

UNIVERSITY OF CHICHESTER

Institute of Arts and Humanities

**ADVAITA, CHRISTIANITY AND THE THIRD SPACE:
A STUDY OF ABHISHIKTANANDA AND BEDE GRIFFITHS.**

by

Jonathan Gordon Smith

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2019

Abstract

This study examines what occurs theologically in the space in which two religions meet in an immersive experience of encounter with an attitude of interreligious learning. Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths are examined as examples of such religious meeting and cultural interplay. Postcolonial theory, particularly Third Space Theory, supported by comparative theology, is used to analyze their texts in detail and to identify the conceptual movements taking place in this meeting between Christianity and *Advaita*. In their work they develop hybrid theologies which lie between the two traditions, but which change the respective theological imaginaries and raise questions relating to multiple religious belonging. The Third Space Theory of Homi Bhabha, modified for the purpose of this analysis, exposes mimicry, enunciation of difference, anxiety, and hybridity, while the work of Edward Said is employed to identify constructions of the Other which do not have a genuine referent. Comparative theology supports this analysis by providing an appreciation of how Abhishiktananda and Griffiths approach another religious tradition, and how they handle religious concepts and comparisons between the two traditions. The hybridities they develop in the Third Space of encounter challenge both traditions to reflect on the experience of the Other and question exclusivist theology. However, it is apparent that to maintain the integrity and coherence of each tradition a strong sense of particularism is essential, and where this is lost interreligious learning suffers. In providing tools to identify conceptual movements in the meeting of traditions, Third Space Theory acknowledges the alterity of religions, and gives a deep understanding of the 'same but different' nature of such encounters. Hybridity, properly understood, then becomes a step in the process of interreligious learning, a step which leads to new insights for the home tradition.

Contents

Declaration of Authorship	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Introduction	1
1. Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths in India	
1. Comparative Biography	9
2. The Space of Meeting	21
2.1 Relating to the Cultural Space	21
2.2 The Hindu View of Nature and Space	29
2.3 The Poetics of Space	34
3. Conclusion	39
2. Commentary and Critique	
1. Introduction	41
2. Approaches to the Theology	42
2.1 Adverse Reaction to the Theology	43
2.2 Critical Accounts of the Theology	48
3. Approaches to Incommensurability – Mysticism, Reason and Construction	55
4. Hybridity and Syncretism	60
5. Conclusion	62
3. Analyzing the Interreligious Space 1	
1. Introduction	65
2. The Theological Imaginary	65
3. Comparative Theology and Interreligious Dialogue	71
4. Multiple Religious Belonging	81
5. Conclusion	89
4. Analyzing the Interreligious Space 2	
1. Introduction	91
2. The Historical Colonial and Post-Colonial Context	91
3. Postcolonialism	100
4. Orientalism	105
4.1 Edward Said	105
4.2 The Power of Construction	108
5. Homi Bhabha and the Third Space	116
6. Conclusion	133
5. Space, Tradition and Creation	
1. Introduction	135
2. Spaces, People and Symbols	136
3. Religion and Dharma	144
4. Creation	156
6. Supreme Being, Incarnation and Human Beings	
1. Introduction	167
2. Two Concepts of Supreme Being	167
3. Trinity and Saccidananda	170
4. Christ and Incarnation	179
5. Human Kind and Supreme Being in Relationship	189
7. Conclusion	201
Bibliography	219

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Jonathan Gordon Smith

declare that the thesis entitled

ADVAITA, CHRISTIANITY AND THE THIRD SPACE: A STUDY OF ABHISHIKTANANDA AND BEDE GRIFFITHS

and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission.

Signed:



Date: 8 May 2019

Acknowledgements

I would like thank Professor Simon Barker and Dr Stephen Roberts for their guidance, and to thank Stephen for his help at the outset in the development of this project.

I would also like to thank my wife, Rachel, for her patience with my absence during the many hours of study.

Introduction

This study is an examination of what occurs theologically in the space in which two religions meet with an attitude of interreligious learning. It is not concerned with meetings that take place solely in the academy, but rather with meetings that take place within a situation of religious observance. In such a meeting new insights into theology may be found and new theologies developed, but the aim here is to outline the occurrences within the development of those theologies rather than to critique the theologies themselves. To achieve this aim and to see how two theologies are influencing each other, critical analysis of the new theology will be necessary, but only as a means of understanding the process that is taking place in the space in which the two religions are meeting.

The notion of a 'space' of meeting is central to this study's methodology, and theories developed around the concept of a 'Third Space', particularly those of Homi Bhabha, will be deployed, although much re-understood in the context of this study. Third Space theory proposes that when two cultures meet, usually in a colonial or post-colonial setting, there is a space of encounter between the two cultures, a Third Space, in which various processes take place. Probably the most obvious process is the formation of a hybridity which shares elements of both cultures but is distinct from them. This study is proposing that in the meeting between two religions, even in a situation in which vastly unequal institutional power is not a major factor in the meeting, elements of Third Space theory can be used to throw a light on the interplay between two religious systems.

Alongside Third Space theory, and prior to it both in postcolonial theory and in this study, are found theories of Orientalism, originating in the work of Edward Said. This provides another tool that can be used to identify what is happening when cultures (and religions) meet. Again, most writing on Orientalism is concerned with situations in which there is an imbalance in power between a colonial power and a colonized people, but this study maintains that it does provide some useful tools, particularly in terms of construction of the Other and of oneself that can be used in the context outlined here.

In terms of methodology, postcolonial theory does not provide a means of assessing comparisons, similarities, congruencies or incongruities that are drawn theologically between two religions. In using it to examine the space in which two religions meet, postcolonial theory is being employed here to show how each is influencing the other, but to do that this study needs a way of examining the nature of theological concepts: is a proposed similarity between theologies really so, or is an incongruity being masked; what is the theological stance towards another religion's beliefs? This study therefore also needs to use some of the methods of comparative theology to assess the nature of the occurrences in the Third Space.

Plainly such a study needs, as its evidence base, a situation in which two religions are meeting, and the greater the extent to which they are meeting in lives and practice the more applicable an approach which borrows postcolonial theory is likely to be. It is a group of theories about what happens 'on the ground', and how personal belief and allegiance are affected, rather than concerning itself only with conceptual expression. Also necessary, however, is a theology emerging out of the meeting which can be analyzed to show what movements and processes are taking place.

This study has chosen the work of Henri Le Saux, later known as Abhishiktananda, and Bede Griffiths, and the meeting of Christianity and *Advaita* in their lives and writings, as the sources that will be examined to explore this Third Space of religious meeting. Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths were both Benedictine monks, and as such began their journey as 'orthodox' Christians. *Advaita* is considered to be the most prominent *Brahminical* tradition in Hinduism, and is concerned with the belief in the radical non-dualism existing between the supreme Being, human beings and, arguably, the world. As will become clear in this study, religious traditions are hybrid by nature and experience a mix of influences. *Advaita* is no exception and as seems most appropriate from the work of these two authors this study will focus mainly on the 'classic' *Advaita* represented in the work of Śankara, whose thinking is represented throughout *Advaita*, while recognizing that there are many offshoots which there is not space to deal with in detail.

Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were prominent in the Christian *Ashram* movement in the second half of the twentieth century. Both were involved in the most well-known

Christian *ashram*, Shantivanam. Their experience of the religion of India was highly immersive – they adopted the clothes of Indian religious, they used ancient Indian scripture in their Christian worship, and adopted aspects of Indian religious imagery. It is because of the depth of their involvement in these two religions and the extent to which they themselves occupied an in-between space which shared aspects of both Christianity and *Advaita* that their work has been chosen as an example of a Third Space of meeting.

Third party sources which describe their lives, their theology and the life within the *ashrams* they lived in or led will be examined and give some indication through the interpretation of others of the nature of their in-between space. In the second half of this study it will be their own writing which will provide the evidence base employed in this study. In these writings they sought to reconcile Christian and *Advaitic* beliefs, and to account for areas where reconciliation was impossible for them to find. The writings therefore give some indications as to how Christianity and *Advaita* affect each other, how they ‘react’ in each other’s presence. The hypothesis of this study is that these reactions can be usefully examined employing a methodology drawn from colonial and postcolonial studies in which two cultures are meeting, supported by analysis drawn from comparative theology. Temporal power play is entirely absent from the stories of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, and account must be taken of this in using such methodologies.

Several times in this research I make the assertion that the notion of unequal ‘power’, an account of which a reader might expect in research which is using a postcolonial methodology, is largely absent as a factor in the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. This needs an explanation. I do not ignore the history of unequal power, and give a brief account of the historical colonial and post-colonial context in chapter four. However, it is clear that these authors had no instrumentality in exercising material power over those Indians they encountered, for example by involvement in post-colonial structures. Nor did they attempt in any way to promote Western ways of living – rather the reverse, in that they were keen to adopt Indian lifestyles. It is true that they were writing in a post-colonial setting, that is in a country that had recently experienced colonization, and were from Western backgrounds. In terms of Edward Said’s study of Orientalism, Western culture, particularly Britain and America, had created the interest in the Orient, of which these authors are an example, and framed the terms of the dialogue between East and

West.¹ Their dialogue is inevitably influenced by this factor. This is most clearly seen in Abhishiktananda's and Griffiths' preference for the Indian *Brahminical* tradition which hung over from the colonial period.

In terms of actual influence over the lives of the Indian population the results of colonization were present in India during their time there, particularly in such institutions as government, law and education to mention only three. Had Abhishiktananda and Griffiths been involved in Indian institutions that reflected past colonial power, it would be appropriate to make more of unequal power structures and colonial history in dealing with their texts, rather than focussing on the power of the Western Orientalist influence on their discourse. However, they engaged with only minor social interventions around their *ashram* of Shantivanam.²

Indian Christianity had also been deeply influenced during the colonial period, and that influence remained in Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions into post-colonial times. Had this study been about Indian Christianity, it would be entirely appropriate to deal more fully with the way in which the colonial period had led to a development of a Western-originated Christianity, distinct from the indigenous Syriac tradition, and how that developed into postcolonial influences upon the culture of India. However, Abhishiktananda and Griffiths almost completely omit the theology of Indian Christianity from their writing, ignoring, for example, *Dalit* theology. Their interest in indigenous Christianity is limited to Syriac texts, some of which they used in liturgy.

It is also true that as Benedictine monks they had inherited two thousand years of Christian tradition – a weight of tradition that deeply influenced their thinking. However, despite the presence of Christianity in India for many centuries before British colonization, there is no literature on the influence of Christianity upon Hinduism,³

¹ See Said, p12

² The attitude in general of India to colonial influence on social structures, which is beyond the scope of this study, is a complex story, particularly in the period that has come to be called 'the Indian renaissance' of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The many strands of influence and resistance are outlined in Majumdar's 'Indian Renaissance'.

³ The most obvious exception is the banning of sati, or 'widow immolation', during the colonial period. This was not, however, only promoted by the colonial power but also amongst Hindus such as Rammohun Roy, and was based to a large extent on the fact of the coercion of widows. Also, the practice was not limited in India to Hindus and could be seen as cultural rather than religious. See Mani.

though there is literature on nationalist Hinduism's strong repudiation of any such influence in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. There is considerable literature on the influence of colonial Christianity on India, particularly centred on Christianity's conversion efforts and its influence on such institutions as education and healthcare, but none upon changes in Hinduism itself, nor in *Advaita*, resulting from Christianity's presence in the sub-continent. This goes to show that the 'power' of the Christian colonizer, whilst possibly increasing the inclination to convert in some instances, had little effect on core Hindu beliefs even during the colonial period. This lack of effect might be expected in a tradition considerably longer in its history than Christianity, and deeply rooted in the daily practice of the indigenous people.

Since Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were concerned with a meeting between Christianity and *Advaita*, not with influencing indigenous Indian Christianity, and both fairly comprehensively moved away from fulfilment theology, it is not appropriate to bracket their work with more missiological or social colonial or post-colonial endeavours. It is because of this, because of their lack of interest in colonially originated Christianity, and because of the absence of evidence of Christianity's ability to influence Hinduism itself, that the play of power to which I refer concerns the nature of the discourse in which they were engaged and which was influenced by historic Western attitudes to India. In this discourse they made Orientalist constructions and interpreted Hindu terminology using Christian theology.

The first chapter of this study is a comparative biography of these two writers, with an appreciation of how they related to the Indian space culturally and in terms of place. The second chapter is a review of how their work has been received in terms of the issues it raises.

The third chapter begins to look at tools which can be used to analyze what is occurring in this Third Space. It looks at the concept of the theological imaginary, which this study uses to understand the space holistically, at comparative theology which will be used to examine the emergent theology, and at questions of religious belonging. Chapter four considers how postcolonial theory is relevant to studying the theology of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, and considers the colonial and post-colonial context and

postcolonial theory, including theories of Orientalism and Homi Bhabha's Third Space theory.

Chapters five and six examine seven theological themes which emerge from the writing of these two authors. In treating these themes the authors have drawn comparisons and differences, and sought to discover new insights into both Christian and *Advaitic* traditions. In examining these the internal anatomy, so to speak, of the Third Space which Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths occupied becomes apparent. In the final conclusion in chapter seven I reflect upon what Third Space theory has laid bare in this anatomy of the meeting of two religions, as experienced and expressed by the two authors.

Finally, everyone who writes about religion writes from a particular standpoint, out of a particular personal history and a certain tradition. However much one tries to understand another tradition, one's own acculturation plays a major part in one's thinking, either consciously or unconsciously; there is no neutral ground on which to stand. It is therefore appropriate, since I am writing about Christianity and *Advaita*, to give a brief account of my own religious belonging. I was born into an observant Anglican Christian family, and remained a member of that church until my late teens. At that stage I joined a British group which was studying *Advaita*, learning to meditate in the Indian tradition. I stayed in that group until my early thirties, when I re-joined the Church of England. After a few years I trained as a licenced Reader or lay minister in that church. Having some personal experience of two traditions I have been unable to regard either as invalid at any stage in my journey. When in the *Advaitic* group I had no trouble with the concept of Christ as Saviour, and since returning to the church I have looked to understand its own tradition of mysticism which finds echoes in Eastern religions. During the thirty years since returning to the church as a member, I have regarded both *Advaita* and Christianity as expressions of the deepest attempts to find unity with the divine, and have tried to understand how, in my own experience, the two traditions relate to each other.

Note on terminology

Throughout this study it is difficult to avoid the use of the imprecise and generalized term 'Hinduism'. No other term exists; even 'the religion of India' is inaccurate, ignoring as it does Islam and Buddhism when applied to the religion of the sub-continent. The term 'Hinduism' is therefore used, but the problems that exist are explored in chapter four. Also in chapter four, it is noted that 'religion' is a Western concept, and its equivalence to the Hindu 'Dharma' can by no means be taken as a given. In chapter five the difference between 'religion' and 'dharma' is examined as one of the theological themes that arise in Abhishiktananda's and Griffiths' writing. The term 'religion' is, however used in this study for ease of reading.

Chapter 1

Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths in India

1. A COMPARATIVE BIOGRAPHY

There are a number of sources that deal in some detail with the biographies of Henri Le Saux, who later took the name Abhishiktananda, and Bede Griffiths, and since their later work reflects the earlier development of each to some degree, it is appropriate to begin by examining these sources. Differences in their personal histories can be discerned in their later work, and placing the two stories side-by-side is instructive.

Both Alan Griffiths and Henri Le Saux enjoyed close family relationships as children, particularly with their mothers. Le Saux's vocation to the Roman Catholic church found its roots in his vow at fourteen to follow that path if his mother recovered from serious illness, and he remained devoted to her until her death. For Griffiths, the figure of 'the mother' became important in his later theology; he expressed an experience of enlightenment towards the end of his life as one of motherly love. Both were childhoods spent in the countryside, in the case of Griffiths following a financial crisis for the family. Nature, and God in nature, was important for Griffiths from his time at school at Christ's Hospital in Sussex, important to the extent that Judson Trapnell, in his biography of Griffiths,¹ makes a walk through the Sussex countryside the starting point of his account, with an echo that reverberates throughout the book. Shirley De Boulay, in her life of Abhishiktananda² recounts a childhood in Breton for Le Saux as a model and guide to his six siblings which led to a life-long attachment to the nationality and culture of his birth. Murray Rogers, an Anglican missionary and close friend, remembering meeting Abhishiktananda in India sometime after 1959, recalls that he was, '...as well as getting thoroughly into India by then, really a Brittany man of the sea...'³

The educations of Griffiths and Le Saux could not have been more different. Le Saux's education took place in Roman Catholic seminaries, whilst Griffiths' education was at an Anglican private school and Oxford. Unlike Le Saux, Griffiths spent some time between

¹ Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths*

² De Boulay, *The Cave of the Heart*

³ Rogers, p8

his education and entry into monastic life. After time at Oxford and with his friends in an experiment in joint simple living at Eastington, his reading of the Bible, particularly the New Testament, deepened, alongside a correspondence with C.S. Lewis, who had been a tutor at Oxford. At this stage Griffiths was more interested in seeking truth through imagination and poetry, as were the friends he lived with at Eastington, Martyn Skinner and Hugh Waterman. De Boulay recounts how he regarded the Church as an ossified institution, unsuited to guiding people in the modern age – too tied up with doctrine and authority.⁴ Reading St Paul, however, presented Griffiths with an account of faith that he could not ignore. He found himself caught between the polarities of reason and faith, and this was an indication that he was to retain a need for a recourse to reason throughout his life, up to the time of his final illness and strokes, when that need weakened and he was able to rely fully on intuitive understanding.

His short time in London (at Oxford House in Bethnel Green), filled him with deep unease. Having lived austere at Eastington, and made simplicity of life and closeness to nature such cornerstones of his search, the city unnerved him. Later, shortly after arriving in India, in writing of the world of relativity and duality, he admitted to finding it immensely complex, and that he had 'long given up hope of coping with it.'⁵ His response to the East End of London was to spend a whole night in prayer at Oxford House. In a very real sense the future emphases of his life are apparent before he visited Prinknash for the first time in 1932. His focus on symbol and his interest in poetry and imagination continued.

Trapnell states:

According to Coleridge and Griffiths, the poetic symbol actually makes the reality being symbolized present to the soul so that knowledge in the full sense may occur. Furthermore, Griffiths implies that in making a reality present, the reality 'that is truth itself', that is, *reality as a whole*, somehow communicates itself through the poetic symbol.⁶

Alongside this went his dissatisfaction with the current expression of faith by the Church, his balancing of reason, faith and existential experience, his love of nature and distrust of

⁴ Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, p61

⁵ Griffiths, *On Friendship*, p147

⁶ Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths*, p29

an over-industrialized culture, and his flight to prayer and contemplation in the face of modern life. On Christmas Eve 1932 he was received into the Roman Catholic Church, on 15th January 1933 he was clothed as a postulant at Prinknash Abbey, and at the end of that year was received as a novice. In 1937 he took his solemn vows, and was priested in 1940, shortly after which he was made guest master.

For Le Saux the transition to monastic life was quicker, though not without personal conflict. On leaving the Grand Séminaire he entered the Benedictine monastery at Kergonan in 1929, aged nineteen years. Early on he decided that no half measures would do, and commented in a letter of 1929: 'A monk cannot accept mediocrity, only extremes are appropriate for him.'⁷ This could be seen as a comment on his whole life, and an indication that his commitment to hold nothing back from his search was a decision made early on. In 1931 he had to leave the monastery to do national service in the military, but in 1935 he made his solemn vows. He was called up in 1939, but was not involved in action, and returned to the monastery in 1940 following the fall of France.

Le Saux arrived in India some seven years before Griffiths, and Du Boulay claims that in Le Saux's 1942 unpublished book, *Amour et Sagesse*,⁸ written at his mother's request, there are early signs of him reading outside Christian texts, and as early as 1943, 'he was filled with a passionate desire to go to India,'⁹ a date which is apparent from later writing. However it is not clear where this interest came from, and certainly not from the library at Kergonan. In 1944 his abbot gave him permission to approach various church authorities about establishing a contemplative monastic life in India. A letter to the bishop of Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu was passed on to Father Jules Monchanin, who was visiting and who regarded it as an answer to prayer. Monchanin had gone to India in 1939 and though an intellectual, 'preferred to do parochial work'.¹⁰ Le Saux was invited to India and received the appropriate permissions to go, and arrived in 1948. Both were determined to live in the Indian manner, but at this stage both he and Monchanin sought this lifestyle in order to commend Christianity to Indians. Monchanin retained this emphasis, whilst Le Saux moved away from it over a period of years. Le Saux quickly

⁷ Du Boulay, *The Cave of the Heart*, p17

⁸ Abhishiktananda, *Amour et Sagesse*, 1942 (unpublished typescript) Abhishiktananda Society, referenced Du Boulay, *The Cave of the Heart*, p265

⁹ Ibid, p39

¹⁰ Ibid, p47

realized that many Christian good works in India were 'attracting followers motivated more by hunger than by spirituality'.¹¹

The seeds of Griffiths' interest in Eastern religions are clearer to determine. He records an interest in the teachings and life of Mahatma Gandhi dating back to his school days,¹² and that he read both the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Dhammapada* at about the time of his stay at Oxford House.¹³ Later that interest was fired at Farnborough, where he met an Indian Benedictine, Father Benedict Alapatt who wanted to start a Christian monastery in India. The interest grew at Plascarden as he continued his reading, which was influenced by the historian of religion and culture, Christopher Dawson, who had a lively interest in Eastern religions.¹⁴ In 1955 Griffiths and Alapatt got permission to go to India, where Griffiths felt immediate empathy with Indian life but recognized that Christianity would have to be fundamentally transformed to express itself in Indian terms.

After arriving in India, Le Saux (who assumed the name Abhishiktananda soon afterwards) visited Hindu *ashrams*, though it is difficult to realize how unorthodox and risky (in terms of church opinion) this was at the time. In *An Indian Benedictine Ashram* written by Abhishiktananda and Monchanin in 1951 there was a clear indication that both men still held firmly to fulfillment theology, stating that 'Indian wisdom is tainted with erroneous tendencies.'¹⁵ But in 1949 Monchanin and Abhishiktananda had visited the *ashram* of Ramana Maharshi, who was to be the figure who first fired Abhishiktananda with an understanding of *Advaita*, and also with an authentic experience of the power of the *guru*. Maharshi's *ashram* was on the holy mountain of Arunachala – the place where Abhishiktananda first had a hermitage and where he developed his dedication to silence and meditation – and it is maybe in this context that Maharshi became so important to him. Harry Oldmeadow comments that after his meeting with Ramana Maharshi, Abhishiktananda '...was no longer primarily motivated by the ideal of a monastic Christian witness in India but was now seized by the ideal of *sannyasa* as an end in itself. It can fairly be said that from the early nineteen-fifties onwards Abhishiktananda's life was a

¹¹ Du Boulay, *The Cave of the Heart*, p60

¹² Griffiths, *Christ in India*, p9

¹³ *Ibid*, p10

¹⁴ Griffiths, *The Golden String*, p170

¹⁵ Abhishiktananda, *Benedictine Ashram*, p16

sustained attempt to live out this ideal'.¹⁶ The place was important as well as the man, and Abhishiktananda spent several periods at Arunachala as a hermit.

Santivanam, the *ashram* founded by Abhishiktananda and Monchanin next to the river Kavery, was inaugurated in 1950 – Monchanin had been searching for a site during Abhishiktananda's stays at Arunachala. Oldmeadow expresses their intention succinctly: 'In short: *Vedantic* philosophy, Christian theology, Indian lifestyle.'¹⁷ Emmanuel Vattakuzhy maintains, however, that the *ashram* expressed the spirit of the rule of St Benedict: 'The central idea of contemplation, primacy of adoration and praise, solitude and silence, poverty and work remained unaltered, on the Benedictine lines.'¹⁸

Du Boulay states that they wanted to 'honor the tradition at the heart of both Hindu *sannyasa* and Christian monasticism by simply *being* in the presence of God,' and that they were seeking to be 'Christian-Hindu priests'¹⁹. Here, Du Boulay makes the problems of attempting a Christian-Hindu integration apparent. First, she uses, as did Monchanin and Abhishiktananda, the name 'God' to describe both the Christian and Hindu concepts of supreme Being, quite ignoring the tensions involved and the heart-ache that Abhishiktananda went through in trying to bring the two together. Mario Aguilar goes so far as to describe Abhishiktananda as 'a tortured man throughout his life in India.'²⁰ Had it been easy to live so profoundly influenced by two faiths, Abhishiktananda's story would have been very different, and it may be that Abhishiktananda, even at this early stage, did not think the task was quite so straightforward.

Du Boulay's further quotation uses the term 'priest' in the Christian sense, and attaches 'Hindu' to it. There is no sense in which even Abhishiktananda could ever have been described as a Hindu priest, with the associated duties and rituals. They continued to use the Eucharist as their main celebration, albeit with Hindu additions. With claims as in this second quotation, one can understand the sensitivities expressed by some Hindu authors who objected to their activities.

¹⁶ Oldmeadow, *A Christian Pilgrim in India*, p11

¹⁷ Ibid, p8

¹⁸ Vattakuzhy, pp58-9

¹⁹ Du Boulay, *The Cave of the Heart*, p85

²⁰ Aguilar, p44

The work at Shantivanam was not straightforward. Oldmeadow states:

On the face of it, the efforts of the French monks were less than successful: it was a constant struggle to keep the *ashram* afloat; there was little enthusiasm from either European or Indian quarters; there were endless difficulties and hardships; not a solitary Indian monk became a permanent member of the *ashram*.²¹

Griffiths was not immediately involved with Shantivanam when he arrived in India five years after its inauguration and Aguilar outlines a difference between the original motivations of Griffiths and Abhishiktananda: Abhishiktananda 'wanted to make a difference in the appreciation of the Church in India and therefore aid the evangelization process', while Griffiths, 'wanted to make a change in the Church and aid the changes needed within a Christian Church that had become almost completely European.'²² It is a key distinction, particularly as Abhishiktananda moved away from that original intention towards a far greater acceptance of the primacy of the *Advaitic* experience, whilst Griffiths maintained a keen interest in how his work would influence Christianity, and specifically, Western Christian seekers.

On arrival, Griffiths and Alapatt moved into their first home near Kengeri and called it Nirmalashram (The Monastery of the Immaculate), and continued a life similar to that at Prinknash. Nirmalashram did not, in the end, get the Catholic Church's permission to establish itself long-term, and so Griffiths moved to Kerala, to work with Father Francis Mahieu, with whom he founded an *ashram* at Kurisumala. Griffiths set up a centre for *sarvodaya*, which was a movement started by Gandhi and means 'service of all'²³. The *ashram* bought ten acres of land and set up a poultry farm, but the aims were wider in terms of creating support for the local community. The *ashram* also opened a small dispensary.

Of this stage in his development, Du Boulay says that Griffiths was, 'trying to reconcile the opposites.'²⁴ A westerner living in India, a man brought up in an advanced industrial

²¹ Oldmeadow, *A Christian Pilgrim in India*, p9

²² Aguilar, p86

²³ Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, p140

²⁴ *Ibid*, p148

society, living in an *ashram* but concerned for those around him, a man who valued reason but who was deepening his contemplative practice – Griffiths was facing the contradictions and multiplicity of his chosen path.

At Shantivanam, Abhishiktananda was finding that he was unable to pursue his deep longing for a more complete experience of *Advaita*. William Skudlarek states that Abhishiktananda was convinced ‘...that the true and ideal monastic life is a solitary life that is devoted exclusively to contemplation in order to arrive at an experiential knowledge of God.’²⁵ Vattakuzhy comments: ‘The center of Abhishiktananda’s life was his monastic consecration to which he was experientially and existentially committed. He came to India, not because he was a Christian, but because he was a monk.’²⁶

Skudlarek, however, disposes of the notion that Abhishiktananda’s ultimate rejection of community life was in some way connected with a disinclination towards company. He ‘...loved being in the company of friends and [was] animated ... in his interaction with them.’²⁷ Murray Rogers, in his very personal account of the man, remembers: ‘The twinkle in his eye and the ready laugh, and the uproarious times we had...the times we had, sitting on the floor or on the grass under a tree.’²⁸

At the same time as this inner conflict, Abhishiktananda was finding difficulties at Shantivanam. Abhishiktananda was left with much of the practical side of running the *ashram*. ‘Father Monchanin, saintly, charming and immensely intellectually gifted, was utterly impractical, so the running of the *ashram* fell entirely to Abhishiktananda, and he did not conceal his occasional irritation on this score.’²⁹ In Abhishiktananda’s own words, ‘he is the best of companions, but the worst of partners,’ based on the fact that he had no ‘plan’ for the development of Shantivanam, but that he let ‘things go on as they are.’³⁰ Oldmeadow draws a less complimentary picture of Monchanin, and quotes Alain Danielou’s biography of him, which characterizes him and his devotees as ‘...rather

²⁵ Skudlarek, section entitled ‘Monastic life is essentially contemplative’, paragraph 1

²⁶ Vattakuzhy, p210

²⁷ Skudlarek, section entitled ‘Monastic life is ideally eremitic’ paragraph 7

²⁸ Rogers, p15

²⁹ Du Boulay, *The Cave of the Heart*, p87

³⁰ Stuart, p98.

disagreeable people...'³¹ The result was there was some question as to whether the two could work together. Abhishiktananda was to have similar problems with the relationship with Griffiths and Father Francis Mahieu. At Shantivanam, they began to wear the traditional garb of the *sannyassi*, which caused some scandal amongst other Catholics in the area. Abhishiktananda was moving beyond dialectical thinking towards experience, and this thinking related to the 'beyond' horrified the intellectual Monchanin.

By 1952 Abhishiktananda was having doubts about Shantivanam – writing about its 'non-future.'³² Arunachala was claiming his allegiance, above his original aim in coming to India. Abhishiktananda made his fourth visit to Arunachala in 1953 and between this and the end of 1956 he went through a 'terrifying spiritual crisis'³³ as he tried to reconcile his *Advaitic* experience with the faith he had had since childhood. In this period he began to lose his belief in fulfillment theology. By 1955 he was determined to leave Shantivanam. In fact he kept it as his base for many more years, not finally leaving until 1968, though staying without much enthusiasm as the *ashram* developed into a larger community of monks. He had profound moments of enlightenment of an *Advaitic* nature, particularly in visits to Arunachala, moments which he called *éblouissements* (dazzling moments, illuminations), but these moments did not necessarily relieve the pain he was in. Towards the end of this crisis period he was influenced by Dr Mehta and Harilal, Dr Mehta in particular urging him to leave all behind in the experience of *Atman* and to surrender totally to that. In 1955 Abhishiktananda found his *guru*, Sri Gnanananda, about whom he wrote *Guru and Disciple*, although Monchanin tried to persuade him not to visit his *ashram*. He made many visits to Sri Gnanananda's *ashram*, finding 'utter peace and fulfillment.'³⁴

Monchanin died in 1957. After a seven-year process Abhishiktananda was granted Indian citizenship in 1960. During the 1960s his circle of friends sympathetic to his view expanded considerably. In 1961 was held the first of the 'Cuttat group' meetings, ecumenical Christian meetings to discuss Hinduism and Christianity, named after Dr

³¹ Oldmeadow, *A Christian Pilgrim in India*, p37

³² Du Boulay, *The Cave of the Heart*, p155. Griffiths records that prior to Monchanin's death, '...this initiative in contemplative life [Shantivanam] met with practically no response.' (Griffiths, *Christ in India*, p63)

³³ Du Boulay, *The Cave of the Heart*, pp96-7

³⁴ *Ibid*, p132

Jacques-Albert Cuttat, Swiss ambassador. *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point* grew out of these meetings. Abhishiktananda attended three of these meetings, but discontinued his attendance after he felt his Christian integrity had been called into question, and the meetings continued without him. Cuttat wrote in a letter in 1972: "...I realized that something essential was lacking in this *jnanic* way to the supreme.'³⁵

In 1961 he had been given a small patch of land for life near the Ganges at Uttarkashi in the Himalayas. A *kutiya* (hermitage or shelter) was built, but he decided not to live there permanently. He was still travelling widely in India. Vatican II saw him '...full of hope, and animated, finding the council "splendid"'³⁶ according to his friend Murray Rogers, although with some doubts.

