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Abhiṣiktānanda: A Reception History¹

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ABSTRACT In this article, I present an evaluation of the scholarly reception history of Abhiṣiktānanda. I argue for an identifiable threefold division in Abhiṣiktānanda scholarship: the earliest biographies and appraisals focused on his ‘spiritual search;’ a second wave of scholarship stressed Abhiṣiktānanda’s role as a pioneer in the interreligious dialogue; and, most recently, a third ‘turn’ has emerged in which a generation of scholars are concentrating on ‘internal’ Christian doctrinal critiques of Abhiṣiktānanda’s theology. I also suggest that today’s escapable and perplexing Abhiṣiktānanda is not necessarily the same Abhiṣiktānanda who inspired scholars in the past.

Introduction

Who could have imagined in 1973, when Abhiṣiktānanda (born Henri Le Saux, 1910-73) died, that the reclusive monk and poetic but theologically imprecise writer would maintain a limited but specific ascendancy on Hindu-

Christian dialogue? And yet as I show in this article, this is exactly what happened to Abhiṣiktānanda in the last half a century. Few Roman Catholic (or simply ‘Catholic’) expatriates in India have been more actively present on the Hindu-Christian intellectual scene than Abhiṣiktānanda; possibly nobody has been more variously interpreted, his ideas more imaginatively reformulated and his life story more spectacularly retold than Abhiṣiktānanda’s. Spiritual seekers and genuine advocates of interfaith dialogue, Europeans and Indians, Catholics and Anglicans, all might find in him something to which they can relate.

In this article, I cover a wide range of literature on Abhiṣiktānanda, in a certain sense, to build an incomplete, concise, probably syncopate version of the history of ‘Abhiṣiktānanda studies.’ In documenting Catholic interpretations of, and engagements with, Abhiṣiktānanda’s life and thought, I do not intend to enumerate the

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various ways scholars have used Abhiṣiktānanda's body of writings. I prefer instead to see these interpretations and engagements as a prism through which to trace a possible trajectory followed by Abhiṣiktānanda studies in almost half a century. More precisely, I identify three phases in 'Abhiṣiktānanda studies:' the earliest biographies and appraisals, which came out in the 1970s shortly after Abhiṣiktānanda's death and often written by close friends and acquaintances, tended to emphasize the idiosyncrasies of his 'spiritual search' and leave the impression of an enigmatic, but ultimately concrete individual on a personal quest. A second wave of scholarship redressed this balance by focusing on Abhiṣiktānanda's role as a pioneer in the sort of dialogue between Christianity in Indian clothes and Hindu forms of spirituality, which had been given new impetus by Vatican II. Most recently, a third 'turn' has emerged in which a generation of scholars with no first-hand knowledge of Abhiṣiktānanda are concentrating less on biographical material, 'theology of religions,' or interreligious dialogue to target instead 'internal' Christian doctrinal critiques of Abhiṣiktānanda's theology, exploring, for example, his understanding of Trinity or Incarnation and assessing the orthodoxy of his thought.

This article is a historical account of the forms Abhiṣiktānanda has taken in Christian literature. While technically a work of intellectual history, this article engages with theology. The image of theologians, who have their say on Abhiṣiktānanda independently from their different historical periods and various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, is charmingly appealing, but relies on a serious misunderstanding. Theological work is affected by the specific physiognomy of the

historical world in which it emerges and which scholars have to reconstruct. In other words, the study of Abhiṣiktānanda is also everything that has happened around such as study. Accordingly, one of the article's assumptions is that the study of Abhiṣiktānanda -- with all the questions he posed, the debates his work generated and the invitations to self-reflection that commentaries on it often formulated -- has been profoundly and multifariously affected by larger concerns. I would suggest that the reception of Abhiṣiktānanda's work and life is part of the enormous efforts of Roman Catholics to understand their own experience of living in a Church increasingly engaged with other religions without compromising her integrity. Thus, this article is a chronicle of the phenomenon that could aptly be called 'the Abhiṣiktānanda image,' including a summary description of the multiple theological contexts in which Abhiṣiktānanda's name, manuscripts, ideas, and life have been addressed over time.

