one of us, if we could only know ourselves. We are for ever coming forth from the Father into the light of self-knowledge, for ever returning to the Father in the bliss of love....If we could go down in the depths of any being, a grain of sand, a leaf, a flower, we should come upon this eternal mystery. Beyond molecules and atoms, beyond the protons and electrons, beyond the living cell with its genes and chromosomes, there is an energy, a force of life, which is continually welling up from the abyss of being in the Father, continually springing up into the light of the Word, continually flowing back to its source in the bliss of love.....The Holy Trinity lives in the heart of every creature." ■



The Golden String

2010 Abhishiktananda Events at Shantivanam Symposium: January 10-15

The following is drawn from the report on the Symposium by Fr. William Skudlarek OSB, Secretary General of **Monastic Interreligious Dialogue**, on the **MID** website.

To commemorate his life and reflect on his legacy, DIM/MID sponsored and organized a week-long symposium at Shantivanam, the ashram he and Father Jules Monchanin founded sixty years ago. . entitled *Monk, Mystic, Bridge Builder: Abhishiktananda's Legacy Today*. Some forty people participated. The presentations were as follows:

- Abhishiktananda's influence on Indian Theology' (Michael Amaladoss SJ, India)
- 'Exile and Wandering as Spiritual Practice in Abhishiktananda' (Fabrice Blée, Canada)
- 'Dimensions of Hindu-Christian Dialogue: A Vipassana Perspective' (Shivamurty Mahaswamiji, India)
- 'Unity by Identity, Unity by Communion' (Cyprian Consiglio OSB Cam, United States)
- 'The Life and Teaching of Sri Ramana Maharshi' (Nochuran Venkataraman, India)
- 'Bridge Building for God's World' (on Romano Guardini and Abhishiktananda) (Jane Lee, Australia)
- 'The Eucharist in Abhishiktananda's Theological Reflections' (Fausto Gianfreda SJ, Italy)

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Celebration: December 14-17

On the occasion of the birth centenary celebrations of Swami Abhishiktananda, Fr. Henri Le Saux, there will be a three-day celebration at the ashram from 14th to 17th December. We expect the participants to arrive on the evening of the 13th. We will have some sharings on the December 14th, 15th and 16th, and the concluding celebration on December 17th, which is also the date of the birthday anniversary of Father Bede.

This year is also the 60th anniversary of the founding of Shantivanam and the 30th anniversary of the Ananda Ashram, which is directed by Sr. Mary Louise. Those who would like to participate can contact: saccidananda@hotmail.com or ncgeorge4@hotmail.com or brothermartin111@hotmail.com ■

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