1965-67 was to see the publication of his most significant books: *Saccidananda; The Mountain of the Lord; Hindu Christian Meeting Point; and Prayer*. Vattakuzhy describes Abhishiktananda's aim in his writing as '...putting Christianity on the cultural and religious frame of Hinduism.'³⁷ Du Boulay notes that Abhishiktananda was inclined to change his views after publication, and was only really satisfied with his accounts of personal experience, such as accounts of meeting *gurus*.³⁸

Griffiths was also finding life at Kurisumala difficult. Father Francis Mahieu, a Trappist, was mainly interested in creating an *ashram* which provided a focus for Christian life in a particular locality. Bede's focus was far more on study³⁹ and discussion, with a large number of people, often westerners, coming and going. Aguilar records: 'It was always clear for Griffiths...that he had entered the Benedictine[s] rather than the Trappists, and thus he had entered a world of learning and a rule rather than the world of farms and penance so well known to the Trappists.'⁴⁰ There was therefore tension between the two men, fueled by Mahieu's autocratic style of leadership. Bede decided to go back to Prinknash, but before that could happen, in 1968, Abhishiktananda left Shantivanam to

³⁵ Ibid, p184

³⁶ Ibid, p202

³⁷ Vattakuzhy, 1981, p82

³⁸ see Du Boulay, *The Cave of the Heart*, p186

³⁹ Griffiths had begun a study of Sanskrit almost immediately upon arriving in India and by that August (1955) was writing that he could 'read slowly the *Bhagavad Gita* now'. (Griffiths, *On Friendship*, p140)

⁴⁰ Aguilar, p121

retire to the Himalayas, and Father Francis persuaded Griffiths to go to Shantivanam to take up its leadership.

In an interview with Du Boulay, Brother Martin, a member of the Shantivanam community since 1984, sees four stages in Griffiths' development. First was the discovery of the love of Christ, including the point at which he became a Benedictine monk; secondly, in the 1930's, a growing interest in other religions whilst maintaining a fulfillment theology; thirdly, by 1973, the view that Christ, rather than Christianity, is the fulfillment of all religion, and fourthly his view soon afterwards that all religions are complementary, and that there is an ultimate reality found in all religions.⁴¹

Once at Shantivanam Griffiths had some clashes with brothers, including those sent from Kurisumala, and also with Brother Stephen who looked after much of the practical workings of the *ashram*. After a period devoted to Griffiths, he had to leave the *ashram*, having made formal complaints against Griffiths. All this took a toll on Griffiths who became quite unwell and lonely. He was somewhat rescued by the arrival of Amaldas and Christudas, young monks who asked to come to Shantivanam from Kurisumala, and who remained a support to him for many years.

As his life at Shantivanam developed, it gave Griffiths full scope to follow the mystical tradition. By the mid nineteen-seventies there were eight full members of the community. There was also a library, a meditation centre, and in terms of contact with the local community, '...a dispensary, two spinning mills employing sixty girls and a nursery school which they helped to establish and where they provided a daily meal for some fifty children.'⁴² Shantivanam currently runs a crèche to help working parents, an old people's home, and builds 25 to 35 new houses annually for the families most in need.⁴³

At the same time, Griffiths' reputation as someone with a particular spiritual status was growing. In explanation, Trapnell states: 'Unlike a Benedictine monastery that centres around the common life and liturgy of the monks, an *ashram* is a community of disciples

⁴¹ see Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, p188-9

⁴² *Ibid*, pp173-4

⁴³ Information from the Shantivanam website [accessed 23/3/2017]

gathered around the *guru* or master in whose experience of God they seek to share.⁴⁴ Some of those at Shantivanam may have regarded Griffiths in this way (such as Amaldas and Christudas) but it is open to question whether Griffiths saw himself like this, but rather '... saw himself as a kind guest-master.'⁴⁵ Griffiths did, apparently, have a great gift for encouraging others in their spiritual search, but this was done as an offshoot and product of his own continued search and exploration into unknown territory.

By 1968 Abhishiktananda had finally left Shantivanam and moved to the hut near Uttarkashi, staying there for at least half of the year for the rest of his life, and visiting Sri Gnanananda's *ashram*. In *Guru and Disciple* there is little doubt that Abhishiktananda regarded Gnanananda in exactly the same way as a Hindu devotee would, and that Abhishiktananda was immersed in the *guru*-disciple relationship.

He continued to say a daily Eucharist, though in varying forms, beginning, for example, with *Vedic* mantras. While here, Abhishiktananda was approached by a number of young people to be their *guru*, but it was not until 1971 when Marc Chaduc, a seminarist from Bourg in France, arrived that Abhishiktananda experienced the *guru*-disciple relationship from the side of the *guru*. The relationship was intense, including powerful experiences of non-duality, both with the Self and with each other. In June 1973 Marc received *sannyasa diksha*, the ceremony of becoming a *sannyasin*, and soon afterwards he left Abhishiktananda and commenced the life of a wandering *sadhu*. Chaduc, having adopted the name of Swami Ajatananda, and having lived for some years in seclusion, disappeared in 1977 and has not been seen since.

A few days after Chaduc's *sannyasa diksha*, Abhishiktananda had the first heart attack, which proved to be, for him, the start of the final stage in his journey, in which he felt he had reached his goal. Others who visited him in the nursing home where he now stayed recognized a great change in him. He died on December 7, 1973.

It was after Abhishiktananda's death, around the time of Shantivanam *Ashram's* silver jubilee in 1975 and following it, that Griffiths and the Christian *ashrams* in general came

⁴⁴ Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths*, p115

⁴⁵ Aguilar, p99

under attack from more 'conservative' Hindus who saw their activities as a deception perpetrated against the indigenous faith of Indian people. Trapnell speculates that it was experiences such as his fruitless dialogue with Goel, referred to in chapter two, and with other Hindus, 'that led him to draw away from dialogue with Hindus during his later years and to turn toward what he came to recognize as his most receptive audience, contemplative Catholics in the West.'⁴⁶ Controversy with Christians continued in the 1980s in the pages of the *Tablet*.⁴⁷ But by the 1980s Shantivanam had become a destination for many Western seekers, and could have up to a hundred visitors at any one time. It had also become a centre for dialogue with much effort made to build up the library. Shantivanam had been run as a virtually independent house, but in 1980 it joined the Camaldolese community, a strict order belonging to the Benedictine Confederation.

Between 1978 and 1985 Griffiths travelled widely, and continued to travel thereafter. 'Bede's ability to make Christianity acceptable to people who had wandered far from its embrace was perhaps his single greatest contribution to twentieth-century spirituality, and this was what he did on his travels...'⁴⁸

Du Boulay stated (in 1998) that, with the exception of Teasdale's and Trapnell's academic thesis, Griffiths theology has not had the attention it deserves. She maintains that '...the reason given is that he is simply not taken seriously by theologians. In the light of his international fame and the impact he made on so many lives this fact demands an explanation.'⁴⁹ Du Boulay's explanation is that rational theology cannot deal or cope with the claim to 'go beyond', or to be operating on a different plane. Whether this is an explanation that Griffiths would have approved of, with his joint emphasis on reason as well as contemplation, is open to question.

Between 1990 and his death in 1992 Griffiths suffered severe ill health, mainly due to strokes. During this time he felt a 'breakthrough' in terms of his spirituality and his experience of non-duality. There is therefore a connection in that both Griffiths and

⁴⁶ Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths*, p119

⁴⁷ Griffiths' letters to the *Tablet*, quoted by Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, p222, spanned the period 12/12/1987 to 27/10/1990

⁴⁸ Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, p217

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p225

Abhishiktananda experienced a significant period of final ill health during which both believed they were led to a greater experience of non-duality shortly before their deaths.

2. THE SPACE OF MEETING

As noted at the start of this chapter, understanding the biographies of Abhishiktananda or Griffiths gives some leads when reading their work, and since this research focusses on a Third Space of encounter, an understanding of how the space they occupied influenced them is important. Account needs to be taken of the fact that both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths decided to pursue their exploration of non-duality physically in India, and in the context of Hinduism, rather than in the West and in the context of Christian monastic mysticism. Some of the distinctions made here will be examined in more detail as the analysis of this study develops, but some general comments are appropriate at this stage.

2.1. RELATING TO THE CULTURAL SPACE

The Christian *ashrams* did not all have the same relationship to the culture of India. The first protestant *ashrams* were *khadi* ashrams and focused more on social issues than did the *kavi* Ashrams like Shantivanam, in which spiritual practices were more the focus. Jan Peter Schouten explains the distinction drawn by Richard W. Taylor, in 'From Khadi to Kavi: Toward a Typology of Christian Ashrams'.⁵⁰ *Khadi* was a simple cotton woven fabric promoted by Gandhi, often worn in *ashrams* which focused more on social issues and which, as a part of that, supported the independence movement in India. The spirituality was more about basic simplicity. *Kavi* is the name for the ochre garment that has been worn by Hindu ascetics since ancient times. Taylor distinguished between those *ashrams* that wore the *Khadi*, and those that wore the *Kavi*, the Roman Catholic *ashrams* wearing the latter and being more concerned with spiritual practices, though Schouten states that this is an over simplification.

Schouten also points out the extreme nature of the *sannyasi* tradition in India when compared with more common Christian monastic models, and points to the complete renunciation of the former. Schouten claims that it requires a rejection of the world, and Monchanin and Abhishiktananda believed that this was the way of Christ, yet in bringing

⁵⁰ Taylor, Richard W, 'From Khadi to Kavi: Toward a Typology of Christian Ashrams'

this image of Christ into such an extreme form of life, ‘...this image of Christ becomes even more radicalized.’⁵¹

What is significant about the *Khadi/Kavi* distinction is that it shows that the way in which Monchanin, Abhishiktananda and Griffiths related to the religious culture of India was a choice, and that others made different choices, as in the Protestant *ashrams*. In the West it is Abhishiktananda and Griffiths who are comparatively well known in the field of Christian-Hindu dialogue, and it is their theology which is read by many in the West who wish to seek in the East for religious answers. There is an assumption that when Christianity goes East it links of necessity with, and learns from, a spiritualized East based on radical renunciation. Remembering the presence of the *khadi ashram* tradition places a question mark against the completeness of their representation of the Hindu tradition, and shows that the ‘*Brahminization*’ of Christianity referred to below is not the only option. Despite the adoption of the *kavi* tradition, questions can still be raised about their genuine immersion in the Indian tradition. Aguilar states that the Christian *ashrams* were a ‘confined space’⁵² in which these pioneers did not have to deal with Hindu conceptions of nature, but in which they studied the Upanishads – they ‘sat beside’ the Hindu tradition.

The relationship of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths to the culture in which they lived is complex and not well documented. Much of the literature about them is content to relate their activities in a ‘Hindu’ context, and it may be noted briefly here that Hinduism as a cultural (or religious) definition has many problems. The designation of a belief or cultural practice as ‘Hindu’ is often the type of generalization which comparative theology is advised to avoid, although there is no obvious term to replace it, hence its use in this thesis. The definition of ‘Hinduism’ and an exploration of its many aspects is not a major theme in this thesis, and it is remarked upon here in acknowledgement of the fact that Abhishiktananda and Griffiths related to one aspect of a complex Indian religious scene, and that this has implications which will be explored later. ‘Hinduism’, Sharada Sugirtharajah claims, is a colonial product of ‘...naming or classifying the Other...’, related to Western Orientalism. ‘...the [Hindu] tradition has been defined and interpreted mainly

⁵¹ Schouten, p185

⁵² Aguilar, p31

in Western categories.’⁵³ Along with the ‘mystic East’, problems of Orientalism will be considered in chapter four. Gravend-Tirole stresses the diversity of religious belief and practice in India, and the questionable relationship with inculturation which can easily assume that only one culture exists with which to relate:

The project of inculturation assumes, if only implicitly, that India is culturally monolithic. But this is, in fact, an untenable assumption. How can one speak of a single Indian culture, for example, when in fact Indian reality is clearly characterised by a mosaic of cultures, languages and symbolic representations?⁵⁴

It could be argued that Abhishiktananda and Griffiths avoided this difficulty by attending to only one strand of Hindu thought, namely *Vedanta*, the claim being that *Vedanta* is the ‘core’ of the Hindu tradition – linking with this is linking with the faith of India and accessing the mystical tradition that so interested the West. The question remains, however, as to whether *Advaita* can, indeed, exist in a vacuum distinct from, for example, the tradition of *bhakti* (Śankara included devotional practice in his own life and writing) and whether these two authors are, indeed, relating to a living tradition, or a partial tradition selected as useful for their purposes. This would not be problematic if both authors did not so consistently reference *Advaita* as the tradition that they were mainly interested in. The problems of this are apparent in the literature, in which specifically *Advaitic* beliefs are denoted as Hindu precepts.

The issue of motivation also affects how those in Christian *ashrams* are seen as relating to the Indian space. The implication, found in various quarters, is that the *ashram* movement was, according to Aguilar, ‘the spacial entry into a Hindu public space’⁵⁵ with the main aim being the acceptance of a Christian presence so that those involved could continue their teaching. This is also expressed by Hindus who objected to the *ashrams* from a very different standpoint. The history of Christian inculturation in India is relevant here. Abhishiktananda acknowledged Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907) as a forerunner of the work at Shantivanam and he will appear in more detail in chapter four. Upadhyay wrote favourably of the Catholic Church being ‘..dressed up in Hindi garments’,

⁵³ Sugirtharajah, p16

⁵⁴ Gravend-Tirole, p120

⁵⁵ Aguilar, p29

and ‘...stooping down to adapt herself to [India’s] racial peculiarities.’⁵⁶ This clearly categorizes him as someone who is mimicking Hinduism for a particular missiological purpose, and Teasdale emphasizes the fact by saying that this strategy amounts to ‘...play by the rules, and they [the Christians] will show that even this culture can be inserted into the bosom of the Church, the universal culture and tradition of humankind.’⁵⁷

Mimicry, as a non-pejorative description of a process that occurs when religions meet, will be examined in chapter four. Whether such intentional mimicry as Teasdale ascribes to Upadhyay (and which Upadhyay himself expresses) can be laid at the door of Abhishiktananda or Griffiths will be examined later. The motivation of creating space for dialogue is another which Aguilar refers to, and is a much more plausible one: ‘[These] pioneers...constructed symbolic spaces for dialogue in which symbolic connections could be made by Christians residing in them in order to make them feel some closeness to Hindus.’⁵⁸ Any attempt to define motivation, and therefore discover the very centre of the way in which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths related to the Hindu space is open to wide interpretation by the commentator. Aguilar also ascribes the intention of acquiring public status, ‘...that is, symbolic status, such as the advantage of a public recognition of holiness and renunciation – in order to proceed with their daily activities related to dialogue.’⁵⁹ There are elements of truth in all these statements, and one must be aware that Aguilar is writing of the wider Catholic *Ashram* movement. Taken in isolation they do not give account of the immense attraction that *Advaita* held for Griffiths and Abhishiktananda in its own right.

Robert Fastiggi points to another issue regarding the relationship with the Hindu space, that of the departure from a living tradition. He comments that Griffiths used almost exclusively ancient texts, or Hindu authors such as Ramakrishna and Vivekananda who wrote in English and often for a Western audience. Fastiggi maintains that Griffiths, ‘...shows little familiarity with the vast majority of Hindu theologians of the intervening two millennia.’⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Quoted, Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths*, p26

⁵⁷ Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths*, p26

⁵⁸ Aguilar, p162

⁵⁹ Aguilar, p164

⁶⁰ Fastiggi, p24

Again, the use of the terms *guru* and *sannyasin* can both cause confusion in Abhishiktananda's and Griffiths' relationship with *Advaita*. The term '*guru*' is often used in the literature about Griffiths and Abhishiktananda without imprimatur from either, and their official websites do not use it of them to this day. Its use in the literature is something of a mimicry of Indian culture; inaccurate since neither claimed to be the means by which others would reach the divine.⁶¹ Michael Barnes maintains that there are no set rules as to how to be a *guru*, and that it is very much something passed on through personal and close relationships. Distinct from any Christian idea of a 'teacher', '...the *guru* is the means of direct access to God.'⁶²

Also, the confusion caused by Griffiths' and Abhishiktananda's adoption of the term *Sannyasi*, and the associated appearance (dress etc.) is shared by some Indian commentators. Swami Devananda describes the Catholic ashramites as '... Hindu teachers who do not want to take spiritual responsibility for their charges,'⁶³ implying that a *guru* status is, or should be, integral to their work. The issue raises the question of what one might call 'unintended consequences' which result from a Western understanding of Indian religious traditions, and their mis-adoption, which become part of the understanding of the work of people such as Griffiths and Abhishiktananda, entering the literature and causing confusion.

The issue of the Western '*Brahminization*' of the religion of India is a key matter in any critique of the way in which Griffiths and Abhishiktananda inhabited the space between Christianity and Hinduism. It should be noted that Indian *Dalit* theologians also direct such criticism of '*Brahminization*' towards the *neo-Vedantism* that has dominated much Indian national discourse since independence. However, the argument with regard to Western attitudes is that the preference for the high caste religion in India was a strategy for ruling the country consciously adopted during the colonial period which can be seen as having continued in the work of the Catholic *ashrams*. George Soares-Prabhu is a critic in this vein, though at the same time acknowledging the understanding of *Advaita* which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths exhibited. Mathew N Schmalz states:

⁶¹ This study is not concerned with the modern use in India of the term '*Guru*', to denote the leaders of a wide variety of indigenous new religious movements. See, however, Warrier, pp 31–54

⁶² Barnes, 'The Guru in Hinduism', p150

⁶³ Swami Devananda Saraswati, paragraph 2

By adopting a rarified and *Brahminical* form of Hinduism in its religious life, Catholic *ashrams* are aligning themselves with some of the most regressive forces within Indian society. Catholic *ashrams* could be of service, Soares-Prabhu suggests, if they were ‘to communicate to Hinduism something of the painful purification Christians have undergone because of the challenge of the reformation and the fires of humanist and Marxist criticism.’ But as the writings of Bede Griffiths clearly demonstrate, the *ashram* movement seems more concerned with fostering ‘anti-consumerist values’ among the ‘spoiled children of the West.’⁶⁴

James Massey, a prominent *Dalit* theologian, maintains that this influence continues to be felt in the wider Indian Christian Church. The *Dalit* experience is very different from that of higher caste Christians who often dominate the theology, the concept of God and the part he plays in human history being very different in the two cases. The higher caste Christians are, ‘...a small, but, at the same time, a very powerful, minority within the Indian Christian community.’⁶⁵ The implication is that echoes of colonialism are to be found in much Christian theology in India.

Dalit theology is not a focus for this study, but the extent to which the *Brahminization* of Christianity would represent a basic denial of the Christian Gospel in terms of concern for the oppressed, the weak and the marginalized, is significant in studying the Catholic *ashrams*. It could be argued that the work of Christians like James Massey shows that the Catholic *ashrams* ‘missed the point’ in focusing almost exclusively on the *Vedantic* tradition in India. The Gospel they were attempting to place alongside *Vedanta* was a partial Gospel – in its most extreme form a version of the Quietist heresy. What, in a sense, could be regarded as more damning is the fact that it could be the easy option to relate to Indian religion by extracting contemplative Christianity from a broader Christian theology; it avoids the conflicts and differences that exist between the cultures, and avoids the Christian social critique that would be relevant in any culture. *Dalit* theology does not avoid these difficulties and has a hard edge of Christian criticism of Indian

⁶⁴ Schmalz, p6

⁶⁵ ‘Dalit Liberation Theology: Interview with James Massey’, answer to third question

practice and power, and so can be seen to fall outside any 'toleration of religions' that may be natural to Hindu culture.

The issue is not that Abhishiktananda and Griffiths failed to involve themselves in an active critique of inequality or oppression; that in itself is a specific calling. The complaint would be that in their writing there is no evidence that they were aware that this key theme exists in the Christian Gospel, and that they could therefore be risking the accusation of misrepresenting that Gospel. Soares-Prabhu writes in 'Interpreting The Bible In India Today' of the 'liberationists' who write about the poor of India and how the Bible relates to their situation, and the 'ashramites' who are more concerned with relating the message of the Bible to Indian religion. He states that there is an unbridged gap between the two. Furthermore he identifies elements which characterize India; 'massive poverty', 'pluriform religiosity' and an 'oppressive, all-pervasive, and seemingly immovable social structure of caste.'⁶⁶ One could argue that in their relationship as Christians to the Indian space, Abhishiktananda and Griffiths paid scant attention to these elements on which Soares-Prabhu places such emphasis; they do not attend to the Indian social situation, they choose one of the many strands in Hinduism, *Advaita*, and they have few comments to make with regard to caste or their immersion in the *Brahminical* strand of Indian religion.

Gravend-Tirole notes a more recent move towards a contextual theology, 'which encompasses both upper-caste and Dalit terms, as well as others deriving, for example, from feminist, liberation or ecological theologies.'⁶⁷ This reference to contextual theology can be seen as an implied criticism of Catholic *ashram* inculturation which ignored the socio-political context to focus entirely on the 'spiritual' and 'contemplative'. Whilst it can well be said that Christianity has a focus on the spiritual and contemplative aspects of religion, it is much harder to defend a position which ignores the socio-political aspects.

Finally in this section, it is worth noting that during the time of Monchanin and Abhishiktananda, according to Oldmeadow, '...not a solitary Indian monk became a

⁶⁶ Soares-Prabhu, 'Interpreting The Bible In India Today', p75

⁶⁷ Gravend-Tirole, p131

permanent member of the [Shantivanam] *ashram*.⁶⁸ This is not necessarily an adverse comment on the work of the *ashram*, its achievements or its theology, but it does place a question mark against its integration into the living culture and religion of India and indicates the sort of Western-facing stance, albeit based in India and possibly not intended, which Soares-Prabhu suggests above.

The impression given is of a Christian enterprise going on at a few degrees of separation from the complexities of the spiritual life of India, however much Monchanin and Abhishiktananda wanted the case to be otherwise. This is apparent in the emergent theology. They were involved in their own exercise, not in a joint exercise with Hindus, despite all attempts at dialogue, as shown by the fact that no Indian monks became permanent members of the *ashram*. Abhishiktananda's only 'long-term disciple' throughout his stay in India was a westerner, Marc Chaduc, although Cornille points out that he became spiritual director to several convents, seminarians stayed with him, and he had two Hindus who lived with him for extended periods of time.⁶⁹ It was Abhishiktananda that was changed in a quite individualistic way, and although, as Skudlarek points out,⁷⁰ he dialogued with others and was a congenial companion, it seems as though this was a dialogue between individuals which did not significantly affect the two communities of faith.

As Barnes has argued, dialogue is always between people living their religious convictions, rather than between abstract religious concepts,⁷¹ but it may be the very fact that Abhishiktananda (and to a real, though lesser extent with Griffiths) was in an 'in-between' or Third Space which reduced their influence on both religions. Soares-Prabhu says that he does not think that Christian *ashrams* will ever be a major factor in the Indian Church.⁷² One would think that if this theology were to have an effect it would take hold first in India, and it may be that with the doctrine of 'tolerant, even loving acceptance and respect'⁷³ for the *ashrams*, actual engagement by Hindus with this theology was not a likelihood. What possibly emerges is the 'weakness' of the 'in-between', hybridized

⁶⁸ Oldmeadow, *A Christian Pilgrim in India*, p9

⁶⁹ Cornille, *The Guru in Indian Catholicism*, p134

⁷⁰ Skudlarek, np

⁷¹ See, for example Barnes, *Interreligious Learning*, chapter one, entitled, 'In the Middle of Things'

⁷² Soares-Prabhu, 'The Indian church challenged by pluralism and dialogue', p192

⁷³ 'Catholic Ashrams: Adopting and Adapting Hindu Dharma', section entitled 'Hindu Reaction', paragraph 1

theology and its inability to influence established dogma. Its influence is amongst those in whom previous history and dogma does not hold sway – as in westerners unconvinced by established Christianity and seeking an alternative.

When considering how Abhishiktananda and Griffiths related to their Indian religious context, and considering the fact that they were (and are) regarded as spiritual ‘masters’ by significant numbers, it is useful to ask why they attracted mainly westerners, and not Indians. One answer may seem obvious, for there is always the point made, for example, when Thomas P. Ryan quotes contemporary westerners influenced by the *ashram* movement, and states that ‘Christianity doesn’t teach us techniques and methods that serve for sure supports for our path.’⁷⁴ Ryan goes on to quote a Hindu swami’s claim that he is teaching more practically *how* to love God, which ‘today’s [Western] religionists’ fail to do. This aspect of techniques, it seems, is highly significant in the influence that Eastern religion has in the West. Whether these techniques can be used apart from their origins in a particular faith, or whether they can transfer from one faith to another, staying true to the faith of origin and without changing the receiving faith, is an open question.⁷⁵

2.2 THE HINDU VIEW OF NATURE AND PLACE

Abhishiktananda and Griffiths engaged in their explorations in the Third Space where Christianity was meeting *Advaita* in particular places, and in particular relationships with their surroundings. Whatever their imaginings or impressions previous to their arrival, they both discovered what Diana Eck has called a sacred geography,⁷⁶ and that in India, ‘...nature is filled with spiritual and supernatural realities so that animals and plants, mountains, rivers and fields are expressions of the divine Absolute...’⁷⁷ This study is not concerned with an examination of Hindu sacred space, but it cannot ignore the fact that the space in which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths undertook their interreligious dialogue influenced them profoundly.

⁷⁴ Ryan, p6

⁷⁵ A useful treatment of this is in Bender, ‘Constructing Buddhisms’.

⁷⁶ See Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography*

⁷⁷ Aguilar, p30

That particular spaces can be special to a particular religion is well documented. Chris Park, in his essay 'Religion and Geography', states that 'sacred places share two important properties – they are not transferable (they are valued because of their associated holiness), and they do not need to be re-established with each new generation (there is an inherited appreciation of the holiness of the site).'⁷⁸ Abhishiktananda and Griffiths appear to have been greatly affected by the qualities of the sub-continent in general and its people, and Abhishiktananda was deeply affected by specific sacred spaces.

Oldmeadow claims that Abhishiktananda, on arrival in India, was captivated by 'the vibrant spiritual life pervading the whole culture,' and that this was not a matter of theology, but of 'its color and vitality, its history, its people, its temples and *ashrams*.'⁷⁹ For Griffiths, during his early period in India, his youthful experience of nature as somehow God-filled was reinforced by a recognition of the holiness of nature that he found there. He was struck by simplicity of life: 'The way of life that he had found so meaningful in the monastery...he now discovered was being lived by the simplest of villagers around him.'⁸⁰ Aguilar emphasizes the shock of India in terms of those arriving at this time from a post World War II 'destroyed Europe'⁸¹ in which faith in the love of God was weakened. So both were struck immediately they landed in India, first by the people, and secondly by their surroundings. Both were influenced by, and made use of, their surroundings, Griffiths in his care in developing Santivanam and its groves, Abhishiktananda in his extended visits to the mountain of Arunachala, his pilgrimages throughout India and his hermitage by the Ganges.

Some account needs to be given as to why these two authors were so affected by India. David Frawley, in his article 'Hindu View of Nature', draws a distinction between Christian (Western) and Hindu concepts of nature and sacred place. According to Frawley, in the Christian tradition a place is considered sacred due to human agency; a sacred place may be beautiful or moving of itself, but it is its connection to a saint or a prophet or Saviour that leads to it being considered sacred in the tradition. Biblical traditions 'ask us to protect nature as God's creation, but do not afford nature any sanctity of its own.'⁸² It

⁷⁸ Park, p451

⁷⁹ Oldmeadow, *A Christian Pilgrim in India*, p7

⁸⁰ Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths*, p85

⁸¹ Aguilar, p29

⁸² Frawley, paragraph 1

may be somewhat of an exaggeration to say, as Frawley does, that all Western Christian sacred sites are related to an individual in whom its sacredness originates – consider for example the ancient nature of many church sites, or dedications to the Trinity – but the distinction he makes has sufficient validity to be useful.

The place of the natural world in spirituality was a concern particularly for Griffiths, and both men experienced something new in India with regard to this. In attempting to distinguish between Christian and Hindu understandings of nature Radharani goes so far as to say that, whilst Hindus see an intrinsic value in nature, the Western traditions ‘consider man as the centre of the moral universe. They think that the world exists for the benefit of human beings.’⁸³ Nor is the approach of Hinduism to nature only a matter of historic belief, but a contemporary cultural context that both would have encountered. The influence and current nature of the Hindu attitude is evidenced by the fact that it is a live topic amongst those who seek to protect the natural environment in today’s world. Some ecologists refer to a Hindu belief system, and the teachings of Gandhi, among others.⁸⁴

There is a connection between nature and Hindu ritual worship, and both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were very interested in such ritual. Frawley maintains that rituals are intended to link to higher planes of consciousness and energy, bringing these into the world. *Pujas* using flowers, incense, water, food and oils are intended to fulfill this function, and create a seamless link for the Hindu between the divine and the natural world, with the aim of harmonizing the individual with nature and with higher levels in the universe.

Vasudha Narayanan, in an article on ecology that criticizes India for not looking after the environment, emphasises the importance of the Earth, regarded as mother.⁸⁵ Protection of woods and groves is important in Hindu tradition and Hindu temples have a *sthala vriksha*, a tree which is sacred to the area and which represents all trees. Local streams and ponds are also regarded as sacred. Ancient texts specify places which are especially

⁸³ Radharani, p497

⁸⁴ See, for example, Van Horn

⁸⁵ Narayanan, pp179-206

holy, recommending or mandating pilgrimage. Some texts say that if one dies in such a place, liberation follows.

The concept of *tirthas*, or 'crossing points', are identified by Diana Eck as a 'locative' strand of Hindu piety. They are places in which the spiritual and the physical meet, and where movement between the two takes place. The locative nature of *tirthas* means that 'the place itself is the primary locus of devotion and its traditions of ritual and pilgrimage are usually much older than any of the particular myths and deities which attach to it.'⁸⁶ *Tirthas* are often related to rivers, with the dual connotation of a crossing, which becomes a crossing between the physical and the spiritual worlds, and the flow of *samsara* (the cycle of birth and death), which one crosses to a further shore. It is not so much the ritual which takes place which is important, but the *tirthayatra*, the pilgrimage, which is the rite. It is the place itself which has power. This aspect of Hindu spirituality played a great part in Abhishiktananda's understanding of his time spent at Arunachala.

There is a theological cosmology related to this subject. Amita Sinha maintains that in the Hindu conception, nature, humanity and the gods represent a continuity within which there is easy transmutation.⁸⁷ In the words of Radharani, Hindus believe 'that man and nature constitute an organic unity; for them nature is as much important as man.'⁸⁸ Sinha states that the cosmos is represented in miniature in the human body, and is present in all its parts in the human heart – plant, animal, minerals, sun, moon and stars. Nature therefore becomes a means of revelation of the divine, and at the same time of understanding oneself. Also, the built environment is designed to mirror this divine order, for example in the construction of temples. House and city are also built reflecting the square *mandala*, symbolic of *Purusha* (the cosmic man or Self).

Water is particularly important, as are mountains. The former is seen as at both the beginning and end of creation, in emanation and reabsorption. Rivers are therefore sacred sites, most famously the river Ganges, and this becomes part of daily ritual in terms of bathing. Mountains are seen as dwellings of the gods, and therefore sacred.

⁸⁶ Eck, 'India's "Tirthas": "Crossings" in Sacred Geography', p323

⁸⁷ Sinha, pp3-10

⁸⁸ Radharani, p499

Vegetation is also seen as sacred, the lotus being probably the best known, symbolizing the emergence of all vegetation from the primeval waters. Trees represent life and continuity, and the cosmic tree, *kalpa-vriksha*, symbolizes life itself. Radharani writes extensively in his article about the sacred nature of trees and groves. Particular animals, states Sinha, are associated with particular gods, and are thought of as their 'vehicle'. The one most known in the West is the cow, the provider of all benefits. There are many variations in understanding of particular symbols or connections. These vary from region to region, and also as to whether they derive from classic scripture or folklore. The link with nature is consistent across India, but the details are often very localized.

Shampa and Sanjoy Mazumdar write mainly about the sacredness of the Hindu home, but make some general points about the fact that for the Hindu, communion with the divine and the spiritual is something to be sought in any environment.⁸⁹ This is achieved through contact with divine beings and with the natural world, not least in the home, where household deities and ancestors are an important part of the sense of place and attachment to place.

These approaches to nature and place present in Hinduism plainly helped Abhishiktananda and Griffiths to feel that India was a location in which they could develop their connection with the transcendent. For Abhishiktananda, pilgrimage was a key spiritual activity, more so than is the case in the modern West, and the sacred nature of certain sites was important to his choice of location, either temporary or more permanent. For Griffiths an approach that places more emphasis on nature – plant, animal and cosmos – as linked to the transcendent and able to bring the divine into human life clearly links with his school-day experience of the numinous in nature that is described in the first chapter of Trapnell's *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue*.