I assume the reader's familiarity with Abhiṣiktānanda, thus I do not include a lengthy survey of his life. For the economy of this article, the humble monk was born in Brittany and grew up a beloved child with an early vocation for silence and prayer. After entering the monastic life in the pre-council Catholic Church in Brittany, in which Abhiṣiktānanda lived a cloistered, unadventurous life, he moved to India to pursue an extreme form of inculturation, the Hindu *samnyāsa*. At 60, he met his only disciple and then, at 63, died of a heart attack.

This article is divided in two parts. The first part offers a concise reception history of Abhiṣiktānanda's life and thought and some reflections on it. While there was obvious interest in his writings already in the 1960s,

this reception history begins with Abhiṣiktānanda's final departure. The second part comes with a more analytical version of the same reception history. It supposes to document the trajectory of studies on Abhiṣiktānanda and substantiates the case for the three identified 'turns.' For the sake of brevity, I make a claim and then offer a voluminous footnote without close textual analysis of the various works cited. A more granular analysis would require a close reading of a few representative works from each turn to provide evidence for the claim of thematic unity. The second part also offers a voluminous bibliography, which may prove a useful resource for scholars working on themes relating to Abhiṣiktānanda.

First Part

In the late hours of December 7, 1973, Abhiṣiktānanda laid in a bed at the Robert's Nursing Home in Indore, unconscious from what would be fatal heart failure. A nun, Sister Théophane, announced Abhiṣiktānanda's death by saying: "He was anointed and slipped quietly away to the Lord." Abhiṣiktānanda's death set off a wave of intense mourning throughout the Indian Church and beyond. Suddenly, the meaning of his unusual vocation seemed no longer so strange or impenetrable to many outside the strict circle of closest friends. Yet much as people felt they knew him based on reputation and teachings, and friends on affinity and affection, they probably didn't. Abhiṣiktānanda had always been something of an enigma, even to those closest to him. As a monk, he was inclined to silence. In the years following his death, biographers, friends, and scholars attempted to fill those gaps and their research and profiles subsequently created the Abhiṣiktānanda known to the world today.

An argument could be made that for almost half a century, Abhiṣiktānanda has been created and recreated, and this says as much about the construction of historical memory as it does about the man himself. Abhiṣiktānanda exists in the Roman Catholic imagination through a series of iconic yet fleeting images that range from the acosmic on the banks of Ganges River to the wandering monk wearing the orange cloth of the *sannyasa*; these images powerfully evoke the era's confounding mixture of high spirituality and Mystic East. Indeed, the iconography of Abhiṣiktānanda in Saccidananda Ashram at Shantivanam in Tamil Nadu, his retreats in one of the caves near Ramana Maharshi's ashram, and his lifelong attempt to understand Hinduism serves as a kind of visual shorthand to understanding the history of a fascinating era, but such images reveal little about the scholarship that birthed them.

In the last half a century or so, an interdisciplinary body of literature has emerged in a new subfield which can be referred to as 'Abhiṣiktānanda studies.' The mission of this subfield, Abhiṣiktānanda studies, was and remains the discernment of the life and the thought of a man who is hard to capture. Scholarly interpretation of Abhiṣiktānanda and his legacy has evolved over time. In the post-Council era, a first generation of his friends focused on his monumental spiritual search and thus framed Abhiṣiktānanda as a spiritual seeker; then, under pressure to sustain the emergence of an indigenous Indian Christianity with regard to local theologies and interreligious practices, a second generation of biographers and acquaintances re-created Abhiṣiktānanda as a master of inculturation, a pioneer of the pluralistic approach to the theology of religions; today, a third generation of scholars, increasingly concerned with the

character and implications of this age of World Christianity, are investigating Abhiṣiktānanda's theological thought.