This subject does, however, raise a fascinating question around the relationship between some interpretations of *Advaita*, which relegate the world and the material cosmos to a barely respected illusion, and the culture in which *Advaita* finds its home, in which the divine is brought into human life through the natural world. A reflection on this would tend to support those versions of *Advaita*, and that interpretation of the works of

⁸⁹ Mazumdar, pp231-242

Śankara, which are less dogmatic about quite what *maya* or 'illusion' may mean. Referring to Kinsley's book, *Ecology and Religion*⁹⁰, in which there is a chapter on Hinduism, Gavin Van Horn states that, 'Kinsley seeks to dispel stereotypical notions of world-denial associated with Hinduism by appealing to various positive attitudes toward nature found within Hindu traditions, including deification of natural forces and objects, the sacred geography of India, monism, nonviolence, reincarnation, and the sacredness of the cow.'⁹¹

For Griffiths, as has been implied, there is little conflict. He continued throughout his life to work on reconciling his understanding of *Advaita* with a commitment to a theology of creation by God and the presence of the divine in the natural world. He went so far, in his thoughts on religious symbolism, as to maintain that nature itself is a symbol of the divine. Abhishiktananda was more focused on achieving the total immersion into the (arguably more monistic) experience of unity with *Brahman*. Though he visited holy sites, and made them places of extended periods of meditation, he used them as places where the divine is especially present, and there is little mention of the natural world as a whole being redolent of divine presence. However Kinsley does argue in *Ecology and Religion* that the *Advaitic* concept of non-duality does lend itself to a less ego-centred view and a greater appreciation of a large picture that includes all of life⁹². His view of the subject is not, however, the only one. As so often with *Advaita*, there are different interpretations. Lance Nelson sees *Advaita* as an entirely acosmic monistic belief system, and maintains that the *sannyasi* tradition of India, 'achieves its brand of "nonduality" not inclusively but exclusively, at great cost: the world of nature is finally cast out of the Absolute, out of existence.'⁹³

2.3. THE POETICS OF SPACE

This discussion has shown that it was India as a physical entity as well as India as an imaginary that affected both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, raises the awareness of the effects which physical space has on the individual, and also leads in to questions regarding the objective and the romanticized

⁹⁰ Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion*

⁹¹ Van Horn, p9

⁹² See, Van Horn, p9

⁹³ Nelson, p79

view of physical space. This, along with the consideration of the Hindu view of nature and space, with particular reference to Eck's treatment of *Tirthas*, is a way of accounting for the impact which India had on these two authors.

Bachelard argues that phenomenology, the philosophical study of the structures of experience and consciousness, suggests that physical space and particular places have meanings for individuals. The house is one such place, often with the meaning of security, although Bachelard does not mention the very many people for whom it means something very different, such as those abused in childhood or subject to foreign invasion – the house would mean something very different for such people – a prison, or a war zone. This underlines the fact that it is the *poetics* of space that Bachelard writes about, with an implied idealization. However, places within the house also have phenomenological significance – the attic different from the cellar. Bachelard suggests that these elements of consciousness – our memory of the cellar, for example, or of a warm cubby hole – are the subjects of our dreaming and our day-dreams.

As an example of a dream of place, Bachelard gives the example of a hermit's hut dreamed of by a child in a sitting room (based on Henri Bachelin's novel, *Le Serviteur*). It is the centre of the legend of 'house', the simplest form of habitation. Bachelard says that '...in most hut dreams we hope to live elsewhere, far from the overcrowded house, far from city cares.'⁹⁴

Writing of hermits, Bachelard states that:

...our legendary past transcends everything that has been seen [of this or that hut], even everything that we have experienced personally. The image leads us to extreme solitude. The hermit is *alone* before God. His hut, therefore, is just the opposite of the monastery. And there radiates about this centralized solitude a universe of meditation and prayer, a universe outside the universe. The hut can receive none of the riches 'of this world'. It possesses the felicity of intense

⁹⁴ Bachelard, p31

poverty; indeed it is one of the glories of poverty; as destitution increases it gives us access to absolute refuge.⁹⁵

Bachelard is, however, speaking of a picture of a hut, an engraving, that the imagination engraves on our memories. He is speaking of the hut and the life of the hermit as, to use his word, a daydream – a powerful image which acts as an archetype, both in the usual meaning of the term, and also possibly in the Jungian sense, in that one does not have to have personally experienced it, since it is universal. In Bachelin's novel, the child who dreams of the hut connects his dream with his encapsulated life, seated in a comfortable living room, listening to his father reading the lives of the saints. He delights in imagining that they live in the well-heated hut of charcoal burners.

The power of it is that it is a romance, a poetic trope – hence the title of Bachelard's book, *The Poetics of Space*. It has a certain reality, but is shorn of its attendant practicalities and discomforts – *Le Serviteur* was published in 1918 when charcoal burning was an occupation for the poor, and in England the charcoal burners lived in wigwam-like tents with no amenities.

We do not have evidence as to whether Henri Le Saux or Alan Griffiths had romantic dreams of either *ashrams* or hermitages before going to India, although both appear to have had an image of life as monks in India which were not based on personal experience, but rather on a general knowledge of the Indian culture – in that sense mostly images in the European psyche. They would have been referring to the 'poetics' of India, the European archetypal image, and even though this was informed by the reading of *Vedantic* texts, their mental image would have partaken of Orientalist constructions to some extent.

Abhishiktananda and Griffiths both spent the vast majority of their time in India in rural areas, in the India of villages. Griffiths had already found urban life in England unnerving, and expressed a preference for ruralism and romanticism. Abhishiktananda never lived for any time in an urban environment. A romanticized view of Indian rural life was certainly a part of Western understanding. It is difficult to find clear literature on the

⁹⁵ Bachelard, p31

Western view of rural India, but the literature on Indian villages is helpful. Ronald B. Inden has outlined the history of the Orientalist view of the Indian village, earlier writers looking upon it 'with a condescending fondness that borders on the romantic,'⁹⁶ and seeing it as a way of understanding earlier periods in European history. Inden also claims that the colonial focus on village life was a way of deconstituting the Indian state.

Surinder S Jodhka has labelled this Orientalist and Indological view as the 'book view' in relation to the way in which rural and village life has been understood in India, in which one finds in the village the 'real' culture, relationships and belief systems; this is distinct from the later anthropological 'field view'.⁹⁷ Rumina Sethi states that from the Orientalists's view 'the Indian village was a charming entity, preserved and protected from capitalist modernity.'⁹⁸ Sethi makes clear that Indian writers shared in this portrayal.

Abhishiktananda and Griffiths seemed to have believed that the space they would find in India – both the physical and the conceptual space – along with the culture that went with it, was suitable for a simplicity that would allow for a greater asceticism, and for a greater connection with mysticism; a view, which it could be argued, proved correct for them personally, and for others. Griffiths may have felt this more than Abhishiktananda, who had more of a missionary intent on going to India, whereas to Griffiths it was more of a continuation of his Eastington experiment.

This romanticized view⁹⁹ was not purely colonial, according to some commentators, but entered into the post-colonial period in the thoughts of no less a person than Gandhi. Surinder Jodhka notes how Gandhi employed the notion of the village as 'an ideology that would de-legitimise the British rule over India...Village was the site of authenticity, the "real/pure India", a place that, at least in its design, had not yet been corrupted by the western influence.'¹⁰⁰ This was necessarily a romanticization. Douglas Allen

⁹⁶ Inden, *Imagining India*, p132

⁹⁷ Jodhka, 'From "Book View" to "Field View"', pp311-331

⁹⁸ Sethi, Rumina, p89

⁹⁹ In acknowledging the presence of a romanticized view of the Indian rural space and village life, it should not be forgotten that there is an extensive literature on the lack of economic and cultural development and the stagnation in Indian villages. Considering this is, however, quite outside the scope of this study, focused as it is on less analytical Western understandings.

¹⁰⁰ Jodhka, 'Nation and Village', p3346

maintains that alongside a dislike of modern industrial life, some of Gandhi's earlier writing contained, 'idealized and romanticized descriptions and evaluations of India's villages'.¹⁰¹ Anil Mishra states that in challenging the principles of the modern world, Gandhi 'offers an idealized conception of traditional life in rural India.'¹⁰²

Although this is not a universally agreed view, there is a strong suggestion that when Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were arriving in India there was some idealization of Indian rural life, such that Suryakant Nath can claim that the Indian elite has had a tendency to romanticize village life as a 'return to our roots' and that 'much of the elite continue to subscribe to the Gandhian belief that the village should occupy a holy place at the centre of Indian nationhood.'¹⁰³

Abhishiktananda and Griffiths discovered that the *poetics* of space could prove disappointing. Poetry is a literary form in which emotion and feeling find expression in imagery. Griffiths was drawn to the poetics of a simple life with companions at Eastington, and significantly was much influenced by the romantic poets at this stage of his life, reading first Shelley and Swinburne, and then the poetry and philosophy of Coleridge.¹⁰⁴ But the experiment at Eastington broke down as practicalities impinged and personal relationships proved difficult. Abhishiktananda was drawn to the poetics of the life of a *sannyasin* in an *ashram*, but in the company of the impractical Monchanin found the practicalities of life in such a situation, and personality clashes, were not what he had expected.

In both these cases, the *poetics* of space became the practicalities of space, in that Griffiths and Abhishiktananda did not only dream about these spaces (if dream they did), but went to live them. Griffiths at Eastington, and Abhishiktananda at Shantivanam, were both to some extent disabused of a romanticized poetics. For Griffiths, after Eastington, the role became that of the reluctant *guru* and willing guest master at Shantivanam, and the poetry of the Indian space, expressed in Aguilar's *Christian Ashrams, Hindu Caves and Sacred Rivers*,¹⁰⁵ including the symbolism at Shantivanam which Griffiths was so

¹⁰¹ Allen, p134

¹⁰² Mishra, p90

¹⁰³ Nath, p361

¹⁰⁴ For an account of Griffiths' reading during this period, see Du Bulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, pp34-40

¹⁰⁵ Aguilar, *Christian Ashrams, Hindu Caves and Sacred Rivers*

concerned with. These became part of his lived drama. The power of the drama was such that he was able to withstand considerable difficulties with some who attempted to be long term Shantivanam residents. For Abhishiktananda, the dream of the hut, maybe first experienced in his solitude at Arunachala, became a lived experience at his *kutiya* at Gyansu.

It seems likely that poetics and practicalities worked together in their experience of Christian religious life in India – the poetics attracting and giving emotional and imaginative power, and the practicalities giving the day-to-day performance which brought the poetry out of imagination into lives that crystalized their intentions and proved influential for others. Attempts within this study to draw conclusions about what is and what is not a romanticized view of Hindu culture will be, to a large extent, subjective judgments. People see cultures in different ways, and opinions differ. It is, however, important to retain an awareness that the poetics of space, as outlined by Bachelard, may be influential for an individual or a culture, and may be deep within self-understanding. It can be, in the terminology of the social imaginary, normative as well as factual. In other words, the poetics of space may project onto self-understanding how it is believed things should be, rather than how they are.

These various complex understandings of the space in which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths lived in India, and the way in which they related to this key cultural aspect of India, are an important backdrop to this study. Their background experiences, which influenced their later work, were events within a context both cultural and physical.

3. CONCLUSION

As this study moves forward, there will be an attempt to consider the totality of the situation in which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths found themselves, hence the focus in this chapter on relating to the cultural and physical space, and the employment of Bachelard's notions of the poetics of space. Getting inside and understanding the in-between space in which these two authors worked and developed their theology is no easy task with the only truly reliable sources being what they themselves wrote. How their theology has been received is, however, a pointer at least to the difficulties of the task they undertook, and this is the topic to which this study now turns

Chapter 2

Commentary and Critique

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a considerable body of commentary and critique of the theology of both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. This study is not primarily concerned with an exposition of their theologies but with the issues raised in an immersive experience of a religion by those from another religion who, in many ways, situate themselves between the two, and the space in which this takes place. To this end commentators will be considered in this chapter who have looked beyond the final theology, and identified relevant issues. Because the nature of this study is to examine the space in which the work of these authors took place, and because this involves a new approach in this area, the sources of information that will be used and the commentators that will be cited are much wider than those more well-known treatments of their theology. Mentions of them by authors who are writing more generally about the wider Indian religious scene become important, those analyzing the cultural and political context are informative, and more ephemeral journalistic treatments are useful. To understand the space in which they worked, rather than just looking at the theology they developed, the net has to be cast widely.

The main analysis of this space, and what is happening within it, will take place later in this study, but hints appear in the work of commentators and in the reception of the lifestyle and theology of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. Where these hints appear in commentators' own understandings, whether it be a syncretic statement or an inappropriate equivalence between the two faiths, rather than ignore them attention will be drawn to them. The themes of this thesis therefore start to appear as the commentators are examined, and some terminology expanded upon later is used. This will build towards the next two chapters, in which this study will seek to develop a methodology for understanding the process that is taking place.

So the next section, on approaches to their theology, is more about the reception of their theology than about the theology itself. With the understanding of the space in which these two authors worked being the main purpose of this thesis, theological and cultural issues identified by commentators as emerging from that space are important. Section

two is itself in two parts. In the first is a treatment of adverse reaction to their theology; objections from both the Christian and the *Advaitic* sides are considered, some of an exclusivist nature. The following sub-section relates to critical accounts of the theology in the existing literature. It contains commentary which is based more upon a comparative approach to what they produced, and analysis of that commentary. Here in these critiques, however, can be found what this study considers to be fairly profound misunderstandings of how Christianity and *Advaita* may be related to each other, many appearing to find their origin in the difficulties of the theological enterprise upon which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were embarked. Many statements are made, in attempts to clarify the theology of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, which they would not themselves have made. Other material considers, among other things, whether their claim as represented in the literature, and in some commentary, to have found a close relationship between Christian and *Advaitic* beliefs stands up to scrutiny. Arguments that have been made against this claim are rehearsed.

Two issues which appear in the literature have been drawn out for particular attention in sections three and four, the issue of incommensurability between Christianity and *Advaita*, and that of hybridity versus syncretism. The first recognizes the fact that Christianity and *Advaita*, in perfectly justifiable readings, are incongruent in most areas. How commentators deal with this is significant in the reception of these two authors' works. The second acknowledges that Abhishiktananda's and Griffiths' theologies are often discussed in terms of hybridity or syncretism. These terms will be looked at more carefully in a following chapter when Homi Bhabha's employment of the term is examined, but here is included an examination of how commentators use these terms, along with the description of 'dual belonging' or 'multiple belonging'.

2. APPROACHES TO THE THEOLOGY

In the later chapters of this thesis, the writing of Griffiths and Abhishiktananda will be examined in some detail, with, as is stated in the introduction, the intention of understanding something of the process that is taking place in the space in which these two religious cultures meet in their work. It will therefore be in these chapters where a full exploration of the resultant theology will be required, so that the nature of the

encounter can be seen between Christianity and *Advaita* in these authors' writing, and how it relates to the theology that emerges.

In dealing with those who have commented upon this theology, this study will therefore, at this point, focus not on the theology itself – that will come later – but on how these commentators understand its nature. Those who take exclusivist views, both Christian and *Advaitin* will be followed by those who take a more comparative theological approach.

2.1. ADVERSE REACTION TO THE THEOLOGY

Outright objections to the theology that emerges from the Catholic *ashrams* is a combination of exclusivist Indian views and cultural and post-colonial anxiety on the one hand, and on the other, Christian exclusivism combined with anxiety about contamination of the faith. The issue of whether interfaith understanding is desirable is not often addressed by these commentators, nor how the Catholic *ashrams* could more appropriately engage in such dialogue. Whilst it may be tempting for those interested in interreligious dialogue to view these outright objections as reactionary, the objections cited can raise real issues facing the theology resulting from the immersive inculturation we are concerned with, including the issues of incommensurability mentioned above.

Dinesh D'Souza, an American who is a political and cultural commentator rather than a theologian writes against the background of incidents of persecution of Christians caused by more extreme forms of Indian nationalism. He laments the 'more extreme versions of inculturation',¹ which deny the exclusivity of the Christian faith, and maintain a value equal to Christ for Muslim and Hindu deities. He cites Griffiths as an example of this extremism, saying that he '...has largely given up reading the Bible and meditates on the Ramayana and the Bhagavad Gita, two sacred Hindu texts.'²

D'Souza displays what is often present in outright objections that come from Christians, in that he appears to have quite a poor knowledge of the religion of India, even though he was, in fact, born in Mumbai. He writes that *karma* is the individual's duty to God, and

¹ D'Souza, paragraph 10

² Ibid

that AUM is an invocation of Krishna. He suggests that the Vatican's *Nostra Aetate* of 1965 refers to that which 'non-Christian religions hold in common with Christianity', when in fact it refers to '...a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men' in non-Christian religions, and does not imply that truths are held in common. It is also not true to say that Griffiths neglected the reading of the Bible. What is more telling, though, is the assertion that the pursuit of 'higher forms of spirituality' caused Griffiths to abandon Christian theology; whilst this is an exaggeration it is true that Griffiths balanced theology with an emphasis given to personal spiritual experience.

D'Souza raises the question as to how one can search for areas of common ground or for points of connection, and yet avoid losing what, to many Christians, is the faith's justifiable and canonical claim to an exclusivity of salvation. Such a claim is the position of the Roman Catholic church and however much it is hedged around with statements regarding inculturation it is not, in the end, qualified. The issue for this study then becomes how this obstruction to the development of a more unified theology which includes *Advaitic* insights is negotiated. How is this Christian claim dealt with in the space between Christianity and another religion? D'Souza's position suggests that for at least some Christians there is a distinct 'space', inviolable in nature, in which Christian doctrine is found.

To Kenneth Rose, all such work is undesirable, since '...encounters with other traditions inevitably involve syncretistic blendings.'³ Commenting on Catherine Cornille's work on multiple religious belonging, which will be dealt with in chapter three, he maintains that the theology of what he calls 'hybrid Catholics' is no different from 'New Age' spirituality, which Cornille herself, he says, has little regard for.⁴ Rose believes that the pursuit of what he considers to be syncretic theology is driven by personal situations and religious interests, rather than being at the service of wider and more orthodox church traditions. His analysis does not admit of an in-between space in which negotiation takes place between traditions, and it will be noted later that syncretism, the word used by Rose, implies equivalences and does not involve work in the Third Space in the way that hybridity does.

³ Rose, *Pluralism: The Future of Religion*, p74

⁴ Ibid

Rose throws doubt on the theological seriousness and rigour of the whole enterprise involved in the type of immersive experience of another religious tradition which characterizes the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. It will be the aim of this study to examine the processes contained within the development of their theology to the extent that an examination of their published work will allow.

Rose, however, is also concerned, it seems, with a unifying theology which damages not only Christian belief, but those of other faiths as well. In commenting on Wayne Teasdale's ideas of interspirituality, in which theological conceptualization takes a definite second place behind spiritual disciplines and insight, he says that Griffiths' contention that people of other religions are being drawn to Christ through their own beliefs does not risk genuine confrontation between Christianity and other faiths. In fact Rose goes further; it '...closes its adherents off to the deeper and more challenging dialogue that puts this claim about Jesus at risk and entertains the possibility that some other religion may have a more comprehensive truth than Christianity.' It closes off '...the real possibility of conversion to other religions [and] turns out to be only a new and more deceptive way of doing missionary work.'⁵ Rose is implying that such interspirituality – the belief that people of all faith are being led to Christ through their own religions – is simply a disguised form of fulfillment theology which could be described as a postcolonial imperialism. Christianity becomes the fulfillment of the other's belief via the acquisition of the other's insights.

So rather than there being exclusivist motivations for Rose's outright objection, it is a recognition of differing or competing particularities, and he raises the key question as to whether Griffiths (and presumably some others working in the field of Christian-Hindu dialogue) far from taking the courageous course are in fact avoiding the really difficult issues in generalizations and theological 'fudges'. Griffiths is not taking the risk of concluding that a more comprehensive truth than his own is available. It raises the question of enculturation (one's original acquisition of culture), and acculturation (the acquisition of another culture at a later stage); to what extent could deeply committed Christians (as were Griffiths and Abhishiktananda) acknowledge a belief system which is,

⁵ Rose, 'Interspirituality: Interfaith dialogue or dissembling monologue?' paragraph 6

in part, superior – if they did believe this, as seems to be the case? Can the leopard change his spots, or does it have to seek another strategy which is at least personally possible in order deal with the dilemma? As this study looks in later chapters at how these authors live in a space between two faiths, and in which an internal negotiation between the two takes place, the question as to the degree and nature of theological risk that they were prepared to take will be relevant.

Objections to the Catholic *ashrams* by Indians is partly religious and partly cultural. It is tied up with Indian nationalism and the related *Neo-Vedanta*, and often refers back to a colonial period of which the *ashrams* are seen to be a remnant. The key issue for most Indian complainants is that a perceived deception is being perpetrated. In other words, inculturation is an attempt to persuade Indians that a level of unity between the faiths has been found, in theology, symbol and practice, whilst at the same time the Christians involved are maintaining the unique place of Christ in soteriology for all people. In short, *à la Rose*, they are involved in a disguised form of missionary activity. There is also a sense of the ‘pollution’ of the ancient truths of Indian religion. The editorial of *Hinduism Today* in December 1986 maintains the doctrine of *sarvadharmā samābhava*, equal respect for all religions, but goes on to record the hostility abroad amongst some Hindus. It is worth quoting at length:

...among those at the vanguard of Hindu renaissance there is suspicion, resistance and even outright hostility as shown by comments collected for *Hinduism Today* in India on the subject of Christian ashrams. Here is a sampling: G.M. Jagtiani of Bombay wrote: ‘A mischievous attempt is being made by some Christian missionaries to wear the saffron robe, put tilak on their forehead, recite the Gita, and convert the Hindus to Christianity.’ S. Shanmukham of the Hindu Munnani, Kanyakumari, states: ‘Once I met an orange-robed sannyasin. I took her to be a Hindu sannyasin. When asked, she said “I have put on this dress so that I can come in contact with Hindus very easily and tell them about Christianity.”’ R. Chidambasaksamma, Kanyakumari said. ‘It seems to be a sinister plan to make people accept Christ as God, the only God. They adopt all the philosophies and

practices of Hindus but would accept only Jesus as God. It is only a development of their original plan of Indianisation of Christianity.’⁶

Some of the criticism from this quarter can be impassioned and irate, indicating the level of hurt felt by some Indians. Swami Devananda is particularly outspoken, and Fastiggi comments that he, ‘...displays an unrelenting hostility towards Griffiths and Christianity in his letters and thus does a disservice to what otherwise appears to be a valid case.’⁷ Coupled with the fact that Shantivanam *Ashram*, for example, attracted little interest from the indigenous Indian community in terms of followers or adherents (as distinct from the respect that is shown towards it in the tradition of *sarvadharmā samābhava*), there must be a question over the extent to which the Catholic *ashrams* fully understood the culture in which they lived, not in terms of its classical scripture, but in terms of the faith ‘as it is lived’.

Sita Ram Goel, a prominent supporter of the Hindu national movement claims, for example, that this ‘experiment in fraud’⁸ finds its beginning in the work of De Nobili in the seventeenth century. Again, Goel shows the depth of feeling by extreme language. One of his books contains the section heading, ‘The Gospels are the First Nazi Manifesto’,⁹ based on the history of Western anti-Semitism and imperialism. Francis X Clooney recognizes the level of feeling present among some Indians on this topic. In a letter to *Hinduism Today* in 1987 he throws doubt on the advisability of presenting Catholicism ‘dressed up’ as Hindism without a sufficiently deep intellectual basis. He suggests a real openness to new images and ideas not traditionally Catholic is necessary, and is concerned about how all this appears to Hindus.¹⁰ Oldmeadow notes the ‘... residual political and racial resonances which sometimes obscure and distort the spiritual purpose of ... dialogue,’¹¹ but maintains that some of Goel’s criticisms were ‘cogent’. Oldmeadow cites as causes of disquiet the assumption of the garb of the *sannyasin*, the lack of formal initiation, the lack of time spent in a Hindu *matha* (monastery) or with a recognized *guru*, and the fact of being outside the traditional lineage. Whilst the language is sometimes

⁶ ‘Catholic Ashrams: Adopting And Adapting Hindu Dharma’, section entitled ‘Hindu Reaction’, paragraph 2

⁷ Fastiggi, p24

⁸ Goel, *Papacy: Its Doctrine And History*, p70

⁹ Goel, *Jesus Christ: An Artifice for Aggression*, p70

¹⁰ Quoted in Goel, *Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?* section III/12

¹¹ Oldmeadow, *A Christian Pilgrim in India*, p227

immoderate, the detail contained in such objections cannot be ignored. All of the factors mentioned by Oldmeadow could justifiably cause offense to an orthodox Hindu.

Indian objections to the activities of the Christian *ashrams* show that, *sarvadharmasamabhava* notwithstanding, there is a space which many Hindus felt had to be defended, and that while the basic tradition is to respect other religions this does not imply that there is not ground which is distinctly and uniquely Hindu or *Advaitic*.

2.2. CRITICAL ACCOUNTS OF THE THEOLOGY

Both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, in attempting to live in a theological space that is between Christianity and *Advaita*, made original and substantially new contributions, but as such they have not gone unchallenged by Christians on other than exclusivist grounds. In later chapters I shall attempt to trace the processes by which they arrived at these contributions and the attendant problems, using the methodology which will be set out. At this point it is sufficient to consider commentators who have challenged the final emergent theology, both in terms of general validity and also in terms of its detailed conclusions.

However, before moving to examine more substantial critiques of their theology, it is relevant to note some examples where deep misunderstanding exists on the part of commentators themselves. From the postcolonial perspective comes the warning against construction, dealt with in detail in chapter four, and from the perspective of comparative theology comes the warning against generalization, expanded upon in chapter three.

So far as construction of the Other is concerned, one of the key occurrences in the meeting of religious cultures is that the one makes statements about the other. Where the one is not rejecting the other on exclusivist or other grounds, or where the one is prepared to understand the other in order to learn from it, these statements form part of a negotiation between the two faiths. These statements about the Other are, however, formed within the perspective and framework of the religious tradition from which they are being made. The first religious culture influences the statements made about the

second, and the concepts and categories of the first can distort the understanding of the theology of the second. In certain instances the shift in understanding of the theology of the other can be intentional and acknowledged, and defined as part of the negotiation that is taking place. At other times, however, the shift in meaning is the result of a false and unconscious construction of the Other, in which a concept in one faith is incorrectly construed, or a belief is ascribed which does not exist. The cause of this is often the attempt to find an equivalence. Chapter four will deal more with this, but here it is appropriate to look at some examples of this found within the literature.

Gustafson outlines Griffiths' use of the Christian concept of Trinity as a means of understanding God as communion. It is appropriate to quote in full:

This is a crucial point to grasp for understanding Griffiths' theological foundation, and how and why he differs from Hindus. The tendency in Hinduism is to understand God as purely monadic, as in Islam. Griffiths points out that if this is the case, then the Godhead 'cannot be love in himself', for only in a relational or communal understanding of the Godhead can God be understood as love¹².

Gustafson here is accepting that there is a Hindu 'God' who can be compared to a Christian 'God' – this is made particularly plain by his identification of a Hindu 'God' with Islamic concepts of divinity. He is attempting to employ the Islamic view of God as a counterpoint to Christianity – Islamic monotheism as against Trinitarian monotheism. But Islamic monotheism is not monism. Gustafson's mistake is glaring – monism in *Advaita* (if *Advaita* is monistic, itself a debatable point) is a monism not of God, but of 'all that is'. Once the idea that *Advaita* has a monadic concept of divinity is established by a commentator, it is then a short step to compare this monad with the Trinity and note the differences. In fact, the whole concept of what ultimate 'divinity' means (as relating to the supreme Being or Essence) is different in the two religions.

Mong also attempts to define the difference between a monist *Advaita* and 'Christian *Advaita*' by stating that the former 'affirms the absolute identity between *Brahman* and the soul,' while the latter is 'characterized by intuitive knowledge, love and an affirmation

¹² Gustafson, p37

of the reality of the world'¹³. But this is a confusion over what constitutes monism. Monism denies the reality of a world of multiplicity – one does not have to be monist to hold that there is identity between *Brahman* and the soul. It shows how subtle the distinctions are in this area, and how easy it is to make false judgments about what 'goes along' with any particular formulation of the relationship between the world and the divine. There is also a confusing use of the word soul. It is the pure and unattached *Aham*, the *Atman*, that is identified with *Brahman*. The soul, with the Christian idea of the fall, sin and redemption, is quite a different concept, more like the *jiva*, the individual being with all its attachments.

A related form of misunderstanding can be brought about by unjustified generalizations. Edwards Ulrich states that, 'The Christian...proceeds from the ground of faith and its contents, whereas the *Advaitin* proceeds from the experience of the *Atman*.'¹⁴ This is to generalize, and also to compare two unlikes. Ulrich is generalizing about Christians and *Advaitins* – i.e. the Christian who has no experience of the presence of God with the *Advaitin* who has conscious experience of the *Atman*. It is like comparing the mystical writing of an Eckhart with an Indian academic who only knows *Advaita* intellectually (Bradley Malkovsky comments on the inadequacy of understanding of *Advaita* in Indian universities).¹⁵ It is surely unreasonable to assume that everyone who claims *Advaita* as their creed has the sort of experience of the *Atman* that an adept may have. In the same way it is by no means a foregone conclusion that no Christians have a sense of the presence of God which is comparable to the *Advaitin's* sense of *Brahman*.

The appearance of constructions and generalizations, among other processes, occurs in the literature which comments on the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, and this reflects the complexity of their work in the Third Space of encounter. The methodology will attempt to develop a way of recognizing what is happening in the space in which religions meet. This methodology will be applied in more detail at a later stage, both to their own writing and further to commentary upon, and reception of, their work.

¹³ Mong, p46

¹⁴ Ulrich, 'Swami Abhishiktananda and Comparative Theology', pp48-49

¹⁵ Malkovsky, section entitled 'Advaita and Christian Faith in Conflict', paragraph 3

Turning to critiques in which construction and generalization do not feature, the validity of the theology has been challenged on the grounds that these authors' work represents a misreading of *Advaita*, and in this sense, that they are developing a Christian theology in response to a belief system that does not, in fact, exist in the way in which they interpret it. The centre of the problem is that the Christian view of the relationship between the divine and the creation is, in a common reading of *Advaita*, completely at odds with the belief of the latter. This area was a particular focus for Griffiths. Martin Ganeri maintains that to express the concept of the Christian God in *Advaitic* terms requires a re-reading of Śankara in much the same way as Aquinas re-read new meaning into his Greek and other sources: '*Advaitic* Trinitarian and Christological accounts are likewise creative interpretations of *Advaita* in the encounter with Christian faith.'¹⁶ The difference is that Hinduism is a living tradition, unlike the culture that Aquinas was reinterpreting, and this means that there are likely to be problems with the reception by Hindus of such a re-reading, who have a present day interpretive tradition.

A key issue for this study, however, is that there is a complete difference between knowing *and acknowledging* that one is re-imagining another religion's doctrines – which may be a process within the development of a hybrid theology – and intentionally or unintentionally misreading the other theology without acknowledging that one is changing it, which can only be described as a construction of the Other. The distinction between a hybridity and a construction is key to this study.

Writing of the respective understandings of the relationship between the divine and the physical world, Celia Kourie deals with the fact that *Advaita*, as understood by many in India, proposes that the world is illusion or *maya*. Kourie states that Abhishiktananda, in proposing a solution that fits with the Christian concept of a world of reality, has to revise *Advaita*. '[Abhishiktananda] tried to give a more positive view of *maya* by looking at it in terms of the *sakti*, or energy of God. This would amount to a revision of the classical Hindu concepts of *maya* and *sakti*.'¹⁷

¹⁶ Ganeri, 'Catholic Encounter with Hindus in the Twentieth Century', p422

¹⁷ Kourie, 'Abhishiktananda: a Christian Advaitin', p3

As well as problems over the God-creation relationship, to use the Christian terminology, two other issues come to the forefront. The first is the use both authors made of the *Advaitic* concept of *saccidananda*, often translated as ‘conscious-knowledge-bliss’, although as will become apparent, all English translations of Sanskrit are at best approximations, since each of the *Advaitic* concepts has a meaning with considerable scope in terms of English definition, and is often very sensitive to the context in which it is used. Griffiths himself wrote that often ‘one does not know what a [Sanskrit] word means, because it can mean many things.’¹⁸ However, both he and Abhishiktananda sought to express Christian Trinitarian belief in terms of *saccidananda*. Fastiggi points out there is a considerable difference between the Hindu ‘consciousness’ of *saccidananda* and Christian *Logos*, between the Christian Spirit who is love, and notions of ‘bliss’. One might also add that these authors pairing between *saccidananda* and Trinity are not always consistent over time. In commenting on Griffiths, Fastiggi concludes: ‘If Griffiths persists in equating the Trinity with the Hindu *Saccidananda*, then he is either distorting the meaning of the Hindu triad or he is promoting a view of the Trinity, which is unacceptable in Christian orthodoxy.’¹⁹ The proposed relationship between *saccidananda* and Trinity will be focused on in detail in chapter six.