To the first generation of friends and scholars in the aftermath of the Vatican Council II, Abhiṣiktānanda provided an image of the spiritual seeker willing to go it alone without inherited prejudice, without institutional affiliation, without rock or refuge for his truth claims. These themes, encompassing Abhiṣiktānanda's persona and ideas, figure prominently in the first studies on him. Readers took an interest not only in Abhiṣiktānanda's radical ideas, but also in the tortured life that gave birth to them. They examined why his orthodox and eventually conformist monastic training gave way to acosmism, catalogued his spiritual battles that blurred into illnesses, questioned why he left his missionary project for a lonely life of itinerancy, and debated whether courage and authenticity were the appropriate explanation for his unique biography. The facts of the monk's solitary wandering life—his books largely ignored by specialists upon publication, his mind burdened by ceaseless doubts and eventually pain—were, for most readers, inseparable from the emphatically self-described commitment to Christ and his scandalous Neolithic Christianity, as he called the Church of his time.² And this fusion of life and work made him, especially in the eyes of Catholic readers in the decades immediately post-Council, a prophet and icon embodying freedom. In that period, it was above all the labors of Raimon Panikkar, as friend and interpreter, who rescued Abhiṣiktānanda from the risk of oblivion. Panikkar framed him as a spiritual seeker and turned him into an acosmic individualist with immediate appeal to Catholic readership already swooning over French existentialism. Abhiṣiktānanda

thought that if a religion was clutching calcified truths, one needed to sound them out relentlessly. And that's exactly what his readers in a radiant post-conciliar era tried to do. What bound Abhiṣiktānanda's array of readers is simple: they discovered in him a thinker who wrote to and of the distinctive, rare, exemplary post-dogmatic faithful, and they took it as axiomatic that they were the faithful that Abhiṣiktānanda had in mind. That Abhiṣiktānanda's readers absorbed, after all, was not so much a specific style of spiritual search, but a feeling, reading as a transformative means of reception. The history of Abhiṣiktānanda as a spiritual seeker is a story of individual readers coming to terms with themselves and with their faith, as they imagined Abhiṣiktānanda speaking to and about them.

Then, a generation of Indian theologians and pioneers of an interfaith dialogue rescued Abhiṣiktānanda from the taint of spirituality, placing him in the context of the interreligious enterprise and turning him into a founding father of an indigenous form of Christianity. Their work dramatically transformed Abhiṣiktānanda from a robust yet little-explored undercurrent of twentieth-century Catholic mission into the quintessential European who advised the Indians precisely not to inherit Europe. These theologians noted that Abhiṣiktānanda paid a heavy price for daring to strip away the comforting props of Christian concepts and dogmas, bringing readers face to face with the imperative 'to experience.' He launched his own version of interreligious dialogue, which begins with the recognition that "the myth of the Church is left behind."³ The time was ripe: how thrilling it must have been for pluralist theologians long shackled to the "Latin captivity" of the Indian Church, in R.H.S.

Boyd's phrasing.⁴ It was at this time that discussions of his thought began studding theological journals, spiritual books, and public lectures. In virtually every reading, a new Abhiṣiktānanda emerged. The interest in Abhiṣiktānanda grew so dramatically that by the 1990s observers could, without hyperbole, claim that it was one of the most significant intellectual romances of the Hindu-Christian studies. Barely known in his birth country of France during his productive lifetime, Abhiṣiktānanda had become a posthumous spiritual guru and respected intellectual. The rediscovery of Abhiṣiktānanda as a champion of Hindu-Christian dialogue presented the latter as precisely that kind of serious and passionate thinker with whom a generation of theologians engaged in the construction of a more inclusive form of Christianity could concur. The transposition of Abhiṣiktānanda's writings into a grand framework, a theological approach expressing a genuine encounter with Hinduism, was facilitated by the traits of his personality. His lack of appetite for dogmatic theology was compatible with the Indian inclination to regard experience as the primary criterion in theology. His life showed a surprising proximity with the Indian life. Throughout the story of Abhiṣiktānanda's successful inculturation in India, theologians of dialogue saw a possible path for the future of Christianity.