The second issue is the relationship between the two concepts of the divine. Because of this difficulty, this study will use the term ‘divine’ or ‘supreme Being’ to mean the ultimate Being unless referring to it within its respective tradition. Both the Christian use of ‘God’ and the Hindu use of ‘*Brahman*’ are too tied in with meanings which are surrounded by beliefs not shared across both faiths – a difficulty which is, of course, at the centre of any attempt to relate the two belief systems. Fastiggi, again commenting on Griffiths’ writing and on his attempt to equate Christian Father and Son to two aspects of *Brahman* makes it clear that the result is unacceptable to even a wide interpretation of Christian belief. Griffiths equates the Father with *nirguna Brahman*, the qualitless Absolute, and God the Son with *saguna Brahman*, the qualitated Absolute. The qualities referred to are the *gunas*, qualities which occur at *Brahman*’s first move into creation. However attractive this is, the clear *Advaitic* belief is that *saguna Brahman* is a lesser aspect of the deity, and the first step towards *avidya*, the ignorance that leads to human

¹⁸ Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*, p21

¹⁹ Fastiggi, p25

delusion. Again, Fastiggi concludes; 'If Griffiths is serious about his equation, he has made the Son less than the Father in a way destructive of Christian orthodoxy.'²⁰ Griffiths attempts to defend his position by referring to the unmanifest Father and the Self-manifestation which is the Son, but this is to lose the *Advaitic* context of a lesser being.

The Third Space, in which hybridization takes place, will produce effects such as the two noted here. It is the extent to which the process of hybridization is acknowledged which is significant.

Both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths propose, at different points, varying correspondences in *Advaita* for the Father/Son relationship. It shows the wide possibilities of inaccurate understanding when applying a concept from one faith within another faith. The proposals only look plausible because the terms cannot usually be defined with reference to the other faith's concepts. *Brahman* can only be defined in *Advaitic* terms, similarly *Atman* cannot be defined in terms of Christian theology. When they are carelessly imported without sufficient explanation they therefore arrive incognito, as it were, ready to take on a pseudonym. One can say that the concept of *Atman* throws a light on the concept of the soul – it asks questions of that concept. Likewise, *Brahman* asks questions of the Christian concept of God. However, using a concept in another religion almost automatically produces a hybrid if the theologian acknowledges a change in that second religion produced by the imported new term (not necessarily a criticism if one is aiming at a hybridity), or a synchronicity if the theologian claims that there is a direct equivalence of meaning. The distinction drawn between hybridity and syncretism in this study will be considered later in this chapter.

The Incarnation and the historicity of Christian belief is also an area in which compromises were made in Christian belief which seem hard to see as compatible with orthodox approaches. Ulrich states that, by 1970, Abhishiktananda had moved to a much more pluralist position in which he believed that all religions and humanisms would not necessarily converge with the revelation of Christ, but had validity in their own terms. He held, however, to the view that this signified a presence of Christ, under other names and forms. Ulrich remarks that the loss of historicity diminishes a comparative approach,

²⁰ Ibid

since this can only be engaged in if both traditions are held in their completeness when compared: 'Abhishiktananda's experiential inclusivism contributed to this loss.'²¹

Ganeri states that, for Abhishiktananda, Christian faith about the Incarnation of Christ had to be transformed into *Advaitic* categories, so that Christ is no longer the unique union of God and human kind, but an exemplar of the relationship that all human beings have with *Brahman*.²² The fact that Abhishiktananda was dropping the historicity within Christianity, such a crucial part of doctrine, shows that he was working within a hybridity at this point; a faith no longer recognizably wholly Christian which denies crucial elements yet is not in any way *Advaitic*, in that he maintained Christ as the destination. The point of discontinuity for him was the Incarnation, posing a crucial question for the Church and Catholicity as to how a unique Christ could be understood by Hindus '...if such experience of manifestation cannot be expressed in Indian terms.'²³ Abhishiktananda recognized the importance of a theological approach to dialogue between Christianity and *Advaita* to underpin the ascetic practices, but was confronted with the difficulty of the particularity of the Incarnation – once one has fully realized 'I AM', *Aham*, in unity with *Brahman*, what role does a historical and unique Son of God have in one's theology? The theology of Incarnation cannot be expressed in Indian terms – certainly not in *Advaitic* terms.

Griffiths maintained a theology of Incarnation at the centre of his thought far more clearly than did Abhishiktananda. Teasdale states that 'Bede emphasizes that history is one of the elements that distinguish the Christian tradition from the Hindu.'²⁴ While he maintains that Hinduism is grounded in a mythological time and meditative experience, Griffiths finds the root of the awareness of the Trinity in the experience of the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth and his relationship with his Father. This is a marker which shows in brief Griffiths' inclination to be more influenced by orthodox Christian theology.

Finally, in this section on the comparative examination of this theology by others, it is relevant to note an implied complaint against Christian theology, mainly to be found in Abhishiktananda, but also traceable in Griffiths' writing, which places expectations upon

²¹ Ulrich, 'Swami Abhishiktananda and Comparative Theology', p54

²² Ganeri, 'Catholicism and Hinduism', p132

²³ Aguilar, p75

²⁴ Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths*, p139

Christian theology that it does not claim to be able to fulfill. There is, in places, an expectation that theology should be able fully to explain not only the divine, but also 'all that is'. As Ulrich says: '...Christian faith involves conceptual content. However, classic Christian teaching asserts that the central portion of this content surpasses the mind's ability to comprehend it.'²⁵ He makes this remark in response to Abhishiktananda's dissatisfaction with Christian theology, and the fact that it cannot account for contemplative experience:

I endeavour to hang on, reading, the liturgy, reflection, etc.; and after a quarter of an hour, or at most after a day, all the scaffolding that I have put up in trying to support my faith collapses like a house of cards²⁶.

Abhishiktananda is therefore in one sense setting a standard for Christian theology which cannot be met – fully to experience the divine by means of theological concepts. The implication, maybe, is that the *Advaitic* 'scaffolding' does not collapse, or not to the same extent; that the experience of complete unity is more congruent with *Advaitic* doctrine. In other words he seeks, and finds, elsewhere what is apparent in Christian mysticism – that words or doctrines dissolve in experience. However, Ulrich suggests that Abhishiktananda got beyond this 'conceptual' understanding of the purpose of doctrine in his book, *Saccidananda*, regarding it more as something which 'leads' the individual, but the problem of extremely high expectations of Christian doctrinal theology remains a problem when it forms part of a comparison with the mystical element in *Advaita*.

3. APPROACHES TO INCOMENSURABILITY – Mysticism, Reason and Construction

Abhishiktananda expressed in a forthright manner the problem of incommensurability between Christianity and *Advaita*, and in doing so acknowledged the profound difficulties involved in any attempt at integration: 'In their claim to be ultimate, Christianity and *Advaita* are mutually exclusive.'²⁷ Nor will this study in any way suggest that either he or Griffiths ever implied that the two religions represented an 'easy fit' with each other. In their writing, as well as being positioned intellectually between two faiths in terms of the theology they expressed, they were both also positioned between the reasoning they

²⁵ Ulrich, 'Swami Abhishiktananda and Comparative Theology', p47

²⁶ Abhishiktananda diary entry quoted Ulrich, 'Swami Abhishiktananda and Comparative Theology', pp46-47

²⁷ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p49

used to develop their theologies and the mystical or *Advaitic* experience (either realized or worked towards) which had attracted them to risk their 'in-between' position. However, they had very different approaches with regard to the emphasis they placed on direct experience and reason, reflected by their different ultimate goals of experiencing *Advaita* deeply (in the case of Abhishiktananda, once he had moved away from fulfillment theology) and influencing the expression of Christianity, in the case of Griffiths.

Judson Trapnell, in his three-part article, 'Two Models of Christian Dialogue with Hinduism',²⁸ produces a comparative study of the two approaches they took. It was Abhishiktananda who moved furthest in terms of his commitment to *Advaita* as the major element in his thinking, and in his immersion in *Advaitic* practice, Griffiths maintaining more of a balance between spiritual experience and theological reasoning. In this respect they represent two models for living in the space between two religious faiths. The extent to which Abhishiktananda suffered the tensions inherent in maintaining a Christian faith at the same time as diving deeply into another faith's spiritual disciplines is testament to the difference between them. Wayne Teasdale says that he '... went through years of agony and interior turmoil trying to integrate his *advaitic* experience with his equally profound Christian faith and contemplative experience.'²⁹

Griffiths did not depart from his Christian heritage of theological reasoning, though to say, with Hans Gustafson, that he '...remained a very traditional Benedictine with classic theological views and beliefs'³⁰ is to deny the radical elements of his theology. Including Monchanin with Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, Enrico Beltrami defines three related approaches as follows:

...they emphasised their own tradition (Monchanin), took the other tradition as seriously as their own (Le Saux) and enlarged their certainties to embrace two traditions (Griffiths) .³¹

²⁸ Trapnell, 'Two Models of Christian Dialogue with Hinduism'

²⁹ Teasdale, 'Interreligious Dialogue Since Vatican II', p122

³⁰ Gustafson, p31

³¹ Beltrami, p109

As the theologies of these authors are studied in detail, the movement that occurs in their thinking and the way it is changed by living profoundly influenced by two faiths is an important source of information in understanding the 'internal workings' of a religious Third Space. It will help to show how *Advaita* and Christianity act upon each other within these individuals, as far as that can be discovered from their works.

The construct of the 'mystic East', referred to briefly in chapter one and examined more closely in chapter four, is an important concept in this study, as a belief in the primacy of mystical experience may affect approaches to incommensurability between faiths and may result in the belief that all faiths meet in mystical experience. It appears in the literature of commentators, often as an unacknowledged backdrop. Teasdale, for example, holds that scholarship and words get in the way of understanding and that, academic dialogue 'is greatly needed, but it must defer to the mystical reality at the core of each tradition...'³²

Kristin Bloomer, in commenting on the dangers of discounting analysis in favour of experience states:

Despite some of the working benefits of forthrightly assuming an underlying unity of religious experience – including the benefit of providing a common ground for discussion that can encourage interreligious dialogue – the analytical disadvantages are, I believe, more significant. Asserting a unified field of religious experience can actually discourage dialogue and corrode critical scholarship.³³

The Christian tradition generally states that inspiration and experience is balanced with reason, which is the approach generally to be found in Griffiths' own writing – one does not trump the other.³⁴ This is also, of course, the case with *Advaita*, in which Śankara closely reasons his interpretations of *Śruti*, the authoritative scripture on which he bases his teaching. Śankara's *bhashyas*, or expositions of sacred texts, are the main source of his thinking. The prioritization of mysticism could be seen as a part of a modern Western

³² Teasdale, 'Interreligious Dialogue Since Vatican II', p127

³³ Bloomer, p4

³⁴ For example: Thomas Aquinas; 'There is a twofold mode of truth in what we profess about God' (*Suma Contra Gentiles*, 1. Ch 3, n2)

construction of Eastern religions. Both traditions, of course, also place great emphasis on revelation. However, the view that the space between religions can be filled with a spirituality that dissolves theological concepts, incongruences, and allegiances is not one taken by this study, nor indeed by Abhishiktananda or Griffiths, who continued their Christian belonging and their theological work and struggle throughout their lives.

Teasdale claims a particular place for mystical teaching by a master, stating: 'Nothing can take the place of sitting for an hour in the presence of a Buddhist, Hindu or Sufi master....This is uniquely true of mystical religion, but it is not true of mathematics, physics or biology, for instance.'³⁵

Again, maybe a 'mystic East' view. A mathematician would disagree that being in the presence of a master mathematician would not be the most formative and enlightening of experiences. The separation of knowledge about God from other forms of knowledge can be seen as a post-enlightenment approach,³⁶ in which religion becomes a distinct, discrete and definable area of human enterprise, rather than part of a unity with all knowledge. This is a view of the West put forward by some in India, and is not the *Vedantic* view according to Swami Bharati Krishna Tirtha:

What we call secular knowledge, every part thereof, is an integral part of the Vedic learning. Such is not the case with regard to the sciences and the religious literature of the various peoples of the Western world. That has been the trouble all the time. We have never had a quarrel³⁷.

Even given that the view that *Vedic* knowledge includes secular knowledge can be seen as an Indian nationalist reaction to the colonial period, being the contention that India had this knowledge all the time in its own tradition,³⁸ the willingness to see knowledge as unified is present in the *Vedic* tradition. To take again the example of mathematics, both

³⁵ Teasdale, 'Interreligious Dialogue Since Vatican II', p128

³⁶ This view is not uncontested, but the subject is complex. See, for example, Brooke, *Science and Religion*. See also the discussion in the first chapter of Barnes, *Interreligious Learning*, in which the modern use of the word 'religion', as separate from other forms of experience or knowledge, is argued to be post-Enlightenment.

³⁷ Swami Bharati Krishna Tirtha, p321

³⁸ For a discussion of this issue, see Nandy, Meera, 'Vedic Science and Hindu Nationalism'

the concepts of zero and infinity are found in the *Vedas* as both metaphysical and mathematical ideas.³⁹ Having said this, issues of present-day self-perception may be as important as historical fact.

One of the most interesting aspects of the literature is that, amongst those who are enthusiastic about the theology of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, it is difficult to find statements related to the possibility of the incommensurability of *Advaita* and Christianity. One of the clearer statements comes from Glen Friesen, himself generally favourably disposed and no Christian exclusivist, who maintains that Abhishiktananda's reinterpretation of such basic Christian concepts as the fall and redemption in Christ makes them no longer recognizable. Using the Western word 'acosmism' to describe Abhishiktananda's views, Friesen says that the importance of creation is undermined: 'His view that we only have to realize our oneness with God tends to undermine the ontological reality of the fall into sin.'⁴⁰

Theological incommensurability is plainly a possible experience in the space where two religions meet, not in the sense of one exclusivist theology rejecting the other, but in terms of incongruity of theological concepts. Ulrich records that Abhishiktananda, in response to this problem, sought to move beyond theological concepts, in believing that a common experience of unity as is found in *Advaita* is the bedrock on which all religious beliefs and myths rest.⁴¹ He continued, however, to write theologically, having no other option if he was to write at all.

Teasdale regards Abhishiktananda as, 'a symbol of the living encounter between and among the world religions in the mystical depths' in that he found, in his practice, the point at which all 'authentic traditions of spiritual depth'⁴² find their unity. Dialogue at this level takes place in the heart, what in *Advaita* is known as the *guha*, the 'cave of the heart'.

³⁹ See, for example, Maheshwari, np, section entitled 'Concept of Shunya (Zero)'

⁴⁰ Friesen, in answer to the question, 'Where else do you see that he is not helpful?'

⁴¹ See Ulrich, 'Convergences and Divergences', p6

⁴² Teasdale, 'Interreligious Dialogue Since Vatican II', p122

Oldmeadow reasons differently when he claims that in the process of becoming 'a fully realized *sannyasi* Abhishiktananda became neither Hindu nor Christian, or both Hindu and Christian, and that this is only possible '...at a mystical and esoteric level where the relative forms are universalized.'⁴³

Oldmeadow and Teasdale are here accepting as a basic premise that the differences between Christianity and Hinduism dissolve as the result of a certain level of spiritual realization. Abhishiktananda in his later years also claimed to have moved beyond concept, doctrine and theology. It is hard not to see this as a move beyond all statements relating to a particular religion. If the point of unity is beyond individual religions (which seems a completely reasonable stance), the religions themselves, it could be argued, remain separate ways, equally valid if 'authentic traditions of spiritual depth', but not united with each other except in the final realization of unity to which they lead. To focus entirely on the end of the spiritual journey, and to find one's identity only there leaves any sense of 'belonging', including dual or multiple religious belonging, meaningless, which was plainly not the case for Abhishiktananda, who continued to be troubled by questions of belonging to nearly the end of his life.

Commentators on Griffiths writing often make fewer absolute claims for the primacy of mystical experience over reason. While Ambrose Mong maintains that Griffiths also believed that 'at the deepest level of religious experience, there is nothing incompatible among the different religious traditions',⁴⁴ he also states that Griffiths had an approach not entirely based on esoteric insight, and that he had a geo-political consciousness which formed a background to his thoughts on religion, leading him to ideas of co-operation and dialogue.

The premise of this study is that historical and lived faith and doctrine does not disappear in spiritual experience, but that enculturation remains an active force within acculturation, and that when faiths meet, given that there is not outright rejection, there is a process of negotiation and uncertain relational dialogue, if the commitment to both faiths is sufficient. This occurs in a Third Space between the two religions.

⁴³ Oldmeadow, *A Christian Pilgrim in India*, p20

⁴⁴ Mong, p51

4. HYBRIDITY AND SYNCRETISM

The question as to whether there are separate phenomena of hybridity and syncretism, or whether they are two names for the same thing, will be addressed in chapter four, in the context of the use of the term 'hybridity' in Third Space theory. The terms are used by commentators, as the following examples show. It is plain that whilst both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths maintained their allegiance to their monastic orders, and continued to regularly express themselves in the language of Christianity as well as seeking *Advaitic* equivalences, they positioned themselves very much between the two faiths, both in their practice at Shantivanam and in their adoption of the *sannyasi* identity. Fastiggi comments that Griffiths uses Christian concepts to express Hindu ideas, and Hindu concepts to express Christian ideas, but asks: '...does Griffiths succeed in his effort at religious integration or does he create a theological hybrid, which is neither authentically Hindu nor Christian?'⁴⁵ It is a question that relates directly to this study's attempt to understand the space that he and Abhishiktananda occupied.

Beltrami characterizes Abhishiktananda by saying that '...meaning lies in his location of in-between-ness, and [that] this unique status serves to ground his border identity.'⁴⁶ He states: 'Incorporating both Christianness and Hinduness into a unique hybrid category of self-reference, he regarded the encounter between Christianity and India as a matter of deep spiritual search rather than as a theological enterprise.'⁴⁷

Not everyone is so happy with the term hybridity, or, indeed, syncretism.

Abhishiktananda and Monchanin's aim in founding Shantivanam was, according to Oldmeadow, not a syncretic exercise involving any type of resultant hybridity, but an exploration into Christianity, '...with the aid of the traditional wisdom of India which, in the monks' view, was to be found in *Vedanta* and in the spiritual disciplines of the renunciate.'⁴⁸ Oldmeadow is right that at this stage, at the setting up of Shantivanam, hybridity was not a part of the agenda, but the thought that a *Vedantic* philosophy or

⁴⁵ Fastiggi, p24

⁴⁶ Beltrami, pp112-113

⁴⁷ Ibid, p113

⁴⁸ Oldmeadow, *A Christian Pilgrim in India*, p8

wisdom could be separated from *Vedanta*, and grafted onto Christianity leaving the latter unhybridized may well be a mistake.

5. CONCLUSION

The objections of Christian exclusivists to an admixture with *Advaita* are fairly predictable, looked at from a Christian standpoint, but are not always well informed in terms of the content of *Advaita*. They refer to the unique nature of Christ and Christian salvation, and are concerned about unorthodox versions of Trinitarian and Incarnational theology. Exclusivists from the side of *Advaita* are more worried about a perceived dishonesty inherent in Christians who don the robes of *sannyasi*, merge Christian and Hindu images and worship, yet claim a continued allegiance to Christ as the centre of their spiritual life and the end goal of all spiritual endeavour. There is a hangover of post-colonial anxiety on the part of some Hindu commentators.

However, though 'exclusivism' may be taken to be a pejorative term, particularly in a thesis concerned with Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, the genuine anxieties of faiths which consider that essential elements of belief are being eroded should not be swept aside as though somehow ill- or mis-informed. Certainly the points which concern the Christian exclusivists dealt with in this chapter are concepts totally central to the faith and to its understanding of its own value to humanity. Both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths acknowledged that in holding Christianity and *Advaita* together there were incommensurabilities that they had to come to terms with. This study will hope to look at 'where one goes from there'. If one holds that two incongruent beliefs or concepts both have value, what strategy does one adopt to properly honour those values. How and in what ways can a hybridity formed in a Third Space between religions become relevant for the religions concerned? Does it of necessity stay in the Third Space, or can it be referred back, or 'brought home' to either or both of its parent traditions?

Both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths took the step of deep immersion within *Advaita*. Abhishiktananda to a greater extent, Griffiths to a lesser, risked their Christian identities, both personally and theologically, Abhishiktananda apparently going through the greater suffering as a result. The risks that they ran are well reflected in the commentary literature, the most telling, possibly, being the risk in both moving beyond theology but

still talking theologically. There is a strand in the commentary which implies that theology is too lowly a thing to be worried about in the face of *Advaitic* experience, which yet continues to work with theological concepts. While Abhishiktananda may have sometimes implied this, it was not the core belief of either author. Both struggled to unite their experience and their theology, Abhishiktananda at some cost to himself, proving that such attempts at integration become particularly perilous when one is moving outside an established framework of belief. The Third space is one in which differences and incommensurabilities are negotiated, rather than dissolved.

The 'construction of the Other' is also a problem, even with the deeply experienced, though selective, presentation of another religion to be found in these two authors. They both maintained a Christian belief, and even Abhishiktananda continued to use Christian language to the very end. Yet from that enculturated position they attempted to define what *Advaita* is saying. The risks of misconstruction are considerable.

So a major challenge to the theologies that emerge from the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, even though those theologies contain substantial differences from each other, is that they represent a misreading of *Advaita*; that there is a 'construction of the Other' which suits the authors' purposes. This becomes apparent in the questionable matching of concepts such as Trinity and *saccidananda*, or God the Father with *nirguna Brahman*. These matchings, and others, will be explored later in greater detail. There is a universalizing of the Incarnation, based on a comparison with *Advaitic* approaches, that many Christians would find unorthodox. There is also a comparison of the contemplative (to use the Christian term) content of *Advaitic* thinking with the conceptual content of Christian theology, with the result that the latter is considered less spiritually aware.

What is lacking in the literature, however, is an explanation or an exploration of the dynamics of colliding theological concepts, how they seem to work upon each other in the minds of these theologians, and why the resultant theology emerges. In this study an attempt is made to develop a methodology that examines the forces that influence the development of the ideas that come out of this experience of immersion in another religious culture.

I hope to show that one way to explore the influence of one culture upon another is to use methodology developed to reflect upon colonial and post-colonial situations. The literature shows no use of such a methodology, and only tangential references to the fact that Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were working in a post-colonial setting and originated from the West, from which that colonialism came. Later chapters will consider how this type of thinking, involved as it often is with situations in which physical power and domination are in play, or in which the past results of physical power and domination are being experienced, can be adapted to examine the pacific development of a theology which is caught, so to speak, between two cultures.

The issues of hybridity and syncretism become important, as they are in colonial and post-colonial theory, but they are not well defined nor differentiated, sometimes appearing as though they are synonyms, which I dispute. It is not really possible to consider the work of Abhishiktananda or Griffiths without reference to the 'in-between' nature of their endeavours, and several authors consider it a key to understanding what they did. However, what is actually happening in this space between religions, and the nature of that space, has not been anatomized, and my aim is to attempt a provisional analysis along these lines.

Chapter 3

Analyzing the Interreligious Space 1

1. INTRODUCTION

As stated in the Introduction, Colonial and Postcolonial theory, which the next chapter will move to, does not have tools with which to assess the theology that emerges in a Third Space of encounter between two religions. In order to understand the interreligious space in which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths developed their theologies by examining their texts, it is necessary to have ways of reading those texts which expose the workings within theology. Because there is a complex of influences within the theologies of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, a number of ways of reading are proposed by this study. The interfaith space is multi-dimensional, containing cultural influences, physical circumstances, established religious traditions and personal relationships, to name only a few. In order to recognize that complexity the concept of the 'Theological Imaginary' is considered first in this chapter.

Secondly in this chapter is a section on how the theory of comparative theology and interfaith dialogue relates to the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, and can be used to explore what is occurring in the Third Space. Although topics that can be dealt with on their own, comparative theology and interreligious dialogue are dealt with here together because they were so integrated in the work of these two individuals; their deep immersion in Hindu culture was not of the same form as interreligious dialogue of a more formal or academic nature, and the comparative aspects of the emergent theology cannot be separated from their daily practice of dialoging with *Advaita*.

Finally in this chapter comes a section on multiple religious belonging. Again, Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were both particular examples of multiple belonging, although of course this is true of every individual involved meaningfully in two religions. The general concepts within the subject are examined.

2. THE THEOLOGICAL IMAGINARY

This study will use the term 'theological imaginary' to define the complex of beliefs and practices which influenced Abhishiktananda and Griffiths from both traditions, and the

histories, cultures and contexts they inhabited. A theological imaginary is not a mental construct, nor indeed a conceptual project on which an individual embarks, but to use a metaphor, the landscape in which he or she lives. It influences and involves the whole person in their sense of identity, and in their sense of meaning and of relationship with the world and with others. The notion of the theological imaginary is comprehensive, in that it includes all those influences which, for an individual, go to make up who that person is in terms of theology, religion, spirituality, practice and the resultant relationship to others and to the world. The theological imaginaries that influenced them are therefore, in a very real sense, the fabric of the space in which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths engaged in their dialogue, their spiritual practice, and their theological speculations.

A concept such as theological imaginary is needed in this study (or a subtly different but related concept found in the literature, theological imagination) because of the complexity of the cross-currents of tradition, belief, practice and culture which are found in the interreligious Third Space, and which are profoundly present in a space in which individuals are immersed in two traditions to the extent that was true of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. They were influenced by two imaginaries, Christian and Hindu (or *Advaitic*), and did not inhabit one to the exclusion of the other. In their lives and work they developed a nascent theological imaginary, although that of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths differed considerably. It was nascent in that it did not become standard or recognized for a culture or society, but the complex of spiritual practice, theology, liturgy, symbol and lifestyle that they proposed may be described as sharing the properties of a theological imaginary which they inhabited. The term theological imaginary is necessary in this study therefore in recognition that the term 'theology' runs the risk of being too intellectual, too 'unperformative', and not inclusive enough of the elements from the two religions and cultures of which they took account.

Every religious person inhabits a theological imaginary. Individuals are enculturated into such an imaginary if they are born into a faith, or, as Charles Taylor states, '...the religious language, capacities, and modes of experience available to each of us comes from the society in which we are born....'¹ Others may learn it if religion becomes important for

¹ Taylor, Charles, p52

them later in life. Those who do not belong to a faith but live in a culture in which a faith is influential are to a lesser extent affected by a theological imaginary mediated by the cultural inheritance of society – in this sense the theological imaginary is seen as a remnant within the social imaginary. Few people, however, experience the penetrating influence of two theological ‘landscapes’, nor attempt to bring them together into a coherent single imaginary, as is the case with Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. It may be more common in Western multi-cultural society to experience personally two theological ‘landscapes’, but this does not mean that the intense and committed work of reconciliation between the two is usual, or indeed seen as an enterprise to be undertaken.

The notion of the theological imaginary finds its roots in the concept of the social imaginary, and the most prominent writer on this in recent years is Charles Taylor. Taylor uses the term ‘social imaginaries’ to signify ‘the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.’² For Taylor, the social imaginary is both ‘factual and normative,’³ meaning that it both defines how social life proceeds, but also has a sense of how things should proceed – it has a moral content. Scott McDougall states that the social imaginary ‘is the context within which one’s reality, one’s actions, and one’s identity are formed and have meaning.’⁴ In his treatment of modern social imaginaries, which he sees as predominantly secular, Taylor does not see the move away from religious belief to be a ‘subtraction’, or in other words, a return to a more natural state of humanism once religion has fallen away. The secular state of society is not in itself ‘natural’ any more than would be an alternative social imaginary. He sees it to be a pursuit of what he calls ‘fullness’, driven by human aspirations for the best that can be achieved, and an attempt to flourish.⁵

² Ibid, p23

³ Ibid, p25

⁴ MacDougall, p1

⁵ See, for example, *Aspiring to Fullness in a Secular Age*, in which the essays maintain that Taylor’s contention is that religion is an ineluctable dimension of human self-understanding.

Writers differ in their terminology when speaking of the work of religious imagination in forming what Scott McDougall refers to as 'the water one swims in.'⁶ Willie James Jennings, uses the term 'Christian theological imagination' in analyzing the geopolitical, imperial and colonial vision that forms racial attitudes.⁷ Scott McDougall, in considering a wider theology of communion uses 'theological imaginary' or 'theological imagination'.⁸ Writers also differ in what they see the work of the imagination to be. Walter Brueggemann uses the term 'prophetic imagination' to express an alternative set of priorities as expressed in the Old Testament.⁹ Alister McGrath has a more current sense of a theological imagination in which the Church represents an alternative community over against the secular world, and uses the term 'ecclesial imaginary'.¹⁰ James K A Smith sees the religious imaginary very much in terms of worship and liturgy in *Imagining the Kingdom*, and in terms of what liturgy means for one's understanding of the world.¹¹

Michael Barnes uses the term 'social imaginary' extensively in his *Interreligious Learning: Dialogue, Spirituality and the Christian Imagination*, stating that it is the 'beliefs and practices shared by a wide variety of "ordinary people"'.¹² This emphasis on the 'ordinariness', almost the mundanity, of the social imaginary is important. It operates notwithstanding people's conscious awareness of it. Barnes states that it '...order[s] and direct[s] human experience.'¹³ It is '...about what is implicit in the ways people behave and react, what gives their actions a certain cognitive and affective coherence.'¹⁴ It is therefore, in Barnes' vocabulary, a powerful term, defining the way in which people live in relationship to the world and to each other.

At the centre of both the concept of the social imaginary and the theological imaginary is the notion that human imagination plays a central role in the way in which humans represent what is 'real' and practice what they hold to be true. To take the example of poetry and story, which are central to the social imaginary, McGrath states that the focal

⁶ MacDougall, p1

⁷ Jennings, *The Christian Imagination* pp7-9

⁸ McDougall, p3

⁹ See Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*. See, for example, chapter two: 'Royal Consciousness; Countering the Counterculture'

¹⁰ See McGrath, *Re-Imagining Nature*, pp43-47, 55-57, 97

¹¹ See Smith, James K.A., *Imagining the Kingdom*, particularly pp101-150

¹² Barnes, *Interreligious Learning*, p26

¹³ Ibid, p23

¹⁴ Ibid, 2012, p8

point of the Church is 'a particular interpretation and imaginative rendering of the texts of Scripture, history, and nature, understood in terms of the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, or a Trinitarian economy of salvation of creation, redemption and consummation'.¹⁵ Through the lens of this imaginary, says McGrath, which is very far from being a fictional imagination, we are enabled 'to imagine – that is to see – the world afresh, rejecting limiting categories and over intellectualized accounts of reality which ultimately impoverish our understanding of the world and ourselves.'¹⁶

The apprehension of time is very different in different cultures, and the fact that Western cultures tends to see time as linear, and the Hindu culture sees it as cyclical, based on scriptural authority, affects the apprehension of the present. It is an example of the fact that theological imaginaries are very different in different cultures. That theology plays very different roles within the social imaginary is argued by Anne Murphy in her introduction to *Time, History and the Religious Imaginary in South Asia* when she notes the modern Western sense of alienation from the past: 'Prior to the development of such a sensibility, a sense of history prevailed in European traditions that was characterized by the connectedness of past, present, and future in relation to Christian ideologies and the writing of sacral history.'¹⁷ Christian Lee Novetzky's treatment of the role of Sikh hagiography in the understanding of history in South Asia gives an example. He explains in 'The Theographic and the Histogramic in an Indian Sacred Life Story' how sacred and secular history and historical documents interact, often in meetings between secular rulers and saints. A comparison can be drawn between what Novetzky recounts and Old Testament stories of the prophets, yet accounting for these stories as a part of cultural history is now largely absent in the West. His essay points out that in the modern West the relationship between the secular and religious historical imagination has been lost: secular history has almost entirely taken over the field of history, whereas in India '...there is a desire to see religion and history as symbiotic.'¹⁸ Novetzky identifies Hegel as the Western philosopher who first maintained that Hindus were incapable of true historical understanding as defined by Western secular standards. Setting such

¹⁵ McGrath, p46

¹⁶ McGrath, p46

¹⁷ *Time, History and the Religious Imaginary in South Asia*, p2

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p170

judgments aside, it is certainly true to say that the understanding of history – the way in which a culture tells its story – is a key part of its social imaginary.

In his study of the theological imaginary in the writing of John Henry Newman, Terrence Merrigan makes useful general comments relevant to this study. Firstly, ‘the imaginary is a representation of a “living” – or at least realizable – reality.’¹⁹ The imaginary is the realization of existent reality or of a goal which is achievable, an image which is a guide as to how things are or how they could be. Merrigan suggests that myth relates to the possible – in other words is normative rather than factual.²⁰ Secondly, a theological imaginary may exist in tension between the factual and the normative, between what is and what could be. Merrigan comments that when Newman felt the gap between these two became too large he was compelled to act. Thirdly, however, the theological imaginary can only truly be so defined within the context of history, in that it has displayed ‘its discernable continuity and “chronic vigor” or “tenacity” over an extended period of time.’²¹

In the context, then, of their immersion into the practice, symbol, lifestyle, tradition, and theology of both Christianity and *Advaita*, the space in which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths worked is best seen as a space of complementary and competing theological imaginaries. It is possible to see their attempts at redefining some key Christian concepts as a dissatisfaction with the ‘factual’, existent Christian theological imaginary in an attempt to achieve what they believed to be both desirable and realizable. It is plain that both lived in a space of tension between these factual and normative elements of the Christian tradition. It is not possible, however, to define what resulted from their practice as a true theological imaginary, since it was a project upon which they were engaged, not the norm for a culture. In that it engaged and defined their own sense of identity, their beliefs, actions, spiritual practice and relations with others, it was a more nascent and personal imaginary, a blueprint which may or may not be taken up and receive sufficient historical weight to become a theological imaginary with wide influence.