The first generation of scholars articulated the 'French interpretation' of Abhiṣiktānanda's work which sees his life as primarily a spiritual search, while the second generation proposed the 'Indian interpretation,' which places Abhiṣiktānanda's work as primary in the space of interreligious dialogue. These two generations of scholars produced innovative, original studies that offer new interpretations of Abhiṣiktānanda's life and thought. They

linked these interpretations to paramount issues of their age—post-Council, Indian Church—and were successful in making Abhiṣiktānanda relevant to Catholicism of their time. However, the Church of India's shift towards the social eventually questioned the primacy that Abhiṣiktānanda allocated to the spiritual over the social, or, in Abhiṣiktānanda's terms, to being over doing.

Shifting the focus from one that highlighted spirituality and interreligious dialogue to one that centered on Abhiṣiktānanda's thought became the concern of a more recent wave of scholarship. This shift occurs during a period of reappropriation of doctrinal orthodoxy and dismissal of existentialist approaches to theology. *Dominus Iesus* requires theologians to stop stretching Christian dogmas in order to accommodate theology to the dialogue with Hinduism, and to rather reframe the Christian dialogue with Asian religions according to the limits and constraints of non-negotiable dogmas. Recent scholarship is reconsidering Abhiṣiktānanda's works in the light of *Dominus Iesus* and has expanded the traditional understanding of Abhiṣiktānanda's contribution to spirituality, monasticism, and Hindu-Christian dialogue, connecting more with Christology, Trinity, theology of religions, and ecclesiology. To illustrate what a growing number of theology scholars considers the most exciting area of new research on Abhiṣiktānanda, the theme of correctness, or orthodoxy, of Abhiṣiktānanda's theology, *Jesus Christ. Quest and Context of Abhiṣiktānanda (Henri le Saux)* is a case in point. Brief introductions written by theologian Gavin D'Costa and Indologist George Gispert-Sauch SJ. add prestige to this book. Author Fr. Santhosh Sebastian Cheruvally reads Abhiṣiktānanda in the light of the magisterial teaching of the Church,

especially Vatican II's teaching on non-Christian religions and *Dominus Iesus*, from a Christological perspective, and investigates whether Abhiṣiktānanda's Christology is compatible with the question of the fullness of the revelation of Christ and the unicity of Christ as the Word made flesh. He concludes that Abhiṣiktānanda elaborated two peculiar, different Christological approaches, with only the former being healthy and nourishing. Fr. Santhosh's analysis presents a succinct version of the arc of Abhiṣiktānanda's theological development: in his early works, Abhiṣiktānanda disciplined his romantic exuberance, on the advice of his friend Monchanin, in an attempt to achieve total orthodoxy and a harmonious prose style; later he tended to give free rein to his flamboyant imagination.

The way Fr. Santhosh wrestles with Abhiṣiktānanda's orthodoxy is acutely similar to the manner in which other theologians struggle to protect Abhiṣiktānanda from the crime of apostasy—while keeping distance from his theological synthesis. In Monchanin's and Panikkar's view, Abhiṣiktānanda maintained his faith but went theologically off course. Fr. Santhosh's conclusions reinforce a pre-existent conventional scholarship narrative, which accepts as wisdom the idea that Abhiṣiktānanda's status as a prophetic figure in the Hindu-Christian dialogue operates at the level of personal experience, not of intellectual thought or theology. For a long time, a small circle of Abhiṣiktānanda's friends, scholars, and practitioners has managed to live with the cognitive dissonance of thinking that Abhiṣiktānanda made a mistake by rejecting theological formulations, that is, he was theologically heterodox; regardless, to that circle he remains an important source of theological insight and

this tight group would likely smooth out the inherent incongruity, assuming with Raimon Panikkar that “Abhiṣiktānanda's *experience* [is] of great importance.” Panikkar continues cautiously framing Abhiṣiktānanda not as a model—“I do not say that he offers us a model to be copied uncritically”—but in the more general sense of a symbol—“he symbolizes a life lived in depth in the midst of a world that has fallen apart.”⁵