¹⁹ Merrigan, p190

²⁰ Ibid, p201

²¹ Ibid, p198

3. COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

In moving on to comparative theology and interreligious dialogue we are entering into the area where texts can be examined, theological innovations within the Third Space identified, and where the results of Abhishiktananda's and Griffiths' explorations can be analyzed. As such, the texts are more open to analysis than the theological imaginaries with which they engaged, where the evidence is not so clear. However, comparative theology is not without its conflicting interpretations of how interreligious dialogue should be undertaken, and what conclusions from it are justified. There is a contested distinction between what has been called Old Comparative Theology and New Comparative Theology. Whilst the former tended to work within the bounds of fulfillment theology in its earlier manifestation,²² and later shared with the Theology of Religions the Exclusivism-Inclusivism-Pluralism typology, New Comparative Theology moves to a new position. Following the work of Hugh Nicholson,²³ Paul Hedges suggests there are four characteristics of the new comparative theology: firstly it does not generalize about other religions; secondly it does not claim supremacy over the other; thirdly it regards interreligious reflection and the practice of dialogue as parts of one process; and fourthly the religious commitments of its practitioners are open to new insights whilst they attempt to understand other religions in their own terms.²⁴

Comparative theology as a discipline is found mainly in the academy, and Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were very much not academic theologians. However, some of the parameters recognized by what has been called the new comparative theology are relevant in assessing the coherence of the work which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths undertook. Possibly the most important aspects of this 'new' comparative theology is, firstly, an appreciation that a level of precision is needed in dealing with religious traditions, and secondly, the fact that other religions have to be treated as traditions that

²² See Tomoko Masuzawa's devastating comments on an earlier comparative theology, in his *The Invention of World Religions*. For example, p23: 'The project of comparative theology has been deemed not scientific on the grounds that it either presupposed or invariably drew the self-same conclusion as Christian theology, that Christianity was fundamentally different from all other religions, thus, in the last analysis, beyond compare.' It is not entirely clear that Masuzawa, an opponent of essentialism, has revised this view in the face of more recent scholarship. Hugh Nicholson (see next footnote) follows Masuzawa's selection of two paradigmatic examples of the OCT, one American and one British; each is exemplified by a particular text: James Freeman Clarke's *Ten Great Religions: An Essay in Comparative Theology* (1871); and F. D. Maurice's *Religions of the World and their Relations with Christianity* (1847)

²³ See for example, Nicholson, *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry*

²⁴ Hedges, Paul, 'The Old and New Comparative Theologies', p1124-1125

can be learned from. Francis X Clooney, probably the foremost academic comparative theologian in this 'new' comparative theology acknowledges that comparative theology is in its early stages of development,²⁵ yet he is confident enough of the rigour of it as a discipline to say, of theologians in general, '...we have entered an era where constructive, confessional theology will ordinarily be comparative in its practice.'²⁶ In terms of the attempt to understand other religions in their own terms, and addressing the very core of comparative practice, he maintains that '...we...do not pretend that all...traditions are theological in exactly the same way.'²⁷

Clooney pursues his study through examination of textual sources. As Tineke Nugteren puts it, 'Clooney clearly leaves the study of actual encounter in daily life to others.'²⁸ In studying texts, however, Clooney is aware that he has to deal with particularities, not generalizations, if the study is to be truly comparative. Such study has to be thorough, '...in fidelity to the texts involved, their grammar, citations, allusions, and in the light of issues that are important within the text and its tradition, on its own terms.'²⁹

Comparative theology cannot reach its conclusions before it has studied appropriately:

...comparison [of religions] is a reflective and contemplative endeavor by which we see the other in the light of our own, and our own in the light of the other...we understand each differently because the other is near.³⁰

It requires vulnerability, a term used by Clooney, which Marianne Moyaert defines as, 'the common human *capacity* to be affected and affect in turn.'³¹ According to Moyaert, vulnerability is an ethical issue for comparative theology, in opposition to an invulnerability that seeks to control what she calls the in-between space. The extent to which both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were open to the influence of *Advaita* suggests the vulnerability that Moyaert speaks of.

²⁵ See Clooney, 'Comparative Theology' in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*

²⁶ Ibid, p658

²⁷ Ibid, p660

²⁸ Nugteren, p155

²⁹ Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Boundaries*, p61

³⁰ Ibid, p11

³¹ Moyaert, p1146

Clooney states that comparative theology is ‘...*comparative* because it is interreligious and complex in its appropriation of one’s own and another tradition in relation to one another.’³² It is the extent to which there is a genuine concern with particularities and avoidance of generalities and pre-formed conclusions in the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, at the same time as an openness to the other, with which this study is particularly concerned. Comparative study requires respect towards the traditions of the other, and this study will look for those areas in which aspects of belief have been unjustifiably separated from a wider context of belief (and the relevant theological imaginary), and where equivalencies or similarities that are claimed may be questionable. A marked note of Clooney’s comparative theology is its confessional nature. As Paul Hedges notes, ‘...for Clooney, Comparative Theology is always Christian theology; an activity grounded and based within his own Catholic tradition.’³³ This is something about which Clooney himself has no doubts. The extent to which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths (and particularly the former) could claim this says much about the extent to which they intended to ‘bring home’ the learning they acquired from *Advaita*, and the extent to which they can be called ‘comparative’ in the sense of the ‘new’ comparative theology.

However, the question will remain throughout this study as to whether the very situation in which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths found themselves allowed them to be ‘careful’ and ‘tentative’ in the way that new comparative theology advocates. If they could not, if they were immersed in *Advaita* and Hindu culture to the extent that objectivity was lost, does that make their conclusions more or less relevant? From the academic point of view and from the point of view of those interrogating texts, their work may lack rigour, but does their very situation and existential commitment to interfaith ‘experience’, rather than interfaith study, place its own value on their work?

Nugteren argues that comparative theology, of the careful and precise type which Clooney practices, ‘..creates a third space and becomes a theology that is not content with comparing the two separate spaces of the texts under scrutiny but instead is willing to be, even anticipates being, transformed in the process.’³⁴ Whilst not academic, it may

³² Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Boundaries*, p11

³³ Hedges ‘Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics’, p8

³⁴ Nugteren, p151

be argued that the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths is pre-eminently of this nature. She further speculates that what might be termed comparative spirituality is not a third space newly created by comparative theology, but a newly accessed space, '...a space that is supposed to exist beyond all distinctions, paradoxes, and otherness, a space that does not need to be created but is always, perennially there, ready to be accessed by the advancing spiritual adept.'³⁵ This idea of a spirituality in which borders disappear is quite strongly present in the literature both by and about Griffiths and Abhishiktananda, and the extent to which this approach does, or indeed should, 'overtake' or 'downgrade' careful examination of the type which Clooney advocates is an issue within their emergent theology.

Comparative theology has its own dangers. In his chapter, 'Comparative Theology' in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, Clooney, amongst other issues, is concerned that what begins as theological '...may end as a simpler and flatter comparison of religious ideas on neutral grounds, without theological identity and grounding in a faith community.'³⁶ There is an implication of the danger of losing a faith perspective that is genuine and important to the theologian. Secondly, '...one might...object that in the end the real goal of comparative theology is to discern some truth parsed according to the norms of Christian theology,'³⁷ in terms of this study, an approach which could be labeled postcolonial. The third relevant worry is that: 'Different languages and theological traditions, the danger of identifying similarities which are only apparent, and innumerable distinctions and subtle differences may make it almost impossible to speak theologically across boundaries.'³⁸ Whilst the study of the process taking place within the Third Space of meeting is not comparative theology as Clooney would define it, studying the *process* within an interfaith dialogue, and attempting to evaluate the merits of particular comparisons, similarities or differences to this end, leads away from some of the dangers which Clooney identifies. The hope is that this study does not flatten the content of religions, but rather respects the fullness of diversity; it does not require a conclusion in Christian terms, and it fully acknowledges the dangers of minimizing differences.

³⁵ Ibid, p154

³⁶ Clooney, 'Comparative Theology' in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, p664

³⁷ Ibid, p666

³⁸ Ibid, p666

Unlike Clooney, Abhishiktananda and Griffiths pursued their dialogue in the physical space (and to a great extent, the conceptual space) of another tradition. Michael Barnes reflects this approach in the title of the first chapter of *Interreligious Learning: Dialogue, Spirituality and the Christian Imagination*,³⁹ which is 'The Middle of Things'. Barnes seeks to resist the idea of a religious 'experience' that is discreet from communities of faith. He sees all aspects of faith as the reality that has to be accounted for – the faith as lived – which is just as important as any one set of beliefs or any one type of experience. It is in relating to real communities of faith that religious learning takes place: 'The tendency to reify what are really qualities of persons or what is intrinsic to the actions that a person performs is the mechanism that creates abstract nouns or even personifications.'⁴⁰ This is a reminder that the space in which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths worked was a space which contained people and communities, *gurus*, *sannyasins* and seekers, themselves included, involved in religious practice. The theological concepts with which they dealt, while not secondary, were not greater in importance to them than the people and living traditions they encountered, begging the question put earlier as to whether academic rigour was possible for them, or was, indeed, desirable in their enterprise. This study will need to keep consistently aware of the reality of the space they occupied.

The human nature of the space in which interreligious dialogue takes place, and which is implied in the confessional nature of Clooney's comparative theology, is reflected in the qualities that Catherine Cornille identifies as required for dialogue in 'Conditions for Interreligious Dialogue'.⁴¹ She identifies five qualities: humility, which is the ability to countenance the possibility of change in one's own religion; commitment, being the sense of one's accountability to a tradition; interconnection, which is the belief, intrinsic to one's faith, that a meaningful connection can be made; empathy, which Cornille acknowledges is a word unpopular in the literature of comparative theology, but which is the religious imagination needed to understand the other; and finally, hospitality, the willingness to integrate truths which one discovers in another religion into one's own. These qualities, if used as a definition of interreligious dialogue, sit very happily with the practice of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, and show that, while they may have lacked

³⁹ Barnes, *Interreligious Learning*

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p33

⁴¹ Cornille, 'Conditions for Interreligious Dialogue'

some of the academic approach, they made connections which the academy may find it more difficult to achieve.

In terms of those attempting to understand religious traditions, Barnes refers to the distinction between observer and participant, or outsider and insider, related to his concern that religion studied is not at all the same thing as religion in which one takes part.⁴² He refers to Wilfred Cantwell Smith's contention that these roles are coalescing in certain situations, and that the observer (type 1), and the participant (type 2) are now joined by type 3, who are both observers and participants in a religion other than their own.⁴³ Barnes states that for such 'third types', both participants and observers, to emerge requires 'skills and virtues' (unspecified) to be taught by a particular 'school of faith.'⁴⁴ He uses the term 'imaginings' to define a necessary condition for 'translating the self into another cultural world,'⁴⁵ with clear reference to the concept of the social imaginary.

This 'third type' is within a 'third space', as this thesis wishes to use the term and as was the case with Abhishiktananda and Griffiths – belonging to one faith and deeply involved in another. They are not simply meeting another faith, as one meets a neighbour over the garden wall, but becoming involved in the life of the other – as in Barnes emphasis on lived experience as the core of understanding a religion. Barnes makes specific reference to Santivanam, which he visited, and commends the dimension of 'common life' as much as 'religious experience.'⁴⁶ Communities of faith are separated not by ignorance of each other's beliefs, nor by having different 'cumulative traditions', nor by occupying different geographical locations. They are separated by non-participation in each other's religious lives. Speaking of a religion as a 'school of faith,'⁴⁷ Barnes asks the question as to 'whether it is possible to envisage a situation in which "the religions" meet within the same space as a "school of schools" passing on purpose and value to successive generations – and to one another.'⁴⁸ This is a very accurate description of what

⁴² Barnes, *Interreligious Learning*, pp53-54

⁴³ Smith, Wilfred Cantwell, p200

⁴⁴ Barnes, *Interreligious Learning*, p54

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p201

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p140

⁴⁷ A term Barnes uses throughout his *Interreligious Learning*

⁴⁸ Barnes, *Interreligious Learning*, p47

Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were trying to achieve with reference to Christianity and *Advaita*. Attempting a balanced assessment of the extent to which they were able to remain of one 'school of faith' and also participate deeply in another, and make this a learning experience for their own tradition – to bring their learning home – is a major theme within this thesis.

Comparative theology is not necessarily about looking for similarities or correspondence. Christopher Brown points out, in 'Can Buddhism Save? Finding Resonance in Incommensurability',⁴⁹ that systems of belief can be so different that no meaningful conflict can be posited, let alone similarity. He refers to the 'grammar' within a tradition, a language and a set of beliefs that cannot meaningfully lead to points of correspondence with another 'grammar', and also implying that parts of the tradition cannot be separated from the overall grammar without losing their full meaning. The idea of theology as a 'grammar' has been promoted by the post-liberal theologian George Lindbeck.⁵⁰ Writing of this notion and following Lindbeck, Ankur Barua states that, 'theological statements are not truth-claims about a pre-existent reality but second-order regulative principles or grammatical rules of the Christian conceptual system.'⁵¹ It represents a train of thought within the particularist approach to the theology of religions, which regards ideas of mutual complementarity as suspect, as opposed to the pluralist view.⁵² This particularist view relates to notions of incommensurability.

What Brown proposes instead of a direct relationship between religions is the use of the concept of 'resonance', in which beliefs in different traditions are in some sense in harmony with each other – they vibrate in sympathy with each other. Thinking of a concept in one tradition leads one to think of a resonant concept in the other. 'Resonance' is not a term used routinely in comparative theology, but it appears in passing, so to speak, when theologians are reaching for something other than sameness or difference. Michael Barnes suggests that a 'suggestive, if somewhat inchoate, comparative "resonance" emerges'⁵³ when relating Buddhist spiritual discipline and the

⁴⁹ Brown, p165

⁵⁰ See Lindbeck, pp79-84, a section entitled 'Grammar and Doctrine, Continuity and Change'

⁵¹ Barua, web version p8

⁵² Jenny Dagers has argued that particularism is an appropriate post-colonial theory of religions; see Dagers, *Postcolonial Theology of Religions*

⁵³ Barnes, *Interreligious Learning*, p168

life of discipleship in Christianity. Ankur Barua uses the idea of resonance three times in 'Interreligious Dialogue, Comparative Theology and the Alterity of Hindu Thought.'⁵⁴ In her introduction to the collection of essays, *Interreligious Hermeneutics*,⁵⁵ Cornille suggests that there needs to be a 'resonance' within the individual, similar to 'empathy' with the other tradition, before understanding can take place. In 'Conditions for Interreligious Dialogue' she states: 'It is only insofar as one is able to resonate positively with particular beliefs and experiences in another religion that one will be disposed to entertain the possibility of integrating such teachings in one's own religion.'⁵⁶ Other uses of 'resonance' are found in the literature of comparative theology,⁵⁷ and although they do not amount to a developed theme, the concept provides a useful tool for this study in dealing with the incommensurabilities in *Advaita* when placed besides Christianity. In the face of the incompatibilities that Griffiths and Abhishiktananda were faced with, the concept of resonance provides a way of accounting for connections which they made.

However, in writing of the alterity of Hindu thought, Barua adds to the Exclusivism-Inclusivism-Pluralism typology an account of current Particularist interpretations of religion, which 'rejects the fundamental presupposition that there is an "underlying unity" across the religious streams of humanity, and instead emphasizes the radical distinctiveness of each of these religious traditions.' This particularist⁵⁸ view entails a 'rejection of a "meta-theory" which would co-opt the distinctive *particulars* of the religious traditions within an over-arching scheme of Religion, Reality, Salvation and so on, which are said to disfigure these specificities.'⁵⁹ Any other view, whether exclusivist, inclusivist, or pluralist limits the unique nature of the other religion and prevents an appreciation of its 'strangeness'. This is related to Clooney's concern, already mentioned, of the danger of a simplistic 'flattening' of theology in the comparative endeavour.

⁵⁴ Barua, pp215-237

⁵⁵ *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, p xv-xvi

⁵⁶ Cornille, 'Conditions for Interreligious Dialogue', p27

⁵⁷ For example, Neville, in *Behind the Masks of God*, notes a limited 'resonance' between Chinese Buddhism and Western Christianity (p88). Heim (p274) states that theologies of religious pluralism 'seek resonances that arise when two faiths converse with each other and each uses its own language...'

⁵⁸ Barua is using the term 'Particularist' in a quite specific way, relating to the particularity of each religion. It is a quite different use from its use in, for example, the phrase 'Christian particularism' which generally implies that salvation is particular to Christians.

⁵⁹ Baura, web version p4

Barua hypothesizes two forms of particularism: weak and strong. Weak particularism maintains a place for the universality of Christ, and can call someone of another religion 'a child of the Triune God'; strong particularism makes no such pre-judgments. Baura suggests that the debate between the two is about 'whether the doctrinal teachings of Christianity should retain a normative status in "comprehending" religious diversity.'⁶⁰ One could generalize Barua's statement and ask whether any religion should regard its own tradition as relevant in understanding another faith. Cornille, in commentating on the normative status of doctrine refers to maximal and minimal norms: 'When the teachings of one's tradition operate as maximal or positive norm, only those teachings or practices in the other tradition which are identical to one's own will be regarded as valid or true...In functioning as a minimal or negative norm, one's tradition serves as a basis to exclude only those teachings and practices which are irreconcilable with one's own.'⁶¹ This concept of doctrine or tradition being normative is plainly important in a space in which traditions meet. To what extent will a doctrine considered normative tend to encourage a construction of the Other when links are made? The search in *Advaita* for a link with the Christian Trinity is perhaps an example of this.

Hedges' definition of the new comparative theology above could be included in the weak particularist camp, though he dismisses the use of the category of particularism *qua* particularism in this context. An understanding of the particularist point of view is important in dealing with the writings of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, and the implication that to maintain a certain or special status for Christian theology within an interfaith dialogue is to have less than full respect for the other is a significant insight.

Following George Lindbeck's ideas of particularism, Barua states that for those who hold to a strong particularism, 'religions such as Christianity should be viewed along the lines of distinct linguistic structures into whose comprehensive frameworks individuals should be woven before they can begin to learn their respective grammars.'⁶² Lindbeck points out that concepts imported from one religion into another 'have vastly different functions and meanings than they had in their original settings'.⁶³ In postcolonial terms, they are

⁶⁰ Baura, web version p6

⁶¹ Cornille, 'Conditions for Interreligious Dialogue', p29

⁶² Barua, web version p7

⁶³ Lindbeck, p49

imported as constructions of the original. He rejects the idea that religious doctrines are truth claims about reality, or that they express the life of spirituality. According to this view, they are, states Barua, 'rich categories through which reality is apprehended, experience is narrated and life is ordered'.⁶⁴ Religious concepts achieve genuine meaning only within the grammar of symbolism and action.

Comparative theology, as practiced by, for example, Frances Clooney, treads something of a path between the definitions of weak and strong particularism which Barua outlines. In being confessional it maintains a place for the individual's faith in the universal nature of Christ, yet it is tentative and experimental in its conclusions; nor does it base itself on a meta-theory of the relationship between religions such as the exclusivism-inclusivism-pluralism typology would suggest. It recognizes itself to be in an 'in-between' space, and is more concerned in careful learning that can be 'brought home', as opposed to specific concepts which can be redeployed. The extent to which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths are able to recognize the dangers of mis-interpretation that the particularist understanding points to is a key to understanding what is happening in their Third Space. Lindbeck describes the use of concepts from another religion as 'babbling',⁶⁵ and while that may be an extreme view in considering the work of comparative theology, it none-the-less sounds a warning which should not be ignored.

Finally, in this section on comparative theology, brief mention is made here of comparative spirituality, or comparative mysticism, which seeks to determine the nature of spiritual or mystical experience, as understood to be a phenomenon which in certain aspects transcends the boundaries between religions. This will not be a topic for this study, concerned mainly as it is with the theologies that emerged from particular interreligious experiences, and it is sufficient to say that there is a spectrum of understandings ranging from essentialism to contextualism (also called constructivism). The former holds that there is an ontological 'Real' with which spiritual experience connects, and that in this respect the boundaries and limitations of a particular creed may seem less important or determinative. The latter, contextualism, maintains that spiritual or mystical experience connects with no ontological Other which is present for all

⁶⁴ Barua, web version p7

⁶⁵ Ibid

involved in such experience, but that these experiences are formed by previous experience of symbol, language, culture, doctrine, and by the falling away of these factors to leave the individual with what can only be described as a completely 'subjective' mystical experience. George Lindbeck's work (mentioned above), and the notion that theology is *only* a grammar, not truth claims about reality, is a constructivist viewpoint, Paul Hedges states that Lindbeck holds that 'there can be no pure experience. It is, necessarily, a formulation of our thought structures created on the basis of our linguistic/symbolic system.'⁶⁶ Christopher Brown, however, does not take a constructivist stance when he uses the notion of theological grammar in writing of the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity. As this shows, there are many nuances within the argument between these two poles of belief, essentialist and contextual.⁶⁷ However, as the reasoning and concepts of *Advaita* and of both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths are clearly fully in the essentialist realm, and the purpose of this study is to examine the space in which their theology was developed, no purpose would be served in examining it from a contextualist viewpoint. The understanding of theology as grammar is not solely contextualist, however, and will be used in the analysis of their texts, but this study does not intend to cast doubt upon the very basis of Abhishiktananda's and Griffiths' explorations or on their belief in the essentialist nature of their experience.

4. MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING

Their experience was very much of two religions and two traditions, Christianity and *Advaita*. They appear in the work of commentators as prime examples of multiple religious belonging, though the definition of this 'state of being' is by no means clear. Possibly the most well-known quotation about multiple religious belonging is the statement by Raimon Panikkar, friend and confidant of both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. After his journeys and stays in India, he reported: 'I started a Christian, I discovered I was a Hindu and returned as a Buddhist without ever having ceased to be a Christian.'⁶⁸ It stands as an almost archetypal statement about multiple belonging, but although Panikkar wrote extensively on the relationship between religions, particularly that between Christianity and Hinduism, his claim to be Christian, Hindu and Buddhist throws little light on the issues contained within the concept of multiple religious

⁶⁶ Hedges, 'The Inter-Relationship of Religions', p4

⁶⁷ For a discussion of the essentialist/contextual debate, see Stoeber, np

⁶⁸ Often quoted – see, for example, Aguilar, p132

belonging. It is a statement that contains many assumptions. It shows, however, that multiple religious belonging is an *identity*, possibly self-defined, rather than the description of a process or a space of negotiated hybridization.

Catherine Cornille's exacting view of religious belonging is that it '...implies more than a subjective sense of sympathy or endorsement of a selective number of beliefs and practices. It involves the recognition of one's religious identity by the tradition itself and the disposition to submit to the conditions for membership as delineated by that tradition.'⁶⁹ Cornille goes on to argue that full commitment to one religion may allow for ways in which that belonging may be extended to include other traditions, primarily by sincere dialogue and through the inculturation of Christianity in non-Western cultures. However, in these cases the encounter is 'framed by one's primary religious identity.'⁷⁰ A step further than this is to be unwittingly converted to the faith of the other, but this, in itself, is to step beyond multiple belonging. Gideon Goosen maintains, however that only a Biblical interpretation of conversion is admissible; conversion is turning from sin and towards God. It can therefore only truly be used of an atheist becoming a Christian. A Jew or a Muslim or Hindu cannot be said to be turning away from sin in becoming a Christian, as their previous faith may already have been orientated towards the divine.⁷¹

Cornille classifies three ways of 'understanding and legitimating' multiple religious belonging:

1. By '...focusing on the ultimate religious experience that lies at the heart of all traditions.' Cornille states that, 'The belief in multiple religious belonging is indeed generally predicated on the belief in the unity of all religious experiences.'⁷²
2. '...by remaining faithful to the symbolic framework of one tradition while adopting the hermeneutic framework of another. This is what has taken place in advanced forms of inculturation, when Christian faith has been reformulated in philosophical categories belonging to non-Western traditions.'⁷³ Cornille cites the

⁶⁹ *Many Mansions*, p4

⁷⁰ *Ibid*

⁷¹ Goosen, p138

⁷² *Many Mansions*, p5

⁷³ *Ibid*, p5

interaction between Christianity and *Advaita*, and Christianity and *Mahayana* Buddhism as the most common examples in relations with Asian religions.

3. By recognizing the complementarity of religions – i.e. by recognizing and acknowledging the authentic and distinct nature of truth operative in another religion, though not necessarily claiming equality between them.

Abhishiktananda's and Griffiths' form of belonging mostly accords with the first two of these, while the last is possibly most similar to the 'fulfillment theology' that Abhishiktananda began his journey with. The belief in the unity of all religious experiences was an underlying assumption in the space which they occupied. The analysis of attempts to reformulate Christianity in other terms drawn from *Advaita* is the subject of this study.

In citing Abhishiktananda as an example of a 'most dramatic'⁷⁴ example of multiple belonging Cornille raises the question as to whether his 'unwitting conversion' actually rules him out of the category of multiple belonging – what is conversion but a real change in belonging, though Abhishiktananda continued to use Christian symbolism? Griffiths, a counter example, is more like the case in which his encounter with *Advaita* continues to be framed by his primary religious identity. Throughout the literature, one looks in vain for unchallengeable multiple identity, or a definition which does not raise as many questions as it answers. Perhaps one must assume that identity and belonging are not identical concepts, and must call to mind the incommensurable nature of different religions in their completeness. Or one must posit the opposite case, similar to Cornille's first category above, and maintain an underlying unity which the individual can access, and by doing so, overcome the boundaries between religions. Unsurprisingly, this is Panikkar's solution in 'On Christian Identity,' in which he shows various philosophical inconsistencies in many forms of identity-making: doctrines change, history moves on, one's relationship to Christ is difficult to define, and the like. He concludes by answering the question, 'What makes a christian christian?' with the answer, 'Christ's Spirit living in Man [sic]'. He continues, 'To the objection: "Then everybody is a christian", I have little

⁷⁴ Ibid, p4

to object.⁷⁵ It is a stance taken by a man deeply involved in the dialogue between religions, but can be said to extend the concept of religious identity to its extreme limits.

Francis Clooney, however, in 'God for us,'⁷⁶ somewhat overturns self-definitions and religious boundaries in a way no less iconoclastic with regard to those boundaries than Panikkar, by suggesting that it is God who is the main mover in defining belonging. Clooney's chapter is a reflection on a poem by the ninth century south Indian saint Antal, which states, of God's approach to human kind:

Whichever form pleases his people, that is his form;
Whichever name pleases his people, that is his name;
Whichever way pleases his people who meditate without ceasing, that is his way
That one who holds the discuss.

Clooney compares this conformity of God to those who seek him with Ignatian meditation, in which 'God operates in accord with the very acts of imagination undertaken by the persons who meditate.'⁷⁷

What Cornille does not discuss, except implicitly by citing Abhishiktananda, is change over time – one religious tradition being taken into another, possibly through conversion, in a sequential way. However a person who once belonged to one tradition, and then belongs to another, is unlikely to be able to extinguish all the remnants of the first in taking on the second. This is certainly true of Abhishiktananda, who continued to express himself in Christian imagery and language even after he had stated that he found little of ultimate significance in Christian theology.

John B. Cobb Jr. recognizes this in 'Multiple Religious Belonging and Reconciliation,'⁷⁸ in which he proposes his own taxonomy: first there is someone who belongs to one religion but becomes attracted by aspects of another (i.e. short of conversion, thus maintaining multiple belonging); secondly, converts from one tradition to another (or descendants of

⁷⁵ Panikkar, Raimon, 'On Christian Identity', in *Many Mansions*, p140

⁷⁶ Clooney, Francis X, 'God for us', *Many Mansions*, pp 44-60

⁷⁷ Clooney, Francis X, 'God for us', in *Many Mansions*, p56

⁷⁸ John B Cobb Jr, 'Multiple Religious Belonging and Reconciliation', in *Many Mansions*, pp20-28

such converts) who come to appreciate what they have lost through that conversion; and thirdly, those with no particular religious conviction who are attracted by aspects of more than one religion. What is particularly important in this seemingly obvious categorization is that it recognizes that multiple religious belonging is temporal and social as well as philosophical and theological. In other words, things happen in a particular order and in particular circumstances. Thus the Christian who become an *Advaitin* may not necessarily be *able* to dispense with all her Christian inheritance, in fact is unlikely to be able to do so; the Hindu who lives in Britain as an integrated individual may not be *able* to ignore in full a Western Christian heritage.

The taxonomies of multiple religious belonging that are proposed suggest the need to determine, as far as is possible within this study, what was the nature of Abhishiktananda's and Griffiths' religious belonging. As has already been suggested, it is unlikely that those belongings were the same, and how this affected the way in which they inhabited and worked within the interfaith space is important in understanding what was happening within it.

Goosen makes much of symbols as the only way in which we can communicate about the divine, whether those symbols be language, objects, or rituals. In doing so, he maintains that symbols are a main reason why dual religious belonging is possible. He uses Jung's concept of archetypes, present in the collective unconscious at a very deepest level: 'In all cultures there are motifs, archetypes that swell into the conscious that speak of God. These are expressed in symbols. These symbols have grown into clusters in different parts of the world and are called religion.'⁷⁹ These symbols operate universally, and are not limited in terms of understanding to one culture or tradition. Goosens maintains: 'It can be stated with great conviction that seeing religious language as being symbolic is at the core of the understanding of dual belonging.'⁸⁰ Myth is another form of symbol – a symbol story – and it is notable that Griffiths was very interested in myth as the bearer of religious truth. There are examples of symbols which cause problems in understanding for other religions. The most obvious example in Christianity is the cross, arguably the religion's most powerful symbol, which can be quite unacceptable to other religions,

⁷⁹ Goosen, p110

⁸⁰ Goosen, p113

most notably to Islam. It is not clear that all foundational symbols are transferable. However the way in which symbol is used by Abhishiktananda, and particularly by Griffiths, to create bridges across boundaries also says much about how they inhabited the space between Christianity and *Advaita*. Their use of Hindu symbolism is not without its critics, some seeing it as an illegitimate cultural appropriation which did little but confuse; symbols wrested from one culture to change, in another culture, their meaning or their proper associations. When this study moves to consider the Third Space theory of Homi Bhabha his use the term 'mimicry' may seem appropriate for some uses of symbols from another tradition, unanchored as they are in the tradition that imports them. Use of symbols is an important part of understanding hybridization.

Goosen also implies the important relationship between enculturation, acculturation and inculturation; the first is the original formation of the person, the second is that process of encountering another culture circumstantially. Whilst the first, according to Goosen's reasoning, could be described as organic (the hardwiring of the brain), the second is more like the reconstruction of identity undertaken by immigrants to a different culture, usually referred to as acculturation. Enculturation is biological, while acculturation is encountered in, or required by, circumstance. The third term, inculturation, refers to an intentional strategy. Commenting on the resultant individual identity, Goosen claims that 'Identity is...relational. (It always takes place within a culture...)'⁸¹ Enculturation occurs once, and the term would include enculturation into a religious culture. Goosen, appealing to anthropology and neuroscience, deduces that dual belonging, or the attempt to acquire a second religious culture can never be wholly successful: 'The psychological problems Abhishiktananda [had] would support this anthropological statement.'⁸² Referring as well to the experience of Roger Corless, who attempted Christian-Buddhist dual belonging, Goosen points to the vulnerability of this in-between situation: 'Identity can...be fragile...one thinks of the cases of Abhishiktananda and Roger Corless where they might have overdone the de-construction part of their religious identity and were left with much tension regarding their lives.'⁸³ This 'fragility' is related to the liminal nature of the 'in-between' space – the space in which reference points are blurred. In such a space,

⁸¹ Goosen, p81

⁸² Goosen, pp82-83. Goosen cites Norman Doidge, *The Brain that Changes Itself*, Scribe, 2007, pp294-295 in support of his neuroscientific argument.

⁸³ Goosen, p77

in which the individual's usual anchors or stays do not feel so secure, the result can be a feeling of personal vulnerability. As this study develops the uncertainty of the space between religious cultures will become more apparent and a significant theme, as well as the ways in which the home tradition or enculturation and the acculturation of living in another tradition and community interact.