A question can be raised about why Abhiṣiktānanda has proved so popular: What is the life and thought of an outsider doing in an ecclesial reality like Catholicism? Abhiṣiktānanda became the exemplar for those seeking, in a nutshell, not instruction, but example, not intellectual doctrine but the visceral sense of liberation in hearing the inner voice. Thus, a case can be made that until *Dominus Iesus*, Catholics studied Abhiṣiktānanda not to get closer to him but to get closer to *themselves*; they saw in him a reflection of their own best image. Since 2000, however, the reverse process has been at work: For decades, the name Abhiṣiktānanda has typically come up in the context of the Hindu-Christian dialogue that he helped pioneer. In an era of pluralistic religious awareness and post-colonialism, interreligious dialogue inspired many Christians, especially young people, with messages of respect and mutual understanding in the face of enduring inclusivism. In these present times, however, in which Catholic theologians live under the constellation of *Dominus Iesus*, Abhiṣiktānanda's existentialist approach to dialogue appears as sort of fighting a war from a forgotten time. The reappropriation of doctrinal orthodoxy in Catholic theology treats Abhiṣiktānanda as someone who is anachronistic. The immense effect of *Dominus*

Jesus on interreligious dialogue, on one hand, and the current trend to subject Abhiṣiktānanda's non-theological predisposition to theological criticism, on the other, suggest the possibility that Abhiṣiktānanda studies as a subfield is submitted—despite the enduring interest—to a risk of irrelevance. Only time will say if the current intellectual trend of theological criticism is the most appropriate form of reading of Abhiṣiktānanda's work in this age of World Christianity.

Second Part

In this part, I offer a chronological interpretation of a body of knowledge, which I labeled Abhiṣiktānanda studies. According to a basic principle of reception history, the question of the legitimacy of one's grasp of Abhiṣiktānanda's ideas is beside the point. Anyone who tries to understand Abhiṣiktānanda is confronted with at least three different views about the very core matter of his legacy. The first generation treats Abhiṣiktānanda as a Western spiritual searcher, the second generation considers him as an Indian pioneer of interreligious dialogue, and the third generation addresses Abhiṣiktānanda as a spiritual teacher and assesses his doctrinal orthodoxy. So pervasive is the multiplicity of readings, so characteristic of Abhiṣiktānanda interpretations are the variety of expositions, that one may argue that an attempt at understanding Abhiṣiktānanda is still a work in progress.

Spiritual Seeker

In the first two decades after his death, people who had a direct contact with Abhiṣiktānanda and who had direct access to his original writings considered him a spiritual searcher.⁶ Studies on Abhiṣiktānanda's monastic experience and spiritual search are

the most common products of this generation of scholars. Shirley du Boulay's *The Cave of the Heart* was the second biography to appear, following James Stuart's *Swami Abhiṣiktānanda: His Life Told through His Letters*. There are also tributes written by Abhiṣiktānanda's friends, such as David Rogers's memoir, and personal recollections by acquaintances like Odette Baumer-Despeigne, George Gispert-Sauch, S.J., and others. Finally, excerpts from Abhiṣiktānanda's journal were edited by his friend and internationally renowned scholar Raimon Panikkar, who published the content as *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart*.⁷

Full of poetic and yet incomplete claims written in a personal, diarist style, Abhiṣiktānanda's published and unpublished works established their author as preeminent spiritual pathfinder. Not surprisingly, this line of thought drives scholars to the conclusion that Abhiṣiktānanda's legacy lies in his authentic, uncompromised, serious search of the Absolute. His merit was to have lived from the inside, in a wholly authentic way, a passage through religions to the ultimate Source. In his diary and in the letters, he wrote to clarify his thoughts for himself and for his friends, although his thought was always evolving. Accordingly, Abhiṣiktānanda was seen as a spiritual writer, more suited to live new experiences, elaborate new intuitions and insights, and open new spiritual paths. The inevitable implication is that Abhiṣiktānanda poses questions rather than offering answers.