There are ways of looking at multiple religious belonging other than those of Goosens and Cornille. They describe multiple religious belonging using theological and/or sociological terms, which according to Rhiannon Grant is how the subject is most often dealt with.⁸⁴ The term 'belonging', as applied to multiple religious involvement suggests a sociological component, related to a religious community and most obviously displayed in Cornille's typology. An almost complete focus on the theological component is, however, possible, and is the basis of Clooney's understanding in an essay in which he outlines his own academic theological background and tradition and states: 'If I could be a Christian theologian, I felt too that I could learn to think theologically according to the insights of another religious tradition, as a kind of *imperfectly formed* insider to that tradition.'⁸⁵ (Italics added.) His confession that insider status may be imperfect suggests the liminality and uncertainty of an in-between space. He states that, 'Those entirely inside a tradition diligently committed to it, and properly trained over a long time will know more than those who have not had the benefit of that education.'⁸⁶ He similarly asserts the uncertainty of his position in his admission that he may be mistaken in the assumption that, since the 'theologies' of religions are proposed as reasonable and legible, 'there is no good reason...to justify assuming that "theology" differ[s] radically from tradition to tradition.'⁸⁷

Clooney may be aware that he is expanding the meaning of the word 'theology' to allow use by a Christian as a universal description of religious thinking since, as already noted, he states elsewhere that, '...uses of the term "theology" can be valuable even when we still do not pretend that all...traditions are theological in exactly the same way.'⁸⁸ He describes 'theologies' as '...bringing together faith and reason, words and practice, insider

⁸⁴ Grant, Rhiannon, pp2255-2715

⁸⁵ Clooney, 'Neither Here nor There', p101

⁸⁶ Ibid, p106

⁸⁷ Ibid, p102

⁸⁸ Clooney, 'Comparative Theology' in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, p660.

discourse and claims about the Real',⁸⁹ and maintains that it possible to learn one's way into a tradition. This is very much a statement from an academic, and though neither Abhishiktananda nor Griffiths wrote in the academy but in close personal association over many years with Hindu culture, nonetheless, Clooney's approach to crossing boundaries and his account of learning to be an 'imperfect' insider of another tradition is a perspective which displays an honest and realistic degree of self-doubt, and hedges the whole question of multiple religious belonging with the sort of caveats that may well be appropriate. He also recognizes that such crossing of boundaries may make unsure one's home in either tradition, a reference maybe to the 'anxiety' experienced in the Third Space that will be mentioned in the next chapter. Though not referring to Abhishiktananda's or Griffiths' situation or Shantivanam, he somewhat describes them in referring to the creation of '...a community where the person who has studied across religious boundaries can again find a home.'⁹⁰

A completely different way of thinking about multiple religious belonging is presented by Rhiannon Grant when, following George Lindbeck's analysis of religion as a cultural-linguistic entity, he uses the concept of fluency to provide '...a language for describing levels of knowledge and involvement while also reflecting the complexities and flexibilities of real-world belonging.'⁹¹ Lindbeck states, claims Grant, that doctrines are second order claims about theology itself and its reliability, rather than ontological claims as such. This has already been noted. Because of this they may be unreliable in the same way that grammatical rules may be used or set down mistakenly. Doctrine therefore has to be set out by competent practitioners, which in Lindbeck's terms are those '...for whom their religion has "become a native language, the primary medium in which they think, feel, act, and dream."⁹² This reminds one of Clooney's imperfect insider, who is not, one would assume, a 'native speaker' of another religion. Grant points to the problem in this approach that it is apparent that not all the adherents of any one religion necessarily speak the same religious language, yet he distinguishes between 'fluent elites' who preserve the core of the tradition, and others who have varying degrees of fluency, sometimes just a 'working knowledge' of the language.⁹³ Again, one is faced with the

⁸⁹ Clooney, 'Neither Here nor There', p102

⁹⁰ Clooney, 'Neither Here nor There', p110

⁹¹ Grant, Rhiannon, p2

⁹² Grant, Rhiannon, p4, quoting Lindbeck, p100

⁹³ Grant, Rhiannon, p8

conclusion that those crossing into another tradition are unlikely to be fluent in it in the sense of having a complete command of the language.

Grant argues that 'fluency' is a way of understanding degrees of belonging, and moves the discussion away from typologies that suggest multiple religious belonging is an absolute state – one either belongs or one doesn't, which is rather what Cornille suggests. Grant states that, 'Fluency is not an exact point in the process of learning a language, but it does suggest competency. It involves knowledge and accurate use of a range of grammatical rules.'⁹⁴ In assessing how Abhishiktananda and Griffiths inhabit their in-between space, an examination of their use of the language of *Advaita* is crucial in understanding their existential 'status' within that faith – existential in the sense that it is not a status given to them by that second tradition, as required by Cornille, but is earned, so to speak, by their fluency in the language. In this respect, their use of the grammar of *Advaita*, how the parts of the language fit together and relate to each other, is also crucial.

5. CONCLUSION

The concept of the theological imaginary makes any analysis aware of 'what goes along with' any theological tradition. In social terms, the *sadhu* finds no parallel in the Christian theological imaginary and the Christian priest cannot be transferred to the Hindu imaginary. In terms of ritual the Eucharist finds no parallel in Hinduism, and the stages of life for the Hindu only the barest reflection in Christian rites of passage. The authority on earth and the way to enlightenment in Hinduism is the *guru*, in Roman Catholicism the Church guides along the way. As with the theological imaginary, the 'grammar' of a tradition determines its internal conceptual relationships, the way that the parts relate to the whole. So any Christian theological concept 'goes along with' a Christian grammar of Kingdom, sin, judgement, forgiveness, and salvation. *Advaitic* concepts 'go along with' an *Advaitic* and a more broadly Hindu grammar of cyclical history, *avidya* or *maya*, and *moksha*. In dealing with any concept this study will attempt to maintain awareness of its origin and what part it takes in its original theological imaginary and where it sits within its home grammar.

⁹⁴ Grant, Rhiannon, web version, p17

Comparative theology produces a cutting edge that separates careful comparison from imprecise and ungrounded equivalencies or differences. Is there proper respect for the other tradition? Are lessons 'brought home' in a way that respects the home tradition? Is there rigour in the comparisons made, with proper understanding of content and meaning, and are conclusions careful and tentative? Indicators of all this are the extent and nature of the transformation taking place within the theology, the learned fluency with which the 'imperfectly formed insider' can speak another theological language, and the extent to which the theology is a lived experience, or in Michael Barnes' phrase is 'in the middle of things'.⁹⁵

Multiple religious belonging as a concept does not itself provide a means of analyzing a theology. It is a statement about a perceived or experienced state of being, allegiance or identity, rather than an analytical tool. Belonging is, however, a useful adjunct in considering a particular theological position and the elements of 'belonging' that these two authors exhibit in their writing are significant to this study. A confessing Christian who maintains, for example, Christ's key soteriological importance, yet who says *Aham Brahmasmi* – I am *Brahman* – is in a different space than is an *Advaitin* who also holds that *Atman* and *Brahman* are in unity. She or he also may not be using the term in the theological grammar to which it relates, and therefore with less fluency. However, it is the nature of belonging to create Third Spaces if belongings meet and boundaries are crossed; if there were no belonging, there could be no spaces between belongings. Sensitivity to Abhishiktananda's and Griffiths' sense of belonging – its strength or weakness, its fixity or fluidity – help therefore in defining the way in which they inhabit their Third Space.

⁹⁵ See Barnes, *Interreligious Learning*, chapter one, entitled, 'In the Middle of Things'.

Chapter 4

Analyzing the Interreligious Space 2

1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter this study looked at ways of reading the texts of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths that will expose the workings within the interreligious space in which they developed their theologies. The attempt was made in that chapter to focus on real people, in real places; hence that chapter started with a focus on the theological imaginary. There is, however, an overarching factor, little dealt with in treatments of these two authors, and that is the fact that they were working in a post-colonial and a postcolonial culture. The distinction between these two terms will be elucidated. The next section of this chapter will therefore attempt to draw a brief picture of the history of the colonial engagement of Christianity in India, and the post-colonial setting in which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths found themselves. It is a subject that is a study in its own right, and is included here as an introduction to the consideration of postcolonial theory.

The third section will consider some general points related to postcolonial theory – such issues as the definitions of postcolonialism and the lasting nature of its effects. The fourth section on Orientalism is divided into two; the first section again concerning itself with definitions, the work of Edward Said, and the ways in which Orientalism as a topic is significant in studying the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. In a further sub-section, the very important subject of the construction of the Other is considered, a tool of which this study will make considerable use when it turns to examine the development of their theologies. The last section considers Homi Bhabha's Third Space theories which will provide ways of analyzing what is happening when cultures meet.

2. THE HISTORICAL COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL CONTEXT

Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were pioneers in an immersive form of religious dialogue, but they stand in a line of Christians who have, in many different ways, attempted to relate to the religions of India. The history of Christian involvement with other religions in general goes back to the Biblical account, starting with the Gospel story of Jesus encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well at Sychar (John 4.4-26). Robert Fastiggi,

and Jose Pereira, in 'The Swami from Oxford'¹ recount how a respect for 'pagan' religions, and a desire to relate Christian faith in a non-Christian environment, has existed in the Church since the time of St Paul. Later Church leaders, such as Augustine in his mission to Britain, were encouraged to 'purify' the sites of the local religion, but not to act violently against them. Fastiggi, notes the 'philosophical inculturation' that took place as classical thought was incorporated into Christian thinking, but remarks that as 'Christian Europe' took hold in the Middle Ages, inculturation and the need to relate to other religions became less pressing.

The concept of Christian Europe, or more generally the Christian West, is important to this study, and a major strand in the theological imaginary of Western Christianity. Its long history and its firm establishment in the Western consciousness acts as a counterpoint both to the actuality of Eastern religions, but also to the Western construct of the 'mystic East'. The latter will be examined in a little more detail later in this chapter, but it could be argued that it is a later stage of the split between religious and secular knowledge that occurred during the Enlightenment.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at the same time that religion was beginning to be separated out from other forms of knowledge, there was a distinct shift when the West became more open to other cultures, and missionaries in China, India and Ceylon (Matteo Ricci, Roberto De Nobili and Jose Vaz respectively) discovered new ways of working among other cultures and religions. Fastiggi considers Matteo Ricci (1552 – 1610) to be '...the founder of the modern approach to inculturation.'²

It must not be forgotten that there was another very different strand of missiological activity, particularly during the colonial period, and while this is not the subject of this study it remains a back-drop, as it were, throughout, influencing the attitudes of both those who sought to promote a more enlightened inculturation, and those who saw Christian inculturation as a poorly disguised colonialism reborn in a post-colonial age. Xavier Gravend-Tirole sums up much of the commentary upon earlier colonial missiological activity by noting the negativity of 'European Christian Clerics', based on the

¹ Fastiggi, pp22-25

² Fastiggi, p22

assumption of both a religious and a cultural superiority, '...such that they considered as fundamentally flawed, deficient or inimical to Christian dogmas the local cultures which they encountered...'³

Jeffrey Cox identifies three major theoretical traditions in the mission to India in the early and mid- nineteenth century, the orientalist, the utilitarian, and the evangelical:

Each of these traditions was, in the early nineteenth century, defamatory in its treatment of Indian culture, and in some respects the evangelical tradition...was the most defamatory of all...For evangelicals...something was very wrong with India, and the source of the evil was crystal clear: it was religion. Hinduism was obscene and cruel and bloody and lascivious...⁴

Most of this defamation was for Western, not Hindu, consumption. The orientalist's more liberal approach sought to look for truth in Hinduism, but often, in fact, knew little about it. The utilitarian view was related, according to Brian Stanley, to notions of God's providence, and were summarised by Bishop Samuel Wiberforce when he said that Britain was to be uniquely 'God's almoner in scattering the seeds of virtue and happiness throughout the world',⁵ and by Thomas Thompson's statement that 'Christianity Civilization & Commerce are only synonymous [sic] terms.'⁶

Cox emphasizes that missionary activity was marginalized in the master narrative of colonialism but recognizes the nuanced relationship between Christianity and empire when he states that

missionaries in the most important mission societies, and those with whom they associated, Indian Christians and non-Christians, struggled with the conflict between universalist Christian religious values and the imperial context of those values. One audience might describe this relationship as a conflict between faith

³ Gravend-Tirole, p115

⁴ Cox, p24

⁵ Stanley, p73

⁶ Ibid, p71

and power, another as the relationship between universal egalitarian ideals and an exploitative imperial presence.⁷

Anthony Copley, in placing mission in the context of mid-nineteenth century Victorian society, sees it at a 'cluster of ideas' rather than as an ideology, and that at its heart 'lay a formidable, but intellectually narrow, millenarian, exclusivist theology.'⁸ But he agrees with Cox in regarding the relationship between Christianity and empire as complex, and quotes Andrew Porter's contention that the former was often not supportive of the latter. Porter objects to the presentation of religion as 'the flimsiest of ideological stucco on the imperial edifice,'⁹ and when dealing more generally with empire and religion, he maintains that although 'missions could not avoid empire, they were determined to put it in its place. ... Missions also operated in a world where many different pressures – political, theological, economic and intellectual – combined to distance them from empire no less than to draw them together.'¹⁰

Copley places nineteenth-century mission in the context of a supposed decline in Hinduism, an idea subscribed to by missionaries and not a few Hindus themselves, who looked back to a golden *Vedic* age. Brian K. Pennington notes that the growth of a revivalist mood amongst some intellectual Indian leaders included 'this notion of a Vedic past marked by just kings, and a dharmic society in which women were honored rather than exploited,' but that it 'required an embrace of the Orientalist narrative of decline.'¹¹ He states that

these leaders were also responsive to the revivalist effort to identify and locate a Hindu past that could authenticate a modern, nationalist program, one, therefore, that predated Hinduism's alleged decline into superstition, idolatry, and priestcraft and its fragmentation into manifold regional practices that did not conform to brahminical or Victorian norms.¹²

⁷ Cox, p6

⁸ Copley, pxiii

⁹ Quoted Copley, p5

¹⁰ Porter, p330

¹¹ Pennington, p161

¹² Ibid, p166

Paul Hedges maintains that the predominant nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theological and missiological view of Hinduism was primarily a theology of fulfilment, which entailed a recognition of universal religious yearnings, satisfied by lesser religions which are replaced by higher religions, and at last by the highest religion, each religion ordained by God for the purpose evolving towards the Christian revelation. According to Hedges, there were three reasons why fulfilment theology became influential in the nineteenth century: firstly there was a growth in the knowledge of other religious traditions and the similarities that were found presented a challenge to Christianity; secondly there was a growth in missionary activity; and thirdly there was a conflation of the aims of mission and the British empire, which itself was considered to be divinely ordained.¹³

Returning to Fastiggi's treatment of Bede Griffiths, he recounts a profound departure from previous colonialism and previous ideas of inculturation in the author. Griffiths is looking to discover what Christianity can learn from another religion, in Griffiths' case from Hinduism. Fastiggi refers to a theology which is '...Christian and Hindu at the same time,' and this is more than inculturation as formerly understood. It does not imply a Christianity that is taking 'acceptable' cultural elements from Hinduism, but which is adopting Hindu theological understandings and entering into its theological imaginary. What is notable is that Fastiggi does not refer to Griffiths' religious or cultural *positioning* between the two faiths, and how this emerges as a theology, but more specifically to the nature of the theology itself. The present study is particularly concerned with the processes of evolution and the location of such theology.

Gravend-Tirole records the fact that the Shantivanam *Ashram*, founded by Monchanin and Abhishiktananda, and which played such an important role in the work of Griffiths, was not the first Christian *ashram*. He states that it was the Christa Prema Seva Ashram, founded in 1927 by the Anglican priest Jack Winslow, in which the term '*ashram*' was first used as a description, though in fact the first Protestant *ashram* was the Christakula, founded in 1921 by E. Forrester Paton and S. Jesudason.¹⁴

¹³ Hedges, *Preparation and Fulfilment*, pp15-46

¹⁴ See Cornille, *The Guru in Indian Catholicism*, p126

These developments took place against a Roman Catholic theological background which was shifting, and though Anglican developments were also occurring, it is the Roman Catholic theological background that is most relevant to Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. Paul Collins, in *Christian Inculturation in India*, has outlined this development, both in the Roman Catholic Church and in the Anglican Communion. From a position in 1854, when Pope Pius IX had argued that salvation is found only within the Roman Catholic Church, the need for understanding and reconciliation generally became more important in the twentieth century following the First World War.

However, much of the writing about mission in the colonial period in India refers to protestant mission, and British mission at that. It was the various British Protestant missionary societies which pursued the type of missionary activity that comes to mind when the words 'missionary' and 'conversion' are used. Both Jeffery Cox and Anthony Copley detail that activity in their respective books, and Copley comments that in the nineteenth century, Roman Catholic mission was 'substantially concerned with the care of its existing Christian communities,'¹⁵ since it had a historic presence in India, unlike Protestantism.

In the twentieth century, protestant attitudes underwent a relatively major change. John B. Cobb records that at the First World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910, Protestant missionary strategy still 'anticipated the disintegration of the non-Christian religions and their supersession by Christianity.'¹⁶ The Second World Missionary Conference in 1928, however, 'recognized something positive in the resurgence of traditional Asian religions.'¹⁷ Interreligious dialogue became a major strand of the work of the World Council of Churches after the second world war. It is notable that the shock of the two world wars influenced the certainty with which the Protestant missionary movement regarded notions of Western cultural and religious superiority.¹⁸

Then in the first half of the twentieth century, the Roman Catholic Church took on a specific role in the academic study of Hinduism in the Calcutta School of Indology, though

¹⁵ Copley, p7

¹⁶ Cobb, p15

¹⁷ Ibid, p15

¹⁸ See World Council of Churches, *Account of the History of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism*

it is known by various names. It was a group of Jesuits who studied Hinduism and who published a monthly journal *The Light of the East* in the 1920s and 30s. They took their inspiration from Brahmabandhav Upadhyay (1861-1907), an Indian *Brahmin* who converted to Christianity. According to Joseph Mattam, Upadhyay worked with three principles: firstly that after conversion he was a 'Hindu Catholic', and that as such he could live by *Samaj Dharma* or Hindu social customs and way of life; secondly, he held that that the missionary should 'instead of vilifying Hinduism "find out truths from it by study and research;"¹⁹ thirdly he believed that the conversion of India would be achieved through monasticism. Monchanin and Abhshiktananda acknowledged their debt to him with regard to this last point.

The Calcutta School continued Uphadyay's emphasis on study and research, and its most prominent member, Pierre Johanns, worked towards doctrinal convergence between Christianity and Hinduism. Johanns was basically a fulfillment theologian, and stated that '...we shall try to show that the best thought of the east is a bud that fully expanded blossoms into Christian thought,'²⁰ but he also proposed strong linkages with Thomist theology, links which both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths made use of in their own thought. Whilst preferring Śankara's form of *Vedanta*, Johanns also made use of Ramanuja's modified *Advaita* in order to link a theistic *Vedanta* with Christianity, again, a lead followed by Griffiths. Besides Johanns, the most influential member of the Calcutta School was probably Richard de Smet, who studied Śankara deeply, attempted to tackle the question of divine personhood, and worked on a *Vedantic* Christology. He greatly influenced his student, Sara Grant, who was co-*acharya* of the Christa Prema Seva Christian *ashram* in Pune, and who was an associate of Abhishiktananda.

In 1926 Pope Pius XI urged the need for indigenous churches, as countries began to emerge from colonization, and proposed that the spirituality of other cultures may be drawn upon by Christian contemplatives. By the 1950s the concept of inculturation was well established as a strategy for being the Church in a non-Western culture. The Second Vatican Council placed the need for inculturation into the context of dialogue between Christianity and other religions.

¹⁹ Quoted, Mattam, p194

²⁰ Quoted *ibid*, p198

However, within the pronouncements of Catholic Church leaders in the second half of the twentieth century there is a clear assumption that a fulfillment theology alone will account for Christianity's relationship with other faiths, however the indigenous culture is involved. Pedro Arrupe, the Jesuit Superior General, in his 'Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation' in 1978, wrote; '...the fundamental and constantly valid principle is that inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context.'²¹ It is notable that it is 'Christian life' and the 'Christian message' which is to be incarnated. It may be argued that both are redolent of their Western formation and their Christian Western heritage. Such a stance, stated like this, does not envisage the changes within Western Christianity which were such a major concern for Griffiths.

It may be argued that a Western Christ with its particular developmental history remains non-universal so long as the Western cultural and historical influences upon it remain unrecognized. However, it is true that the understanding of inculturation has included attitudes which are far more than the promotion of a Western-enculturated Christ, a process which was developing while Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were in India. This is underlined in John Paul II's Apostolic exhortation letter 'Catechesi Tradendae' of 1979, which states that, in knowing the components of other cultures thoroughly, and their significant expressions, '...it will respect their particular values and riches,' so that original expressions of Christian life will develop. Evangelization '...is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures.'²² Cobb, however, is content to assert, writing in 1982, that 'most Catholic theologians continue to teach that Christianity is not only a true religion, but also the absolute one, the one to which all others must finally move.'²³

What this does not account for is the nature of the space in those cultures, and religious cultures, in which negotiation takes place, what is occurring in that space, and quite how competing and quite possibly incompatible beliefs are interacting. It does not take account of the risks to established faith encountered in that space. It is such a space

²¹ Quoted in Gravend-Tirole, p113

²² Quoted in Gravend-Tirole, p114

²³ Cobb, p30

which this study seeks to study. Griffiths and Abhishiktananda were involved in the deep stripping away of Western influences, leaving themselves in a vulnerable, uncertain space, open to misunderstanding from both sides. Without the commitment of living in such an uncertain and theologically unsafe place, even if the other culture is fully respected, is it possible that Christ risks remaining a foreign influence, and mission arguably a colonial enterprise?

Finally, in this section on historical context, it is appropriate to sound two cautionary notes. Firstly, it would be historically inaccurate to give the impression that the Christian *Ashram* Movement in general, or Abhishiktananda and Griffiths in particular, were central to Christian, or more specifically Roman Catholic, thinking with regards to inculturation in India. While the Catholic Church was adopting inculturation as a principle of mission, that inculturation was often most concerned with issues such as church hierarchical organization, liturgy, or catechesis. In many ways Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were very much outside the mainstream of the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of inculturation generally, and in India in particular. A major treatment like *A Century of Catholic Mission: Roman Catholic Missiology 1910 to the Present*²⁴ can lack all reference to the Christian *Ashram* Movement despite chapters on Christianity in Asia and on inculturation. Similarly, Volume 9 of *The Cambridge History of Christianity*,²⁵ entitled *World Christianities c.1914–c.2000*, can make one passing mention in two chapters.

Secondly, as will be noted below, there was an anxiety on the part of some Hindus as to the motivation of the Christian *ashrams*. However, the *ashram* movement was working in a wider postcolonial context. Bauman recounts how an Indian local government report, the *Niyogi Report* of 1956 outlined these worries, and states that hostility and ambivalence towards Christian mission in general was not merely based on religious difference, '...but also, and perhaps more significantly, the manifestation of understandable postcolonial anxieties about the very survival and coherence of the Indian nation.'²⁶

²⁴ *A Century of Catholic Mission: Roman Catholic Missiology 1910 to the Present*

²⁵ *World Christianities c.1914–c.2000*

²⁶ Bauman, paragraph 3

In not mentioning inculturation in his article (the report does not mention it either), Bauman shows that the worry about Christian mission was much wider than that about inculturation, encompassing all areas, from evangelism to socio-political involvement. The report is also concerned with schools, hospitals and other services run by Christians. Bauman mentions the 'post-colonial anxiety' which was caused by the strand of Western influence that remained very powerfully within India after independence, and the worries about the Catholic *ashrams* have to be put into this context – a context in which they could not remain immune from this anxiety. The report does not mention the *ashrams*; it was written at the very start of the work in India of Monchanin, Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, although other *ashrams* were in existence. So it seems that inculturation was less of a worry than more overt evangelical attempts. With Hinduism's generally positive, quite inclusive attitude to other religions, an approach in which Christianity is seen as a religion 'alongside' Hinduism may well have caused less anxiety. Later, with Goel and his colleagues' worries mentioned below about a deceptive mimicry of *Advaita* a rather different Hindu dynamic emerges.

3. POSTCOLONIALISM

Abhishiktananda (then still known as Henri Le Saux) arrived in India in August 1948, close on a year after India's independence from the British Empire on 15 August 1947. Bede Griffiths arrived in 1955, some seven years after Le Saux. Neither were therefore present in the colonial period, or had contact with a colonial authority in India, although the disastrous effects of the miss-managed partition of India in terms of refugees and unrest were to continue for many years, with the political fall-out still current. Both, however, were present in India as it developed its identity following the withdrawal of the colonial power. It is no part of this study to examine the processes and stages by which India developed its post-colonial identity, but it is relevant to note the continuing influence of the colonial period on post-colonial interpretations of Hinduism, *Advaita*, and Indian culture in general, as in, for example, the continuation of the fairly universal preference for a *Brahminical* and *Vedantic* view of the religion and culture of the sub-continent that was inherited from the colonial period, as has been mentioned in chapter one.²⁷

²⁷ See also Sweetman: 'While the privileging of brahmanic [sic] perspectives is by no means only a feature of the colonial era, recent scholarship has identified colonialism as a significant factor in the reinforcement of their position and the acceleration of the "brahmanization" [sic] of Hindu society.' (p13)

In *Imagining Hinduism: A Postcolonial Perspective*, Sharada Sugirtharajah states: 'Postcolonialism is concerned with "knowledge" produced both by the former colonizer and by the colonized, as well as by postcolonial subjects in diverse historical contexts...' It is concerned, he maintains, 'with the ideological orientations undergirding textual productions.'²⁸ In his definition of terms, Sugirtharajah states that "'post-colonialism" indicates historical periodization, that is, the period after the demise of colonialism or the empire. In its unhyphenated form, "postcolonialism," it goes beyond historical periodization in that it identifies various forms of colonialism and neo-colonialism in newly independent and contemporary societies.'²⁹

Abhishiktananda and Griffiths are therefore in a post-colonial culture in terms of history – they are in a country readjusting after a period of colonization – and they are also under postcolonial influences in a culture which has been, and is, affected by that colonization. Despite the fact that neither wrote about British colonization of India or its effects, the landscape in which they lived (to refer back to the previous chapter's comments on the social and theological imaginaries) was to a lesser or greater extent deeply influenced by postcolonial issues.

It is true that both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths did, on rare occasions in their writing, express postcolonial views. Abhishiktananda and Monchanin, early in their time in India, expressed the view that India 'is an ancient civilization of which she is legitimately proud. It is indeed a duty to help Young India to assimilate whatever is good for her in Western civilization...'³⁰ Writing to Richard Rumbold, about visiting India and using a house there, Griffiths states that he 'would need two or three servants, who would probably not speak English, and who would almost certainly be dishonest.'³¹ Such rare instances are almost completely outweighed by the positive impressions they express of their experience of India.

None the less, Sugirtharajah maintains that 'Colonialism [does] not end with the colonized territories gaining political independence; newly independent nations continue

²⁸ Sugirtharajah, pxiii

²⁹ Ibid, pxii

³⁰ Abhishiktananda, *Benedictine Ashram*, p30

³¹ Griffiths, *On Friendship*, p149

to replicate the hegemonic values and structures of the colonizer.³² Thus, in a process that will be examined later when the work of Homi Bhabha is considered, cultures that have become independent from a colonizer re-present some of the values of that colonizer as its own in developing a new identity. Therefore the view of Hindu culture that Abhishiktananda and Griffiths received during their time in India is not without influence from the colonial period; in a post-colonial situation such as the one they inhabited, the influence of the colonizer has not disappeared. This is, of course, most obvious in the case of India in the forms of government and secular organisation that the newly independent state adopted. However, the extent to which British rule influenced Hindu identity in the post-colonial era is significant in understanding the way in which these two authors inhabited their interfaith space, and the way in which they related to *Advaita*.

The three areas in which the colonial period created a postcolonial inheritance, according to Will Sweetman, are: firstly, as already mentioned, the preferencing of the *Brahminical* tradition over other forms of religion in India; secondly, the establishment of a textual basis for Hinduism as its defining characteristic; and thirdly, quoting Richard King, ‘...the identification of *Vedanta*, more specifically *Advaita Vedanta*, as “...the paradigmatic example of the mystical nature of the Hindu religion”’.³³

Victor van Bijlert, in his 2013 lecture at Calcutta University, following the work of the Indian theorist Sharada Sugirtharajah, maintains that the establishment of the centrality of the textual basis of Hinduism was not only an activity for orientalists and colonizers: ‘Both indigenous Sanskrit experts and European orientalists were engaged in this activity.’ Bijlert maintains that this is ‘...an adaptation from the Christian idea that Christianity is founded or ought to be founded on the scripture called the Bible.’³⁴ That *Vedanta* and *Advaita* adopted a textual basis as a central aspect of its identity from colonial rule seems unlikely, given their reliance on *Śruti*, the most revered body of sacred literature. It seems more likely that this reliance formed a part of the preferencing of the *Vedantic* tradition by colonialists. Any view that *Vedanta* relies solely, or even mostly, on personal mystical experience, and does not draw much of its knowledge from *Śruti*, could itself be

³² Sugirtharajah, pxiii

³³ Sweetman, p13, quoting King, p128

³⁴ van Bijlert, section entitled ‘Other postcolonial scholars on Hinduism’, paragraph 1

accused of being a westernized 'mystic East' view, albeit one which some in India may, to a certain extent, be re-presenting to the West.

Before turning to consider Orientalism in more detail, initial consideration can be given at this stage as to how a postcolonial perspective can affect our approach to two Western authors attempting to occupy a space between Advaita and Christianity. The problems inherent in the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hindusim' will be touched upon later, but certainly both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths preferenced *Vedanta*, *Advaita* and the *Brahminical* tradition over other aspects of Hinduism. Their identification of the *sannyasin* tradition as a parallel to Western monasticism made such a preferencing natural to them. The dependence of *Vedanta* and *Advaita* on the authority of *Śruti* also made them a natural choice for Christians with a strong consciousness of scriptural authority. The question remains as to whether, in this meeting between *Advaita* and Christianity, the whole of *Advaita* and the whole of Christianity are represented. Is enough notice taken of those areas of the two faiths which are apparently completely incongruent? Does what may be termed an Orientalist approach to *Advaita* make them too keen to understand it in Western terms, a process that can be facilitated by divorcing *Advaita* from the rest of Hinduism? These are questions that need to be addressed as the texts of these two authors are examined.

There is a possible over-simplification to be avoided in using postcolonial theory to examine religion, which is displayed in Berger and Luckmann's *Social Construction of Reality*. This is the notion that religion is entirely socially conditioned, or in Richard King's critical comment, that '...all religious phenomena (including all beliefs) are socially constructed, and therefore causally dependent upon social, historical and cultural factors for their existence.'³⁵ Berger and Luckmann state that,

One cannot remain a Muslim outside the *'umma* of Islam, a Buddhist outside the *sangha*, and probably not a Hindu anywhere outside India. Religion requires a religious community, and to live in a religious world requires affiliation with that community.³⁶

³⁵ King, p48

³⁶ Berger, p178

According to Berger and Luckmann, the reality one experiences is always dependent upon specific 'plausibility structures', which allow one to retain one's identity, yet the *'umma*, and the *sangha* are interpreted here as purely social and physical in their existence. In other words, they are clubs, much as detractors from Christianity might claim that the Church is a club. *'Umma, sangha* and Church all have religious meanings for their adherents not solely limited to place and time, nor even necessarily to the world of phenomena. It is also factually apparent that Hindus can remain as such, and very faithfully so, outside India. The error is made clear when they state:

One can only maintain one's self-identification as a man of importance only in a milieu that confirms this identity; one can maintain one's Catholic faith only if one retains one's significant relationship with the Catholic community; and so forth. Disruption of significant conversation with mediators of the respective plausibility structures threatens the subjective realities in question.³⁷

A Catholic might well claim that this is a category error; being a man of importance is a different category of self-identification than being a Catholic. The one is a view of oneself, the other a view of reality. It is to be noted that some Catholics did claim that both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths strayed from their Catholic identity in their immersion in *Advaita*. To this extent one could say that they risked their plausibility structures; that Griffiths maintained a Catholic identity against some opposition and that Abhishiktananda moved to a position where his understanding of his identity was less clear. Both, however, were identities claimed in terms of the faith that they held, rather than in terms of external social structures, except, perhaps, for that which they had created themselves, namely the *ashram* of Shantivanam. So in using postcolonial theory to study their work it will be important to avoid what, in terms of religion and theology, could be described as a material reductionism. This study, though concerned with their real lives and the community and communities in which they lived, cannot reduce their whole experience of Christianity juxtaposed with *Advaita* and become purely sociological or anthropological.