Interfaith Pioneer

Then the focus shifted. The first generation of scholars and commentators concerned with Abhiṣiktānanda's spiritual life and writings was replaced with those more interested in his experience of inculturation at the border between Christianity and

Hinduism. He was initially recognized as a disciple of a leading pioneer of the inclusive theology of religion before turning his devotion to Hindu sages and becoming a bridge between two religions. Investigation now focused on the efforts that led Abhiṣiktānanda to be actively involved in the indigenization of the Indian Catholic Church during and after the Vatican Council, with the collateral elaboration of an attempted synthesis of Advaita and Trinity. Abhiṣiktānanda's writings were commonly viewed by this second generation of scholars as contributions to the development of Hindu-Christian dialogue in the context of a pluralistic approach to theology of religions.

Abhiṣiktānanda's importance was recognized as providing the spiritual basis and practical example for dialogue, and for sustaining, in the last years of his life, the process of inculturation of the Indian Church and formation of an indigenized Christian theology. He was applauded or attacked as the author of works of theological and spiritual compass, who took the ideas and methods of Monchanin and Panikkar and developed them less prudently and far beyond anything their first authors had imagined. While Abhiṣiktānanda's work was predominantly seen as an episode in the history of the encounters between religions, reservations about his theology remained, especially regarding his synthesis of Advaita and Trinity.

The variety and ramifications of Abhiṣiktānanda's commitment to Hindu-Christian dialogue have also been investigated with regard to the notion that "dialogue creates theology," treating theology as the result of Abhiṣiktānanda's commitment to inter-religious dialogue rather than as a cause of dialogue. In this context, dialogue does not only produce "mutual understanding," but

also empowers "self-understanding." By bringing to the surface and making explicit the implicit, deepest assumptions of one's own religion, inter-religious dialogue acts as a step in the direction of self-reflection and self-criticism. Ragunta Yesurathnam's study returns to the subject of Abhiṣiktānanda's contribution to Christian dialogical theology, while George Gispert-Sauch, SJ., suggests that Abhiṣiktānanda's life and thought exercised a certain amount of influence on Jacques Dupuis, a Belgian Jesuit and the leading theologian on the subject of religious pluralism.⁸

Some works not totally focused on Abhiṣiktānanda still show the influence he exerted on the Church of India, a Church that is dealing with religious pluralism and the need to feel inculturated in India. Indian Catholicism operates in a post-colonial, post-Council setting: it requires being less dependent upon Western theological and philosophical categories and relies more on principles of the conditioned nature of all religious languages. Some studies recognize Abhiṣiktānanda's contribution to Indian Christian theology and practice in the areas of the movement of Christian ashrams, the indigenizing of the Roman Catholic Church in India, the framing of an Indian model of inculturation, and the development of an Indian Christian theology.⁹ A few studies consider his life and thought in the context of comparative studies, addressing Abhiṣiktānanda as part of the group of Western expatriates in India.¹⁰

Blurring the Boundaries

By strategically locating Abhiṣiktānanda in two broad theological areas of interest, spirituality and inter-religious dialogue, the first two generations of scholars depicted him