³⁷ Berger, p174

4. ORIENTALISM

Turning to the subject of Orientalism, this came to prominence in the work of Edward W. Said who published his book *Orientalism* in 1978. Distinction must be drawn immediately between the mainly nineteenth- and twentieth-century academic study of the cultures of the Orient, and the postcolonial approach to that study which the work of Said represents, and who wrote; “I myself believe that Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridic discourse upon the Orient (which is what, in its academic or scholarly form, it claims to be).”³⁸

4.1 EDWARD SAID

In terms of the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, the relationship with Orientalism as defined by Said is complex. Writing of Orientalism in general, Said states that,

Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, makes its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says. What he says and writes, by virtue of the fact it is said and written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and moral fact. The principal product of this exteriority is of course representation...³⁹

This applies in some measure, and in important aspects, to the two authors we are concerned with, but in other important ways they differ markedly from this description. They are not exterior to the culture in which they, in fact, immersed themselves, though to what extent they are ‘morally’ exterior is a more difficult question. Said uses the term, it appears, to signify political structures, cultural mores, as well as personal behaviour of the Orient, about which judgments are made by a Western power. It seems likely that Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were immersed in Indian culture to a sufficient extent such that they were not exterior, except in their biographical pasts, to the ways of India, and indeed saw those ways as desirable when compared with their experience of the West. It

³⁸ Said, p6

³⁹ Ibid, pp20-21

seems it would also be unjust to claim that either of them was ‘never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what [they said].’ They were deeply committed to expanding their encounter with India and developing their experience in close proximity and dialogue with it. What is true, however, is that both ‘ma[de] the Orient speak, describe[d] the Orient, ma[de] its mysteries plain for and to the West.’ They wrote for Western consumption, were concerned to be understood in the West, most obviously in Griffiths’ turn towards Western lecturing after the failure of his relationships and attempts to find common cause with *Advaitins*. They expressed themselves often in Western, Christian, categories, and the question may be asked as to whether ‘..these representations [of the Orient] rel[ied] upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient.’⁴⁰ Distant and amorphous, that is, not from Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, but from their readers and the Western traditions and conventions to which, and by which, they related *Advaita*.

It would be incorrect to attempt an exact ‘fit’ of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths into Said’s Orientalist mold; very plainly they were closely involved in the culture they were attempting to relate to the West, and had not only sympathy for it, but also empathy. However, Said’s Orientalist perspective will be useful in analyzing what was occurring in the ‘in-between’ space they occupied, their expectations in occupying that space, and the way they described the religion of India, and more specifically *Advaita*. They had the option to simply experience *Advaita* on its own terms, learn what they could, and either join an *Advaitic ashram*, or return to a Christian monastery. They took it upon themselves, however, not simply to experience *Advaita*, but to comment upon it from a Christian perspective in Christian terms, and it is therefore justifiable to include an Orientalist critique in examining their work. To quote Said’s trenchant criticism:

‘To the Westerner...the Oriental was always *like* some aspect of the West; to some of the German Romantics, for example, Indian religion was essentially an Oriental version of Germano-Christian pantheism. Yet the Orientalist makes it his work to

⁴⁰ Said, p22

be always converting the Orient from something into something else, for the sake of his culture, in some cases for what he believes is the sake of the Oriental.’⁴¹

One could ask whether, to Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, *Advaita* was essentially an Oriental expression of Christian mysticism. The extent to which the two authors represented *Advaita* as ‘something like’ Christianity will be a key issue, as will their conversions of *Advaita* into Christian terminology and their motivations in such conversions.

Possibly another of Said’s criticisms of Orientalism which most applies to Abhishiktananda and Griffiths is contained in his statement that there is a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ Orient, and that ‘...the “good” Orient was invariably a classical period somewhere in a long-gone India...’⁴² It is undoubtedly the case that both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths looked back to the idea of a classical India of incomparable wisdom. In this respect they fit very clearly into the Orientalist camp. What, of course, can also be argued is that Hindus themselves see their history as rooted in the religious and scriptural past that Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were so interested in. Chapter four of Jawaharlal Nehru’s *The Discovery of India*,⁴³ itself entitled ‘The Discovery of India’, and therefore to some extent the main argument of the book, sees the origins of India in its Sanskrit scripture quite as much as in any historical event. This relates back to the reference made in chapter three regarding the apprehension of history in different theological imaginaries.

Said’s work is not without its critics. Bernard Lewis in an article in the *New York Review of Books* in June 1982,⁴⁴ compared Said’s treatment of academic Oriental studies to an imagined parallel in which traditional Classics was banned on the grounds that it misrepresents and oppresses the Greek land and peoples, though it could be objected that the study of the Classics does not take place in a recent post-colonial context. David Kopf has argued that Said presents an entirely one-sided negative view, which is both unhistorical and has also ignored the role that Orientalist ideas have played in the new Indian state which has, itself, colonized many Orientalist views.⁴⁵ Such a criticism does

⁴¹ Ibid, p76

⁴² Said, p99

⁴³ Nehru, *The Discovery of India*

⁴⁴ Lewis, np

⁴⁵ Kopf, p495-506

not make an Orientalist approach any more accurate or reliable, simply attesting to its transferability. John MacKenzie criticises Said for the use of elite literary texts in his analysis, whereas historians were well ahead of him in appreciating colonial power through popular texts that did not have a totalizing narrative.⁴⁶ Keith Windschuttle accuses Said of ‘...inept handling of historical material’,⁴⁷ and maintains that the doctrine which states that cultures define themselves over against the Other, ‘...is not an historical statement at all, but an epistemological assumption.’⁴⁸ Whatever the criticisms of Said’s *Orientalism*, and of others who have written against this understanding of Western interpretations of the East, it is fair to say, as does Oldmeadow, that ‘...it is certainly no longer possible to consider the interactions of East and West without taking some account of their critiques.’⁴⁹

Although Said’s *Orientalism* is not without its critics, they are, in the main, objecting to the way he interprets history, and although this is an important criticism as such, the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths stands somewhat outside the flow of geopolitical history that Said is interpreting. In this study, examining as it does the space in which two cultures meet, less concerned as it is with the questions of historical power and oppression which Said’s critics feel he mishandles, the anatomy of ‘meeting as meeting’ which he examines is useful. It can be applied to a particular point in time and to the content of a space of meeting. Having said that, one needs to be aware, as is Oldmeadow, that the two authors this study considers were involved in a religious meeting, and must deal with ‘...Western encounters with the Eastern traditions as *religious* phenomena which, in the end, are not amenable to non-religious explanations.’⁵⁰

4.2. THE POWER OF CONSTRUCTION

The idea of construction of the Other, which comes out of Said’s work and is used also by Richard King in his *Orientalism and Religion*, is a powerful tool in examining the meeting between cultures. Said introduces construction of the Other as ‘a sign of imperial power

⁴⁶ MacKenzie, pxiv

⁴⁷ Windschuttle, paragraph 19

⁴⁸ Ibid, paragraph 23

⁴⁹ Oldmeadow, *Journeys East*, pp10-11

⁵⁰ Ibid, p15

over recalcitrant phenomena.⁵¹ However, construction of the Other, though it often takes place where power is unequal, and in such situations can have marked practical consequences for, and material effects on, the Other, is not limited to such situations. King, among other issues, seeks to examine ‘...the role played by Western Orientalists and Indian intellectuals in the construction of an image of “Hinduism” as a type of mysticism centred upon the philosophy of the *Vedanta*.’⁵² This is a construction created mainly for the West by both Orientalists and Indian scholars.

The power *of* such construction is, in fact, the power *to* construct the Other. The act of constructing the Other, in and of itself, has a powerful effect. In other words, a French person meeting an English person has, by his or her capacity to imagine and to make founded or unfounded assumptions, the power to construct a picture of Englishness as strange and Other, and to live and be influenced by that perceived difference if he or she chooses to be so affected. Construction of the Other is not, therefore limited to colonial situations, although in such situations the construction of the colonized by the colonizer is likely to reflect the power of the later. In post-colonial situations constructions of the Other may well retain some of the power-affected imaginings of the colonial era, particularly when differences are perceived to be significant, but the concept of constructing the Other is a very broad one, used in a number of areas of study.⁵³

It is therefore not mainly in the sense of those who have power that the concept of the construction of the Other will be used in this study. The construction of *Advaita* involved in the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths had little if any practical consequences for, or material effects on, Indian culture. It is still, however, a construct, an image of *Advaita*, and it is also a construct made in a situation in which postcolonial ideas were at play in India, and very possibly in the two authors we are concerned with. It will be part of the

⁵¹ Said, p145

⁵² King, p3

⁵³ The breadth of the notion of the construction of the Other in the following randomly chosen book titles: Smith, Mitzi J, *The Literary Construction of the Other in the Acts of the Apostles: Chrismatics, the Jews and Women* (James Clarke, 2012); Brinker-Gabler, Gisela, *Encountering the Other(s): Studies in Literature, History, and Culture* (State University of New York Press, 1995); Farmbry, Kyle, *Administration and the Other: Explorations of Diversity and Marginalization in the Political Administrative State* (Lexington Books, 16 Feb 2009); Cohen, Beth, *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art* (Brill, 2000)

work of this study to determine both the nature of the construct of *Advaita* that they developed, and the extent to which postcolonial influences played a part in it.

Construction is premised upon difference, and this may mean a distortion of the one who constructs the Other, as well as of that other. To say, 'I am in no way like you,' requires one to deny the ways in which I may be like you. The quotation from Ulrich given in chapter two in which he states that broadly Christianity relies on faith and *Advaita* on experience is an example of construction both of the Other and of self, the one construction requiring the other, denying the experience of the Christian and the faith of the *Advaitin*. The result of this may be that the Other becomes a 'shadow'⁵⁴ and is given an identity which is composed of those aspects which one has not recognized in oneself. In the words of Ashis Nandy, '...the colonial experience made the mainstream Western consciousness definitionally non-Oriental and redefined the West's self-image as the antithesis or negation of the East.' At the same time, '...it sought to do the reverse with the self-image of the Orient and with the culture of India.'⁵⁵ Or as Ronald Inden states: 'Indological discourse...holds (or simply assumes) that the essence of Indian civilization is just the opposite of the West's.'⁵⁶ Construction of the Other is not simply something which is imposed, it is also something which is assumed or taken to oneself. Premised as it is upon difference, the difference must in essence be maintained by the one who forms the construction even if maintaining it entails a change in self-image.

Nor is that perceived difference only to be found in an Orientalist outlook which holds Indian culture to be intrinsically less rational. Inden maintains that those with a 'romantic, spiritualistic or idealistic' view find India to be Europe's opposite: 'The very ascetic practices, philosophies, cosmologies, custom, visual art forms and myths which the utilitarian or materialist finds wasteful, deluded or even repulsive, the romantic idealist takes up with great fascination.'⁵⁷

⁵⁴ This study will not examine the use in postcolonial studies of the Jungian concept of 'shadow', associated as it is with a view of 'the primitive' quite inappropriate in this study of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, but see, Collins, Jo, pp22-30

⁵⁵ Nandy, Ashis, p72

⁵⁶ Inden, p402

⁵⁷ Ibid, p430

At the same time as stating that Orientalism rests on the assumption that Indian civilization is the opposite of the West's, Inden contends that the Indological episteme is essentialist, in that it also assumes 'that the real world (whether that is material and determinate or ideal and ineffable) consists of essences and that the world is unitary.'⁵⁸ From this, argues Inden, comes the belief that human nature itself has a unitary essence, irrespective of the cultural context, and that culture itself is likewise unitary. These two positions, of opposition and unity, may seem, and indeed are, contradictory. To invent two statements: 'Civilizations are, or should be, based on the same principles, but my culture is different from yours:' and 'Human nature is, or should be, universal but I find myself different from you.' These 'split' attitudes, it could reasonably be surmised, arise from a commitment to the values of one culture in the presence of another, or that in other words, when expressed they will often have a postcolonial content. It is an area of contradiction in Orientalism and in postcolonialism that will be met again when this study turns to look at the work of Homi Bhabha, and his notion of the Other, seen as 'the same, but not quite', and at the postcolonial 'anxiety' about which he writes.

To look at it in this way, the Other as 'different but the same', gives a more complete idea of how the notion of construction is relevant in considering the work of Griffiths and Abhishiktananda, and the liminal, shifting space they occupied. In examining their texts I will argue that though there are inaccurate constructions of *Advaita*, attempts to construct an *Advaita* which deserves less attention, or which is inferior to Christianity, or that must justifiably be corrected by Christianity is very much not their focus. What may be found, however, is the differences between the two become definitional but uncertain, or in other words that a particular concept is not understood as it is within its own context of faith, or in its own right, but in its 'sameness but distinction' to some aspect of the other faith. We may also find that this 'sameness but distinction' has not only changed the meaning of the particular concept, but has also altered the aspect of the other faith with which it is compared, and created uncertainty within the understanding of its doctrines.

Richard King argues that the mystical aspects of Western culture have been exorcised or expunged in the post-Enlightenment era, certainly in terms of having any sway in the

⁵⁸ Ibid, p402

social or political arena. Mysticism, as a mode of knowledge, has instead been projected onto a 'mystic East'. The West has employed this projection, undergirded by Orientalism, as a means of defining its identity: 'In this sense, as postcolonial critics from Edward Said onwards have acknowledged, Orientalism is as concerned with the Occident and the preservation of Western cultural identity through the projection of an Oriental Other as it has been with the manipulation of the East.'⁵⁹

Following Louis Bouyer,⁶⁰ King defines Christian mysticism as having three historical dimensions. First is a mystical hermeneutic of scripture, by means of which a higher truth is revealed, particularly through allegory; second is a liturgical dimension, particularly related the Eucharist and the experience of unity with the divine in communion; and third is the spiritual or the contemplative – direct experience of the divine. King maintains that these aspects of mysticism were essential to the theology of pre-modern times, and that the Hellenized Church regarded them as equally important to the early Christian concept of *mystikos*. As mysticism itself lost its place in Western thought as an accepted mode of knowledge, claims King, the different dimensions of mysticism were separated from each other, and the contemplative and personal took on the whole mantle; 'The separation of these various aspects of the mystical and the elevation of one aspect, the experiential, above all others is a product of the modern era.'⁶¹

It is, of course, true to say that both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths combined the scriptural hermeneutics, the liturgical and the contemplative dimensions in their understanding of mysticism. Their writing takes in an albeit unorthodox reading of what they regarded as key Biblical passages, and though they did not use allegory to deepen their understanding, they did attempt to read 'beneath the surface' by referring to *Advaita*. Both maintained their commitment to the Eucharist, again modifying it in the process of their interreligious dialogue. Finally, they attempted to integrate *Advaitic* forms of meditation with their own background knowledge of Christian mysticism.

However, this study will need to consider whether, throughout their explorations, they regarded *Advaita* as a 'religion' in the way that Christianity calls itself a religion. It was

⁵⁹ King, p33

⁶⁰ See Bouyer, *The Christian Mystery*, and Bouyer, 'Mysticism', quoted by King, p15.

⁶¹ King, p23

noted in the introduction to this study that 'religion' is a Western concept, and its equivalence to the Hindu '*Dharma*' can by no means be taken as a given. Hindu *Dharma* is understood in terms of the maintenance and continuance of the universe and its peoples in a way that would be unusual in Christian theology. The *Mahabharata* states: 'That which supports, that which holds together the peoples (of the universe), that is Dharma.'⁶² It is the performance of *Dharma* by all Hindus which itself has the power to maintain the universe, and this is related to the interconnectedness of humanity, the divine and the universe in Hindu understanding. Whilst it would be true to say that 'the Word' in Christianity has such an integrative power, it would be unusual to claim it for the performance of Christian duties, although there may be a resonance with high Catholic priestly interpretations of the Eucharist. It was also noted that 'Hinduism' is a term of a substantially different kind from 'Christianity'. The fact that this study has found no more accurate terms to describe the 'religious' aspect of life in India is simply testament to the difficulties of relating it to the Western experience. King comments that, '...the central explanatory category of religious studies, namely the notion of "religion" itself, is a Christian theological category.'⁶³ As a description, it has attached to it a meaning related to the history and development of Christianity. This being the case, when studying other 'religions' one is, by definition, importing certain presuppositions into that study which do not necessarily pertain. This has implications, therefore, for comparative theology, which is a discipline which finds its home mainly in Christianity and in the Western academy; therefore, '...one should acknowledge that the comparative study of religion remains founded upon a conceptual framework that is unmistakably theological and Christian in orientation.'⁶⁴

Jyoti Raghu, in his 'Rethinking Hinduism in a Postcolonial Context', is more outspoken in the connection he sees between a colonial past and the use of the term Hinduism to describe something that Christians call 'religion': 'Hinduism itself as a category and concept is seen as a construction of British imperialism, there being no such indigenous

⁶² *Mahabharata, Karna Parva, 69/59*. The traditional and all-embracing nature of the concept of *Dharma*, as expressed by Hindus rather than by Western commentators, can be seen in *Sanatana Dharma: An Advanced Textbook of Hindu Religion and Ethics*. It encompasses the early twentieth century context, but expresses the distinct Hindu understanding. The verse from the *Mahabharata* is quoted on p2.

⁶³ King, p40

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p40

sense of such an overarching tradition encompassing the nation now called India. The same holds for the concept of religion, and philosophy in India.⁶⁵

S.N. Balagangadhara has considered the content of dialogue and 'religious' commentary in India, and claims that, in the light of the complex history of 'religions' in India:

'...one would expect a huge volume of literature regarding religion (what religion is, what these individual religions are, etc) and even more literature in theology... Yet, there is hardly any theology in India (if we look at Christianity as an example of what it means to write theological tracts) and there is hardly any explicit reflection on the nature of religion. All one needs is an acquaintance with the history of Christianity to notice how staggering this absence is. To this day, neither the scholar nor the layman can answer the question about what makes, say, 'Hinduism' into a religion...'⁶⁶

In this context it is relevant to remember the connection already mentioned between the methods of Śankara and Aquinas, the latter undoubtedly a theologian. Yet with Balagangadhara's comment in mind it will be relevant to examine the importation of Western concepts of religion and theology by Abhishiktananda and Griffiths into their commentary on *Advaita*. The issue has already been raised, but the clear message from critics of Orientalism that these terms are a misfit in the Indian situation add an emphasis to this consideration. This study will not continue throughout to put quotation marks around the words religion, theology and Hinduism, simply to make for ease of reading, but it will attempt to maintain at every stage of the argument the doubtful value of them and their Western heritage when employed as an explanation of the situation in India.

The problems in the transferring of terminologies and understandings from one culture to another is at the core of this study. The previous chapter attempted to set out this problem in terms of theological imaginaries, of differing cultural constructs, and in terms of the constructivist ideas of grammar and language, used in terms of the structure and internal relationships within a religion. Steven Katz maintains that what he calls a

⁶⁵ Raghu, p2

⁶⁶ Balagangadhara, p59

pluralist approach to constructivism does not deny ultimate realities. In what might be better described a particularist approach, he states that there is no need to ignore experiential evidence, no need to simplify evidence in order to reach for comparisons, and no need to start with prior assumptions about the 'Real'. Because of this

one is in a position to respect the richness of the experiential and conceptual data involved in this area of concern: 'God' can be 'God', 'Brahman' can be 'Brahman' and *nirvana* can be *nirvana* without any reductionist attempt to equate the concept of 'God' with that of 'Brahman', or 'Brahman' with *nirvana*. This respect for the relevant evidence, both experiential and conceptual, is an essential element in the study of mysticism which is disregarded only at the philosopher's peril.⁶⁷

At the same time, King, speaking of mysticism, maintains that there is no need to 'drive a wedge between interpretation and the experience itself'.⁶⁸ In other words, if religion and theology are a language, those who speak it see the world in terms of that language, without a second order process. In this, he differs from Lindbeck. King gives the example of a Roman Catholic who sees a vision of the Virgin Mary. He or she does not have a vision of a young woman and interpret it as a vision of the Virgin Mary, but has a vision of the Virgin Mary. To refer back to the notion of social and theological imaginaries and to expand on the analogy that they are the landscape one lives in, if one is an English person and looks for a culturally significant tree, it might well be the oak – symbol in English myth of strength, endurance and life. If, however, one is an Indian in India and looks for a culturally significant tree, one might find a specimen of the divine power, the divine fig tree or banyan, under one of which Rama, Lakshmana and Sita are said to have rested.

A key question for this study is therefore about the interpretation of experience by Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. Were their experiences in India Christian or *Advaitic* or both? Could those experiences, in fact be both Christian and *Advaitic*, given their Christian heritage? The answer may be different for the two and this study is unlikely to reach a definitive answer to the question, difficult as it is to reach definitive answers

⁶⁷ Katz, p66

⁶⁸ King, p168

where mystical experience is involved. Is a Christian experience of unity the same as an *Advaitic* experience of unity? Though that is very probably an unanswerable question, it is still relevant to ask, to continue the analogy, as to whether in their exploration of *Advaita*, when they saw a divine fig tree they were really seeing a banyan, or if they were actually seeing an oak and simply calling it a banyan.

5. HOMI BHABHA AND THE THIRD SPACE

In analyzing the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, postcolonial theory, criticisms of Orientalism, and an understanding of the process of the construction of the Other are concepts that assist one to understand what is occurring in a postcolonial situation, as already mentioned in this chapter. What this study also needs in its examination of their texts are quite specific and exact tools that can be applied to what they wrote. Within the field of postcolonial studies, Homi Bhabha has developed a number of analytical tools related to his Third Space Theory. In his work the Third Space lies between two cultures that are meeting in the context of colonization or post-colonization. It is an uncertain and liminal space in which a form of negotiation occurs between the cultures, sometimes producing a hybridity. What emerges in the Third Space owes something to both cultures, but is not fully owned by either, distanced as it is to a greater or larger extent from its original roots in both:

The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys [the] mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People.⁶⁹

Bhabha is writing of a situation in which cultures meet, colonialism and post-colonialism being the particular context on which he focuses. But David Huddart states a more general point;

⁶⁹ Bhabha, p37.

We are faced with a world seemingly polarized and divided into discrete cultures. This situation is often described, in the words of historian Bernard Lewis, as a 'clash of civilizations'...This description sees differences as being cultural rather than political: this usually means that historical events are explained as arising from innate cultural differences, implying that we cannot reconcile oppositions (e.g. oppositions between Islam and the West, or 'Jihad vs McWorld'). Bhabha shows how such polarization is simplistic and dangerous, as it ignores the continuing processes of history.⁷⁰

To apply this to the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, regarding Christianity and *Advaita* as 'opposed' is simplistic. History is moving us towards greater integration, and simple oppositions between cultures are becoming less viable. Griffiths in particular had much to say about the historical inevitability of interreligious and inter-cultural understanding. However, both cultures these authors dealt with are, in their own sphere, significant powers – they have mass followings, cultures, traditions. To imagine that there will not be significant and complex reactions in the space in which they meet is unrealistic. Bhabha's study of the postcolonial context provides tools to examine this Third Space of meeting.

However, before going on to look at the analytical tools which Bhabha provides, it is necessary to acknowledge a disjuncture between his work, and the way in which I propose to adapt and use it. Firstly, Bhabha is writing as a literary critic, and secondly, writing about what literature tells us about the effects of the exercise of power by a colonizer, and to a lesser extent the effect that this has in a post-colonial setting. Bhabha's methodology will therefore have to be substantially reinterpreted if it is to be useful in the study of the writing of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. His approach is often about two actors – the colonizer and the colonized – who have reactions, psychological responses and strategies within the colonial setting. In other words he is analyzing, through representative literature, the way in which people cope with a specific situation.

⁷⁰ Huddart, pp3-4. Huddart's parenthesis refers to Bernard Lewis' *From Babel to Dragomans* (London: Weidenfeld, 2004)

The extent to which the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths reflects the reactions of individuals or groups to the past colonial situation is very slight. The most obvious example is their acceptance of the primacy of *Brahmanism* as an expression of Indian religious experience, which many have argued is an influence originating in part in the British colonial period, as discussed in a previous chapter. The main use which I intend to make of Bhabha's analysis is as a paradigm of the meeting between cultures, applied to the meeting of Christianity and *Advaita* within the work of these two authors. There are, however, three distinct disjunctions with the work of Bhabha in attempting this.

Firstly the writing of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths is not a reimagination in literary form of real life – it therefore lacks authorial invention and interpretation of situations, reactions and actions on which Bhabha places such emphasis. In comparison with literary form, it can be argued that theology is creative and requires imagination, but it is an imagined story of life events in only the most general sense possible, and lacks fictional characters whose emotions and actions can be examined and analyzed.

Secondly, there is no account of the play of temporal power and its practical and psychological effects in the work of these two authors, and such power is at the centre of Bhabha's analysis. In Abhishiktananda's and Griffiths' meeting with *Advaita* questions of power were less clear than in the case of colonization, though not entirely absent. That neither religion in this meeting sought to oppress or overpower the other does not, of course negate the fact that the history of such attempts to overpower live in the memory of post-colonial India, and appear in some reactions to their work. In comparison with the situation in British India, and although Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were situated in a post-colonial society during their work, the internal evidence of the play of past colonial power is very limited in their writing, and they are far more concerned with the relationship between Christianity and an *Advaita* that was formulated long before British power in India.

Thirdly, this study intends to apply the methodology to the meeting of two 'religions', and an analysis of the religious aspect of culture is almost completely absent from Bhabha's work. This is not a criticism of his work, simply a statement that this was not his focus. Even less was he involved in a treatment of theology.

There will be no point in this study in attempting to deny that these disjunctions exist. Because of them Bhabha's methodology will have to be substantially reinterpreted if it is to be useful in the study. What it will maintain is that Bhabha has attempted to analyze what happens in a Third Space which opens up between two cultures, and that his analysis can be used in situations where colonial power is not the main driver of action. This study asserts that Abhishiktananda and Griffiths worked in a space – a Third Space – between two cultures and religions and that they were distinctly different from earlier colonial forms of British Christianity in India. This is clearly evidenced throughout their work and is the assumption of all commentators.

In their Third Space two theological imaginaries meet, and Bhabha's methodology provides insights into the dynamic interplay between the two that takes place. Both imaginaries have their own power, both have long histories and a complex of tradition, both are invested in, in various forms, by millions of people. In this sense it is not Abhishiktananda nor Griffiths who represent a Christian power over against *Advaita* and its adherents. The two religious imaginaries are themselves the powers which interact in the space in which these two authors worked. Plainly they facilitated that meeting, which was their declared aim, and to a greater or lesser extent directed the way in which the two religions reacted within their own theologies, but they were not themselves in charge of the two imaginaries which were meeting. I would argue that neither Abhishiktananda nor Griffiths had the intention of setting up 'private religions' – they worked and attempted to remain within established religious imaginaries, complex though they are.

The contention of this study is that the meeting of cultures of which Bhabha wrote and his analysis of it provides a route into understanding the meeting of these two religions. Direct application of his analysis will, however, only be rarely appropriate. His insights into colonial power, understood as insights into the meeting of cultures, will be used but will have to be adapted to suit a different subject matter.

This study defines the colonial view of India, Indian religion and *Advaita*, as that which pertained during the British colonial period. Abhishiktananda and Griffiths are both post-colonial in terms of temporality, and their approach to *Advaita* is postcolonial, in that it

forms itself a critique on earlier Western colonial approaches to religion in India. Though their aim was not to critique earlier representations, they deny colonial boundaries in their willingness to contemplate hybridity. They produced a 'hybrid, or translational, critique',⁷¹ to use Robert Young's phrase. In speaking of social hybridity, Young states: 'The development of this critical "third space" changes the possibilities of politics through the development of modified or hitherto unthought-of positions that operate outside the box.'⁷² My contention is that Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were involved in a similar re-thinking in terms of religious belief.

However, emerging from Third Space Theory are four analytical tools that this study intends to adapt and use. The first is the concept of hybridization, the second is that of enunciation, the third is the idea of mimicry, and the fourth that of anxiety.

Brah and Coombes in combining both biological and social uses of the term in *Hybridity and its Discontents*⁷³ point to the origins of the word 'hybrid', which is a natural and unified organic process in which no dichotomy or inconsistency can exist by definition. This is the starting point, so to speak, for the way in which the concept of hybridity will be used in this study, and marks the distinction between it and syncretism. Hybridity grows as a result of the meeting of cultures, originates from the core of those cultures, and (to use an appropriate biological metaphor) shares their DNA, but is distinct from both. Syncretism, however, does not involve the negotiation, reevaluation and rethinking that takes place in the Third Space. In terms of the Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, syncretism would not be the origination of new thinking or theology, but the joining together of discreet modes of thought or theology without the work of genuine integration.

The word 'syncretism' is often used as a negative by those who object to any influence upon Christianity by another faith, and who wish to defend the unique nature of the Christian Gospel or its superiority to other religions. In historical terms, syncretism is often the term used to describe the transfer of beliefs or practices in situations in which cultures are meeting politically, and the respective religions influence each other. Such would be the case in the example of classical Greek-Roman syncretism, in which the

⁷¹ Young, 'The Dislocations of Cultural Translation', p190

⁷² Ibid p190

⁷³ *Hybridity and its Discontents*

names and myths associated with Greek and Roman gods were transposed. I will use the term syncretism to denote transpositions of this nature. This is quite different from the work this study deals with, in which another religion is explored theologically for its insights.⁷⁴ In 'Is it Possible to Believe in a Syncretistic God?' Petra Pakkanen maintains that this type of exploration or 'mixing' is best described as a hybridity, which requires new understanding within a belief system, whilst syncretism is best understood as a cultural and historic process.⁷⁵

Returning to its more modern theological, rather than cultural, and often negative use, Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony describes syncretism as, 'a tendency or attempt to undermine the uniqueness of the gospel as found in the Scriptures or the incarnate Son of God.'⁷⁶ The term is, however, used in so many different ways, both positive and negative, that Peter Schineller, believes that it is irredeemable.⁷⁷ However, this study will use the term to indicate an uncritical approach to the appropriation of insights from another religion, and the difference between syncretism and hybridity is shown in Hendrik Kraemer's comments on the former:

To say that syncretism is what takes place when one brings two conflicting ideas or practices and unites them into a harmonious whole is to say nothing coherent. If the two original ideas or practices are in conflict, then they cannot, without modification, produce a harmonious unity. If harmony is produced, then it follows that either the two original elements were only apparently in conflict, or that changes have been effected so that it is not actually two conflicting elements that produce the harmony but a modification of those elements that produce elements no longer in conflict.⁷⁸

This study uses the word 'syncretism' where an uncritical melding of two concepts takes place, and a false identity is proposed. It uses the term 'hybridity' or 'hybridization' to indicate where the critical re-working of concepts has taken place in the Third Space –

⁷⁴ For an example of culturally determined syncretism, see Kaizer, pp113-128

⁷⁵ Pakkanen, p137

⁷⁶ Anthony, p243

⁷⁷ See Schineller, pp50-53

⁷⁸ Kraemer, p52

including modifications brought about by insights due to the comparison – and a harmony is proposed on the basis of negotiation between the two original concepts.

Peter Burke suggests that hybridity requires a ‘blending’ and that it is ‘...a slippery, ambiguous term, at once literal and metaphorical, descriptive and explanatory.’⁷⁹ Due to the unfixed, fluid nature of the concept of hybridity, Burke proposes a range of terms, but this study will use the one term, following Bhabha’s preference for it. Hybridity is a term used now in many disciplines, (cultural studies, archeology, language studies, history, visual culture) each with their distinct uses of it,⁸⁰ showing its indeterminate nature.

Hybridization runs counter, so to speak, to multiple religious belonging, and they serve as a critique of each other. Whilst hybridization suggests a ‘blending’, multiple religious belonging suggests the encompassing of differing religious beliefs in one person, as has already been seen in the work of Cornille. Analyzing which of these is occurring, and how belonging is affecting the nature of hybridization, gives an indication of what is happening in the Third Space.

Bhabha’s concept of hybridity is of a moving creative process, rather than of a syncretic process which seeks static equivalencies. It is also a process experienced within any one culture. As David Huddart writes, it ‘...refers to an original mixed-ness within every form of identity Bhabha insists less on hybridity than on hybridization; in other words, he insists on hybridity’s ongoing process.’⁸¹ Bhabha, in fact, criticizes Edward Said, and maintains that the polarization of self and other is too static a concept. Cultural mixed-ness is a fact of life, and when cultures meet it is not one static phenomenon meeting another. Bhabha’s notion of a dynamic of cultural change, of ‘hybridity’s ongoing process’ is, in a sense, a significant justification of the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths – in other words they were simply involved at a particular time and place in a process that is always going on. They were, however, from a Christian Roman Catholic culture which saw itself, in some degree or other, as static, Roman Catholic ideas of inculturation being mainly to do with missiology. Bhabha is to a large extent, it seems, resisting the view of a settled ‘Western culture’ as over against a settled ‘Eastern culture’,

⁷⁹ Burke, p54

⁸⁰ See, for example, *Conceptualizing Cultural Hybridization: A Transdisciplinary Approach*.

⁸¹ Huddart, pp6-7

regarding them rather as themselves hybrid. This contrasts with a common view of monolithic culture in public discourse.⁸²

Bhabha's treatment of hybridity, as well as being about the mixed-ness of individual cultures, is about their meeting, which is again a dynamic, creative, process;

The originality of Bhabha's argument about hybridity is the idea that instead of pointing to the way that colliding cultures produce a fusion of different elements, hybridity for Bhabha describes the new, distinctive forms that arise when intractably different cultures collide.⁸³

Bhabha pursues this argument in perhaps his best-known article, 'Signs Taken for Wonders' in his treatment of the presence of the 'English book' (which is the Bible) in the colonial situation. In its appearance in that situation '...the colonial text emerges uncertainly...'⁸⁴ in colonial discourse, a sign of difference which undermines claims of power. He concludes that the 'English book' is one example of a cultural statement which shows that, '...the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference.'⁸⁵ Thus the text repeated to denote difference becomes other than the original in its import and effect.