either as a mystic or as a pioneer of a pluralistic approach to Hinduism. When portrayed as a spiritual seeker, Abhiṣiktānanda is pursuing an individual path of realization. He seems to come out of an ancient past, with his readings of the Greek mystics of the 4th and 5th centuries and his tendency toward acosmism. He belongs to an old order, the Benedictine order, and appears to belong to an even older age, the epoch of the Desert Fathers, the early Christian hermits, ascetics, and monks who preferred to live in the desert rather than compromise their search of the divine in the imperial church of Constantine. When considered in the context of Hindu-Christian dialogue, he is a pioneer who opens new paths for the benefit of many. He seems to break the archaic mental boundaries of the Roman Catholicism of his time, embracing the notion that world religions, including Hinduism, are true and equally valid in their communication of the truth about God, the world, and salvation. When the two polarities of his life and thought, spirituality and inter-religious dialogue, are connected, two main stories can be told. First, Abhiṣiktānanda reaches the highest level of spirituality through his open-minded approach to Hinduism. He accepts the truth of Hinduism and through a Hindu spiritual path he reaches the deepest sources of mysticism. Second, Abhiṣiktānanda commits to a radical spiritual quest and through such a search, breaking one mental barrier after the other, he reaches a pluralistic view of world religions, including Hinduism and Christianity. Both stories suggest a portrait of the ancient monk with a modern mindset. The connection between spirituality and interreligious dialogue has been called by Wayne Teasdale “interspirituality.” The term is supposed to denote a ‘new mysticism’ emerging out of the “sharing of ultimate

experiences across [religious] traditions.”¹¹ “Aligned with early works on Abhiṣiktānanda, which make clear that his encounter with Hinduism cannot be investigated without referencing his monastic vocation, comes a more recent study by Benedictine monk André Gozier. Gozier’s work focuses on Henri Le Saux’s encounter with the Upanishads.¹² New studies research Abhiṣiktānanda as a primary example of inter-monastic dialogue, in which the very reality of monasticism constitutes common ground for the meeting.¹³

A specific area of research highlights the connection between the experience and the interior nature of Abhiṣiktānanda’s commitment to dialogue, the spiritual-contemplative approach to dialogue. These studies reveal the spiritual and mystical dimension of his experience, such as new monographs on Abhiṣiktānanda that investigate the non-Christian destination of his spiritual journey (Oldmeadow) and the mystical dimension of his experience (Gozier, Trianni and Skudlarek), contributing to the already voluminous output on Abhiṣiktānanda’s encounter with the divine.¹⁴

Scholarly works on Abhiṣiktānanda’s commitment in Hindu-Christian dialogue investigate Abhiṣiktānanda’s specific approach to dialogue, a Christian monastic approach to Advaitic experience, in which an element or two of the approach receives specific attention. Some of the recent studies on Abhiṣiktānanda focus on the fruitfulness of his life consecrated to the encounter with Hinduism, in continuity with a line of investigation that links Abhiṣiktānanda’s personal experience with engagement in Hinduism.¹⁵ Some research on Abhiṣiktānanda, including two doctoral theses, focus on his commitment to Hindu-Christian dialogue in the context of the

emerging topics of multiple religious belonging and borderline identities.¹⁶

Theologian

There is now emerging a third generation of scholars, digging up all the bits and pieces related to Abhiṣiktānanda, indulging in theological criticism. These scholars present Abhiṣiktānanda's work as material for theological elaboration and they analyze his thinking from a theological perspective. This new generation of scholars and commentators presents an important thesis, that is, in the aftermath of *Dominus Jesus*, Abhiṣiktānanda should be studied in the context of contemporary Catholic theology, not necessarily restricted to India. Much of this new scholarship is built upon a revisionist literature that has enlarged the traditional understanding of Abhiṣiktānanda's contribution in terms of spirituality and inter-faith dialogue, while attempting to engage him with greater theological concerns.¹⁷

The work of these scholars, disconnected by time from Abhiṣiktānanda's life, can be classified according to two well-known distinct approaches to the history of Christian ideas: *Christian thought* and *Christian theology*. The first is associated with a focus of interest on the content of Abhiṣiktānanda's theological ideas rather their formal structure; the second emphasizes a reading of Abhiṣiktānanda's ideas as primarily concerned with the formal structure of the Christian thought of the period. The latter might eventually connect Abhiṣiktānanda's ideas to the internal history of the Christian doctrines. More recent studies try to decipher the theological core of Abhiṣiktānanda's thought in a post-*Dominus Iesus* age, that is, within the boundaries of the Roman Catholic tradition, with specific interest in Christology, Trinity,

and ecclesiology.¹⁸ Some scholars address the discursive nature of his interreligious dialogue, a dialogue that has considerable hermeneutical significance and seeks genuine understanding—rather than experience—for sake of a shared quest/pilgrimage and search of truth/absolute. Paolo Trianni's recent work on Henri Le Saux's encounter with Indian philosophy falls within the broader area of study that investigates the intellectual journey that was Abhiṣiktānanda's engagement with Hindu-Christian dialogue.¹⁹

Recent Developments

Today there is burgeoning interest in the life and work of this obscure but extraordinary monk. In 2010, an international symposium at Shantivanam, the ashram founded by Henri Le Saux and Jules Monchanin, was initiated to commemorate the centenary of Le Saux's birth. Other workshops had been held in France (Abby of Landevennec in Brittany), India (Uttarakhand in the Indian Himalayas), and England (Gaunts House, Wimborne, Dorset). The Shantivanam conference yielded a collection of papers, published in spring 2011, under the title *Witness to the Fullness of Light: The Vision and Relevance of the Benedictine Monk Swami Abhiṣiktānanda*. Another selection of papers, gathered on the centenary of Abhiṣiktānanda's birth, has been published in French and in English.²⁰ The Abhiṣiktānanda Centre for Interreligious Dialogue, formed in 2008 after the closing of the Abhiṣiktānanda Society (1978-2008) to promote Swami Abhiṣiktānanda's thought, plans to republish Abhiṣiktānanda's titles, all of which are now out of print. The Centre has recently republished two well-known titles, and six more titles are slated for republication over the next few years.²¹

Notes

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² *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart*, p. 319 (September 9, 1970). The full reference is provided later.

³ R.H.S. Boyd, *India and the Latin Captivity of the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

⁴ *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart*, p. 373 (February 17, 1973).

⁵ Introduction to *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart*, pp. xvi-xvii; italics are mine.

⁶ In general, bibliographic data in footnotes follows the sequence of quotations in the main text; if not quoted in the main text, the bibliographic entries are organized chronologically. In this case, a selection of the most recent bibliography is highlighted, while the less recent bibliography is added, from the oldest date of publishing to the latest. Priority is given to books over book chapters and academic articles.

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⁸ Raguntha Yesurathnam, *A Christian Dialogical Theology: The Contribution of Swami Abhishikṭānanda* (Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 2006). Previous articles on the same topic are: K.P. Aleaz, "Dialogical Theologies: A Search for an Indian Perspective," *Asia Journal of Theology* 6 (1992), pp. 274-291; Edward T. Ulrich, "Swami

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⁹ Robin H.S. Boyle, *Swami Abhishiktananda (1910-1973)*, in: Robin H.S. Boyle, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Madras: The Christian Literary Society, 1975), pp. 287-297; Skudlarek, *God’s Harp String*, op. cit.. Previous work on the same topic: Kalliath, *The Word in the Cave*, op. cit.; Sunand Sumithra, Swami Abhishiktananda, in Sunand Sumithra, *Christian Theologies from an Indian Perspective* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1990), pp. 154-158; M.M. Thomas and P.T. Thomas, Swami Abhishiktananda, in M.M. Thomas and P.T. Thomas, *Towards an Indian Christian Theology. Life and Thought of Some Pioneers* (Tiruvalla: The New Day Publications of India, 1992), pp. 203-207; Felix Wilfred, Widening the Horizons: Swami Abhishiktananda (1910-1973), in Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations. The Journey of Indian Theology* (Madras: University of Madras Press, 1993), pp. 53-60. See also: Anthony Kalliath, “Swami Abhishiktananda: Theologian of Inter-

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¹² André Gozier, OSB, *Henri Le Saux, un moine chrétien à l’écoute des Upanishads* (Paris-Orbey: Arfuyen, 2008). See also: Marie-Françoise Euverte, Françoise Jacquin, Jean-Gabriel Gelineau et al., *Henri Le Saux, moine de Kergonan* (Saint-Maur: Parole et Silence, 2012). Previous works on the same topic: Emmanuel Vattakuzhy, *Indian Christian*

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