Central to the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths is its creative nature, based on the very fact that the meaning and impact of a text in one culture is other than its meaning and impact in another. In the creativity which emerges from this uncertainty they put their own stamp on the hybridities which they write. In other words, there is no unambiguous path which ends with the conclusions they reached, and no simple transfer

⁸² A divorce between Western and Eastern cultures can be defended, even if hybridity in western culture is admitted. See, for example, in Dawson (paragraph 8): 'No doubt there have been great differences of opinion as to the nature of this community [of Western countries]; nor is this surprising since, whatever its nature, the unity of Western civilization is certainly not a simple thing. In contrast to the monolithic simplicity of the great oriental cultures, the civilization of the West is like a Gothic cathedral, a complex mechanism of conflicting pressures which achieves its unity by the dynamic balance of thrust and counterthrust.' Dawson denies the presence of hybridity in 'oriental' cultures – the Other is different in nature.

⁸³ Young, 'The Dislocations of Cultural Translation', p189

⁸⁴ Bhabha, p107

⁸⁵ Ibid

from one culture to another, as would be the case with syncretism. An *Advaitic* text ‘emerges uncertainly’ in a Christian context if one is to be true to both traditions. Their conclusions are therefore personal; a factor which makes their theology easy to criticize in a negative manner. The unpredictable and creative nature of hybridities which arise in the Third Space – the fact, for example, that Abhishiktananda and Griffiths reached different conclusions in several areas of theology – is important to grasp, and plays against any suggestion that the relationship between religions is somehow obvious if one will only forget about religious boundaries.

Bhabha uses the word ‘translation’ to indicate interaction and dialogue, rather than just an interpretation of meaning. Writing of differing socio-political critiques, those of class and gender, he states that,

...the transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are *neither the One* (unitary working class) *nor the Other* (the politics of gender) *but something else besides* which contests the terms and territories of both.⁸⁶

Again, this takes place within a space of hybridity, and stresses the difference between such a process and a syncretism which simply seeks to propose that one theory is the equivalent of another in a different ‘language’.

The second concept drawn from the work of Bhabha is that of mimicry, which describes a phenomenon that occurs in the Third Space in which the colonized or the colonizer takes on some aspect or aspects of the culture of the other. Amardeep Singh, in his much quoted blog, ‘Mimicry and Hybridity in Plain English’, states that ‘Mimicry in colonial and postcolonial literature is most commonly seen when members of a colonized society (say, Indians or Africans) imitate the language, dress, politics, or cultural attitude of their colonizers...’⁸⁷ It is a term most often used to express the attempts of the colonized to gain acceptance of, or indeed to undermine, the colonizer. It is often seen as shameful and a repression of an individual’s true character and traditions, as he or she seeks to

⁸⁶ Bhabha, p28

⁸⁷ Singh, paragraph 3

copy the 'master' in an attempt to gain or share power. There are a number of insulting words or phrases used to describe those who mimic colonizers, used both by the colonizer and other colonized people. A key element of mimicry is that the one who mimics will almost never identify herself as so doing; 'almost no one ever describes themselves as positively engaged in mimicry; it is always something that someone else is doing.'⁸⁸

For Bhabha, mimicry can also be a subversion, an exposure of symbols of power. Singh, however, rather dismisses this, and focuses on mimicry as a simple desire for recognition or a share in power; '...it is quite unlikely that a person would consciously employ this method of subversion [i.e. mimicry] when there are often many more direct methods. Indeed, it is hard to think of even a single example in postcolonial literature where this very particular kind of subversion is in effect.'⁸⁹

Bhabha, however, also speaks of the mimicry of the colonizer;

...colonial mimicry is a desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*...Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power.'⁹⁰

Singh refers to this as 'reverse mimicry', which is also referred to in other sources as 'going native'. The history of colonial India has many examples of colonizers who took on some of the dress and traditions of the native population, Pundir and Meerut citing probably the best-known example of Richard Francis Burton, '...who often attempted to disguise himself as Arab or Indian during his time as a colonial administrator,'⁹¹ and in fact converted to Islam. Borrowing terminology from Singh, they use the term 'passing up' for mimicry by the colonized, and 'passing down' for reverse mimicry, or mimicry by the colonizer, signifying the desire in both cases for a movement or change in identity.⁹²

⁸⁸ Ibid, paragraph 4

⁸⁹ Ibid, paragraph 6

⁹⁰ Bhabha, p86

⁹¹ Pundir, p57

⁹² The terms 'passing up' and 'passing down' can be a little misleading, as 'reverse mimicry' has also been used to describe a situation in which those with power seek to mimic those in the same culture without

Such change in identity, however, is not necessarily a negation of colonial power, and can be used in the exercise of such power; Burton remained a colonial officer.

However, Patrick Bratlinger, in *Victorian Literature and Postcolonial Studies*, notes that this reverse form of mimicry was not usually welcomed by the colonial power:

If the imperialist civilizing mission supposedly aimed to Westernize or Anglicize all 'natives' everywhere (even though they could only be civilized with a difference, or as Bhabha puts it, 'almost but not quite'), the civilized could also regress, backslide, become 'mimic men' who emulated the natives. And in much imperialist discourse, that sort of reverse mimicry was far more menacing than the sort Bhabha has in mind.⁹³

As used in this study, the common meaning of mimicry as intentional parody, does not feature in the definition. Neither Abhishiktananda nor Griffiths took their mimicry of Hindu culture lightly, or intended anything but immense respect for that culture. Because of its common meaning, the use of the term 'mimicry' can seem somewhat out of place in examining their work, but it is, however, an established term within postcolonial studies and is therefore used here.⁹⁴

As Singh makes clear, mimicry is of language, as well as dress and cultural attitudes, and the borrowed terminology in which these two authors expressed their theology is a significant indicator of how they inhabited their in-between space. This study is much, though not wholly, concerned with the language of the emergent theology of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, and 'mimicry' will be used to denote those linguistic and terminological 'borrowings' which are completely 'strange' to Christianity. Mimicry, as used here, differs from interreligious learning, in which new terminology may be used to throw new light on a theology. Mimicry may, however, be a process related to interreligious learning, if it forms part of the work of hybridization. Mimicry itself,

power in order to gain political advantage – which 'passing down' also seems to suggest. For an example of reverse mimicry in one culture, see Tripathy's treatment of the strategy of the Aam Aadmi Party, in 'The Broom, the Muffler and the Wagon R'.

⁹³ Bratlinger, p84

⁹⁴ There are some instances in which 'mimicry' equates to intentional parody in cultural studies: see Chan, pp129-156

though, implies that a term is imported entire and without caveats into another religion in which there is no meaningful place for it in the 'grammar' of that religion with regard to its meaning, place and correspondences in its original religion. Mimicry on its own lacks the work of hybridizing a new meaning, shade of meaning or emphasis; it throws no light since it has no genuine relationship with the theology into which it is imported. In this respect, because of the 'out of place' nature of such 'un-worked-on' borrowings, which can occur in the writing of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, and also because of the common connotation of mimicry, the comment just made about the respect entertained for *Advaita* by both authors is very relevant.

Other cultural borrowings besides language and terminology are important as well, and will appear in this study. Symbols, and daily practices can also be mimicked, and one form of mimicry that particularly incensed some Hindus was the adoption of the *sannyasin's* saffron robes by Christians. Latifa and Hasibuan have written with regard to the adoption by westerners of local dress in Indonesia, specifically the practice of wearing batik clothing.⁹⁵ Bhabha recognized himself the connection between mimicry and camouflage,⁹⁶ and this seems particularly apposite when considering the mimicry of dress. He quotes Jaques Lacan at the very start of his essay 'Of Mimicry and Man':

Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage... It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled—exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare.⁹⁷

Latifa and Hasibuan describe how the wearing of batik was outlawed by the Dutch colonial power, and how mimicry and this reverse mimicry were seen as a subversion of natural distinctions. They point too, however, to the fact both cultures were 'broken by irregularities and many subsets,'⁹⁸ or were, in other words 'mottled' or hybrid. The implication is that it is not one unitary, 'pure' culture mimicking one aspect of another

⁹⁵ Latifa, pp57-70

⁹⁶ The relationship between mimicry and camouflage is not just a postcolonial matter, but is based, like the concept of hybridity, on the natural world. This is shown, for example, by Peter Forbes book on the topic as related to the natural world and to evolution. See Forbes, *Dazzled and Deceived: Mimicry and Camouflage*.

⁹⁷ Bhabha, p85

⁹⁸ Latifa, p63

'pure' culture, but an accentuation of confusion between two complex cultures. In the same way that camouflage clothing breaks up the outline of a soldier, so cultural mimicry breaks up and confuses where a person 'belongs' and where his or her allegiances lie. It is this confusion of difference that some Hindu's took grave exception to in the case of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths.

Given that reverse mimicry by the powerful joins mimicry by those not in power in the vocabulary of postcolonial studies, it is clear that in a situation such as Abhishiktananda and Griffiths found themselves, in which the balance of power between Christianity and *Advaita* within their own thinking is not at all clear, mimicry is a concept that can be safely used. Whether the powerful traditions of Christianity were being subverted by *Advaita*, or *Advaita* was being subverted in its own country by a small and not particularly powerful Christian movement is not of great relevance. The question can equally be seen from both sides. From the point of view of the emergent theology however, which is the subject of this study, where 'out of place' or 'ungrammatical' borrowings from *Advaita* were made, these are best described as examples of mimicry in terms of postcolonial theory.

The extent to which these two authors sought to reduce the distinctness of the identity of the faith with which they wished to relate is a key to understanding how they inhabited their interfaith space. This could be the motivation in, for example, donning saffron robes, calling themselves *sannyasins*, and using sacred symbols or terminology from the Hindu tradition, It relates to how they made 'cultural borrowings', that are arguably better described as 'mimicry' rather than as interreligious learning, but which enabled them to identify *Advaita* as 'almost the same but not quite', representing a possibly unjustifiable appropriation of the other in the development of their theology. As noted, this area of 'mimicry' did not go unnoticed by certain Hindus who were highly incensed by their practices.⁹⁹ Which elements are mimicry and which interfaith learning will be examined.

The third analytical tool that Bhabha provides is 'enunciation'. He describes the Third Space as a space of 'enunciation', by which he means those statements that are made in

⁹⁹ See, for example, Goel, *Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?*

the space between two cultures that concern or are about the Other, or, I would add, are about oneself in contrast to the Other. These statements are made 'from' one culture about another or relating to another, and as descriptions of the reality of the Other often do not have a conceptual referent. An enunciation in the Third Space is an expression of difference, and although Abhishiktananda and Griffiths are often concerned with comparing theological concepts from the two traditions, such comparisons are, in fact, expressions of difference unless exact equivalence is claimed, which is not usually the case. Significantly, enunciations only take place in a Third Space of meeting, and are therefore not simply statements, but also strategies for dealing with the differences that are enunciated within that meeting, and a relativization of certainties about both the Other and the self. They affect the homogeneity of the Third Space, for example, going counter to an assumption that Christianity and *Advaita* are the same (because they concern supreme Being) even if they are different (because they have different beliefs), and in doing so change the nature of that Third Space, and produce its uncertain, shifting nature.

In this study enunciations in the Third Space – the space in which negotiation between the two faiths takes place – will be examined as they appear in the theologies of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. Enunciations in the third space, as expressions of difference, are related to the idea of the construction of the Other, but as has been noted above, they may also be statements about the one who is enunciating the difference – constructions of the self. This study is focusing on a genuine meeting between Christianity and *Advaita*, and it will therefore be easy to note where convergence occurs and to miss the fact that difference is also expressed. Much of the literature on these two authors is very concerned to comment in general terms on the convergence outlined in their writing, but this study will use the notion of enunciation – specific statements made within the Third Space of meeting – to analyze the relationship between the two faiths which they developed in their theologies and the uncertainties which emerge. In the case of Griffiths this may appear as genuine areas of incommensurability regarded from the Christian standpoint, with enunciations regarding *Advaita*; for Abhishiktananda what may appear is a move from a similar position towards a position in which many of his enunciations concern Christianity's differences from an *Advaitic* standpoint.

The final analytical tool from Bhabha's Third Space theory is that of 'anxiety'. The concept of 'anxiety' is used by Bhabha to express the sense of uncertainty that a colonizer experiences in the face of the colonized, and is related to a psychoanalytical analysis of power. The anxiety arises over uncertainty about the whole enterprise of colonization on the part of the colonizer; about how successful it is, about how justifiable are its aims, and about the veracity of its claims. The difference that the colonizing power attempts to maintain between itself and the colonized is undermined by its recognition that the colonized are, in a very real sense, 'the same'. It leads the colonizer to view the colonized as 'the same, but not quite'. This relates to the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths in the sense that *Advaita* may be recognized as the 'same' in that both it and Christianity are explanations of the human predicament as related to the spiritual, but is different in the content of that explanation. Both maintain belief in a supreme Being, but characterize it differently. They are the same, but not quite. Rather than a recognizable anxiety, this can manifest as an apprehension of inadequacy of Christian theology, and the extent to which such an apprehension of inadequacy manifests itself may be an indication of a move towards a hybridization.

David Huddart, writing of the difference of the colonized as apprehended by the colonizer, states:

...colonial authority secretly— rather, unconsciously— knows that this supposed difference is undermined by the real sameness of the colonized population. This unconscious knowledge is disavowed: sameness is simultaneously recognized and repudiated. Importantly, the tension between the illusion of difference and the reality of sameness leads to anxiety.¹⁰⁰

In fact the more the sameness is felt, the greater the anxiety may be. The uncertainty of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths is related to this recognition of sameness that is both recognized and repudiated. Both want to find similarity – something to relate to – but cannot deny a settled Christian doctrine such as the Trinity. This opens a gap which is not one of disagreement, but one in which the voice of *Advaita* can be clearly heard in

¹⁰⁰ Huddart, pp5-6

opposition to Christianity. In a sense, for them, it is a space in which *Advaita* resists their Christianity.

Bhabha's work is not without its critics, and some of those criticisms will inform the way in which his concepts are used in this study. Ania Loomba is concerned at the generalization and universalization of the colonial subject and the colonial encounter. She states that, 'ironically, the split, ambivalent, hybrid colonial subject projected in his work is in fact curiously universal and homogeneous – that is to say he could exist anywhere in the colonial world.'¹⁰¹ This, for Loomba is connected with Bhabha's focus on the 'inner life' of the colonial subject, and his lesser concern with a particular location, gender or class. In this criticism is a warning not to assume that in the meeting of cultures, or in the postcolonial situation, the effects will be everywhere and always, for everyone, the same, and for this study a warning to keep the particulars of the situation and experience of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths at the forefront. In short, evidence from their texts should outweigh any theory of the meeting of religions.

Robert C. Young is likewise critical of Bhabha's preference for psychoanalytic explanation over actual occurrence; what Bhabha suggests are fantasies are sometimes an accurate appreciation of how the colonizer or the colonized view the other. For example:

The colonizer's perception 'he hates me' is not the overinterpretation of paranoia...but an interpretation that is entirely correct. The problem, and the paranoia, comes in knowing when, how, and from whom: how to detect the difference between subservient obedience and the mask of what Bhabha calls 'sly civility'? ... Once again we find a crucial problem emerging: the more that Bhabha claims resistance, the less need there is for his psychoanalytic schema of fantasy and desire, narcissism and paranoia, in any analysis of the structures of colonialism.¹⁰²

Again, here is a warning for this study not to over-guess the internal life of Abhishiktananda or Griffiths. There is plenty of information present in their texts and in

¹⁰¹ Loomba, p178

¹⁰² Young, *White Mythologies*, p192

their lives in terms of their thought and their motivation, and there is little need to go further. Conclusions can be drawn from how they handled the material of *Advaita*, and what construction they make of it. There are clear statements, such as Griffiths' admission that he was seeking 'the other half of my soul'¹⁰³ in India, and clear statements on his dissatisfaction with the life of the West, but in pursuing this study there is no need, and no accurate way, to further psychoanalyze why he engaged in that search.

Bhabha is criticized for not valuing the role of history in understanding colonialism. There is disagreement on this point. Satoshi Mizutani says approvingly of his treatment of the Eurasian experience, 'For Bhabha, history no longer constitutes a viable field of research from which we would be able to gain further knowledge about colonialism. Rather, the idea of history itself is an oppression in its own right.'¹⁰⁴ Whilst Arif Dirlik agrees that postcolonial theory rejects all master narratives, including foundational histories,¹⁰⁵ Paresh Chandra challenges Bhabha's reliance on a disjunctive present, unconnected with the past.¹⁰⁶

Dirlik, acknowledging his importance in postcolonial theory, sums up much of the criticism of Bhabha in trenchant terms, citing the difficulty of his writing and complexity of expression, the reduction of experience to the purely psychological, and the neglect of the historical and social context:

Bhabha's work...is responsible for more than the vocabulary of postcolonialism, as he has proven himself to be something of a master of political mystification and theoretical obfuscation, of a reduction of social and political problems to psychological ones, and of the substitution of post-structuralist linguistic manipulation for historical and social explanation – all of which show up in much postcolonial writing, but rarely with the same virtuosity (and incomprehensibility) that he brings to it.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, p3

¹⁰⁴ Mizutani, p14

¹⁰⁵ See Dirlik, p334

¹⁰⁶ See Chandra, pp199-214

¹⁰⁷ Dirlik, p333 footnote

6. CONCLUSION

Having noted both Said's and Bhabha's critics, they remain major figures in understanding the in-between space that occurs specifically in the postcolonial setting and, I would maintain, more generally when two cultures experience an immersive meeting. With regard to Said, the notion of the construction of the Other is an observation about meetings in general, applied to the colonial and post-colonial settings. With regard to Bhabha:

Instead of beginning with an idea of pure cultures interacting, Bhabha directs our attention to what happens on the borderlines of cultures, to see what happens in-between cultures. He thinks about this through what he calls the liminal, meaning that which is on the border or the threshold. The term stresses the idea that what is in-between settled cultural forms or identities— identities like self and other— is central to the creation of new cultural meaning.¹⁰⁸

Whilst this study may use Bhabha's Third Space theory in quite a simple way, avoiding some of the more abstruse and debated psychoanalytical elements, there is no doubt, with reference to this quote from Huddart, that Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were involved on the borderlines of two cultures in 'the creation of meaning' *par excellence*. They were not inhibited by those borders, either in the physical location in which they worked, or the conceptual border between Christianity and *Advaita*. They did not regard Indian culture as more 'backward'. They created new identities for themselves and for those who followed them. Their work is sometimes regarded as not acceptable, in the sense that it is 'impossible'¹⁰⁹ – the link between the two faiths being invalid. Their work can be regarded as idealistic and unrealistic. In many ways they seem to have had a view of culture in their own time somewhat similar to Bhabha – something fluid in the second half of the twentieth century – ancient tradition which could change nonetheless, and which had previously developed by cultures meeting. This fluidity or liminality is most

¹⁰⁸ Huddart, p7. Bhabha's more complex description of the creation of meaning can be found in Bhabha, p36

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, Frost, pp78-79. Whilst she sees some convergence with Christianity in *Advaitic* notions of regaining an original image, and in ideas of the self-luminosity of the divine, she maintains that 'I am Brahman' is blasphemous in orthodox Christian terms. Or See Molleur, 'The Transformation of Dom Le Saux', who defines the identity of *Atman* and *Brahman* as blasphemous, whilst placing in Abhishiktananda's mouth the words 'I am Christ', p40, which are nowhere to be found in Abhishiktananda's writing.

apparent in the in-between space between cultures and Bhabha provides tools which give different perspectives on this Third Space, and give ways of analyzing what is happening within it.

These perspectives, alongside those of Said and supported by those theological tools mentioned in chapter four, may be used in the examination of the process by which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths developed their theology. These methods will be used in the following two chapters, in which texts by Abhishiktananda and Griffiths will be examined in some detail. Each perspective has something to contribute, and although they do not provide the same analysis as each other, combining them will provide a multi-layered understanding of the complex space they occupied.

Chapter 5

Space, Tradition and Creation

1. INTRODUCTION

The following two chapters analyze the works of Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths in the light of the postcolonial perspective that has now been laid out. It is important to note that it is in the context of this perspective that comments are made, and that the attempt here is to anatomize and understand what is happening in the Third Space which I am suggesting these two writers occupied. There is no intention to comment negatively on the theology which they developed, only to understand its development. Terms like mimicry, hybridity, construction and the like, which can be used negatively to criticize an author's output, are used here as technical terms describing certain occurrences within the Third Space of encounter. So in analyzing their output, comments on the theology that resulted from their encounter with *Advaita* are necessary, but only in so far as they help to understand what movements are taking place in this space. It may be that in their deep immersion in two traditions Abhishiktananda and Griffiths moved outside what might usually be accepted as the essentials of both faiths, but this is not necessarily a criticism, nor the theme of this study; another description of such movements on their part would be that they were breaking new ground. More will be said of this in the conclusion to this research.

Because I do not seek to draw overarching conclusions about the theology of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, but rather to look at the detail of what happens when two traditions meet in an immersive experience, the detail of their writing becomes more important than their final conclusions. In such an analysis, a word or a sentence can suggest that a hybridity is being contemplated; the use of a word unconnected with the grammar of the tradition from which it comes becomes mimicry; a phrase which construes a tradition according to another culture becomes an example of Orientalism; a misplaced word which hints at an incomplete or inaccurate understanding of a tradition, often there because of the needs of the work of comparison or because of an attempt at unification, becomes a construction of the Other. The use of these terms does not imply that interreligious learning is not taking place, but may well signify a process within that learning. This study therefore hangs many of its conclusions not on an appreciation of

the writings as a whole of these two authors, but on hints and indications within those writings which map the route they took through the difficult task of relating Christianity to *Advaita*.

The analysis of the works of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths is dealt with together in seven main themes. The major published texts of both authors were examined in detail, and passages were identified that displayed problematic characteristics as identified in the previous two chapters. These were collected under theme in a tabular form, together with notes on the nature of the hybridity, mimicry, change in theological imaginary, or other movement that had taken place within the Third Space they occupied. Whilst the themes that emerged have been suggested by the research, they are necessarily arbitrary to some extent, and overlap with each other. The themes need to be broad in order to accommodate the breadth of thought of these two authors. In this chapter the three main topics are: Spaces, Symbols and People; Religion and Dharma; and Creation. The following chapter will cover four themes: Two Concepts of Supreme Being; Trinity and *Saccidananda*; Incarnation; and Human Kind and Supreme Being In Relationship.

2. SPACES, PEOPLE AND SYMBOLS

Since the writings of both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths are rooted in particular experiences in India, it is appropriate to preface this analysis of their works with an appreciation of how those experiences affected them, and the conclusions they drew. Of the two, Abhishiktananda was most specific in writing about the effect which spaces and places had upon him, most obviously his experiences at Arunachala, the holy mountain where Ramana Maharshi had his *ashram*. What is notable in his accounts is the intensity of his attraction to place, both to Arunachala, and later to his hermitage next to the Ganges. These are sacred places – a sacredness that he had needed to come to India to find. Of his pilgrimage to Gangotri in the Himalayan Range, he writes:

The further I went the more the world with its towns, its noise, its motor cars, receded into the distance, left far, far behind. The more blurred the memory of the world became, the more truly did peace invade my soul.¹

¹ Abhishiktananda, *Guru and Disciple*, p150

What Abhishiktananda describes is a not an uncommon experience for those who walk in isolated, wild or difficult places. What is significant, perhaps, is the extreme to which he goes to experience this as deeply as he can in the context of sacred place, the temple of Gangotri and its pilgrimage route. Abhishiktananda writes a whole short book essentially on the importance and significance of place in his *Mountain of the Lord*.² This is what Diana Eck refers to in her treatment of *Tirthas*,³ places in which the spiritual and the physical meet. In 1962 he writes of the way in which in the plains, '...there is a brightness of colour which opens you up and "expands" you', in contrast to mountains which '...concentrate you, limit your horizons, but make you go deep.'⁴

It is, however, important to note that India has a particular relationship with sacred space that is very different from most Western approaches. There is, for example, a large literature on the ecological problems facing the natural environment in India and the lack of respect for the physical aspects of the natural world. This is a particularly 'spiritualized' view of sacredness, which takes little account of the physical. Kiran Shinde, in his treatment of Indian sacred space, has studied the environmental behavior at the Hindu pilgrimage site of Vrindavan in India, and noted that 'religious actors' and local residents in the main deny or are indifferent to the problems within the environment. Shinde states:

Many studies report on how visitor influx has driven rapid urban growth and generated several environmental problems, including deforestation, water pollution, and strain on municipal infrastructure, including roads, water supply, sewerage system, and disposal of solid waste.⁵

One *guru*, commenting on the poor state of the site is recorded as saying, 'I see no problem. If there is any, Krishna will take care.'⁶

None of this denies the sense of sacred space in India, but points to the intense 'spiritualization' of sacred space which would generally not be understood in the West.

² Republished in Abhishiktananda, *Guru and Disciple*

³ Eck, 'India's "Tirthas"'

⁴ Stuart, p146

⁵ Shinde, p452

⁶ Ibid, p454

The general movement in the West has been towards a 'secular sacredness', which those who are religious may subscribe to, that leads in the direction of ecological consciousness. In Christian terms it is often expressed as respect for God's creation. With Abhishiktananda's and Griffiths' own emphasis on simplicity in much of their writing – simple huts, simple shrines – it is safe to say that there is a degree of romanticization when viewed from a Western perspective. At the very least, Western readers with no other information about India are unlikely to realize from their writing the problems outlined above, and this romanticization, shorn of some of the reality, can fairly be attributed to a 'mystic East' perspective in that it constructs for the westerner an incomplete view of Indian sacred space.

Generally speaking, Griffiths seems to have been affected more by the people of India, than by place *per se*. He writes of the people of India 'living from the "unconscious"', whereas people from the West, 'are dominated by the conscious mind...each shut up in his own ego...their movements and their gestures [are] stiff and awkward.'⁷ He writes of the poverty in India, but that 'among the poorest there is an abundance of life and joy,'⁸ and that 'all this depth of richness of joy of life [is] better than the prosperity of the middle classes.'⁹ He maintains that there is 'a profound awareness of power beyond both man and nature which penetrates everything and is the real source of the beauty and vitality of Indian life.'¹⁰

There is no doubt that India strikes many from the West as a culture with a deep appreciation of life. However, included in Griffiths' comments is plainly his own disenchantment with Western life as outlined in chapter one of this study. Without denying differences in culture, it is clear that Griffiths was ready primed to recognize in India a lack of the technology and complications of Western life. Having said that, *The Marriage of East and West* was published in 1976, nine years after the date generally agreed to be the point at which a younger generation began looking for more spontaneity in life in the West (in San Francisco 1967). He had been in India since 1955, and this is, to

⁷ Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, p4

⁸ *Ibid*, p5

⁹ Griffiths, *On Friendship*, p153

¹⁰ Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, p6

some degree, a self-construction of an out-of-date picture of the West based on the 1950s and post-war austerity.

So far as Griffiths' comments about the joy to be found amongst the poor are concerned, Emile Crossley's comments on volunteer tourists are relevant. He argues that the anxiety caused by poverty encountered by westerners can often be negotiated in three ways: 'by transforming poverty into a source of moral redemption; by allowing poverty to be subsumed into a seductive, exotic landscape so that it can be admired and consumed; and by constructing impoverished communities as "poor but happy".'¹¹ This is not to say that Griffiths did not recognize abject poverty. He writes of families who cannot afford the food they need, and states that in certain cases 'the poverty is indescribable.'¹² He notes the view of the Indian poor themselves, that they 'seem wholly to be set on the western world' and its greater prosperity: 'You can understand the fascination of Communism for these poor people.'¹³ Even if 'poor but happy' is an apt description, it appears that 'poor but content' was not. One can sense the remnants of a colonial attitude in that conditions unacceptable in the West become less objectionable in terms of Indian culture.

Crossley's description, then, even though he is writing about tourism, does seem in some measure to capture Griffiths' account of his initial encounter with India. Griffiths experienced a radically different culture which had different priorities, and expresses the view of an avowedly anti-materialist westerner. He is seeing India in anti-materialist terms to be found in the West, but a view of the mystic East forestalls the sense of injustice at poverty found in the Christian Western tradition. It is possible he did not think much in terms of social justice, though Shantivanam involved itself in social action under his leadership. But Griffiths does not mention in his writing the poverty he must have encountered when at Oxford House in Bethnal Green in London. He writes of his horror of London as experienced in the East End, but it is horror at a culture, and he does not note the 'poor but happy' people who appear regularly in literature about that area. Gilda O'Neill paints a picture of a vibrant though poor community in the East End, with a

¹¹ Crossley, p41

¹² Griffiths, *On Friendship*, p179

¹³ Griffiths, *On Friendship*, p157

chapter on the simple pleasures of children in a deprived situation.¹⁴ O'Neil has no time for romanticizing poverty, but maybe Griffiths found this poverty too close to home and too tied in with a culture that disturbed him, and could encounter poverty in India with more equanimity when culturally distanced from it.

The way in which both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths related to the physical space and the people of India raises the question as to what extent they related, at least in part, to the 'poetics' of India in a Bachelardian way, rather than to the difficulties of the sub-continent. As was noted in chapter one, Bachelard argues that phenomenology, the philosophical study of the structures of experience and consciousness, suggests that physical space and particular places have meanings for individuals, meanings very often experienced at an emotional level.¹⁵ Neither Abhishiktananda nor Griffiths offer a dispassionate analysis of place or people, but record emotional responses. That in itself is not wrong, but needs to be noted in the context of their approach to *Advaita* itself, and tends to suggest a tendency to regard all things Indian through a mystic East understanding.

In their use of symbols, both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths remodel Hindu symbols for use in their endeavours. In the use of physical symbols mimicry can be seen. Monchanin and Abhishiktananda, in *Benedictine Ashram*, propose the use of the wooden cross of St Benedict, 'which will also suggest, by the intimate combination of the Cross and the Wheel, the ultimate realization of Indian [sic] in Christ (*Dharma-Chakra* stabilized by and in the Cross).'¹⁶ In a letter of 1952 Abhishiktananda mentions the placing of the AUM symbol in the centre of St Benedict's cross.¹⁷ Both these uses of symbols are early in Abhishiktananda's time in India, 1951 and 1952 respectively, showing a desire to make connections and to be understood by Hindus via symbolism.

St Benedict's cross is a cross, either with arms of equal length surrounded by a circle (with no suggestion that it is a wheel), or is a traditional Christian cross incorporating a circle intersecting the limbs of the cross, sometimes with a figure of Christ on the cross. The

¹⁴ See O'Neil, *My East End*

¹⁵ See Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

¹⁶ Abhishiktananda, *Benedictine Ashram*, p70

¹⁷ Stuart, p58

Dharma-Chakra is a wheel, not a cross, usually with eight spokes, and although much used in Buddhism, it signifies law, order, right living (*Dharma*) in Hinduism. The *Bhagavad Gita* speaks of the constantly turning wheel of *Dharma* in chapter three, verses 14-16, dealing with the outworking of the universe from *Brahman* to earthly beings. The reference to the *Dharma-Chakra* wheel stabilised by the cross can therefore be described as a hybridity, in which the central Christian meaning of the cross as a universally significant moment in which the relationship between supreme Being and humanity is altered is superimposed upon the ever-changing life of the universe.

The placing of the AUM symbol can be seen as mimicry, and leads to the question as to what is the grounding of the resultant hybridity; a question that can, it is quite true, be asked about most hybridities. But it does lead to an easy criticism by those who oppose the Christian *Ashrams*, as in Koenraad Elst's comment that

...one of the favourite symbols of the Christian ashram movement was the Aum sign on a cross. The combination is absurd, at least if the cross is taken in its Christian sense as the symbol of suffering. Though Hinduism has a place for the notions of suffering and sin, the Aum sign by contrast represents the cosmic vibration and eternal bliss.¹⁸

The emphasis of Elst's chapter, referring to Christianity in its title as a 'Man-Made-Religion' is apparent, and a Christian would argue that the cross is a symbol of salvation as well as suffering. A Christian though cannot deny the suffering, which plays no part in the understanding of AUM, signifying as it does the sound which most closely resembles the essence of a supreme Being with no connection to passability. The grammatical connection between the cross and the AUM symbol is therefore extremely tenuous, if there at all. It is an example, however, of where mimicry may signify the development of a hybridity – an attempt to create an understanding which incorporates both a passible Christ, and a *Brahman* connected with human suffering. In many ways the Christian cross with the AUM at its centre symbolizes the core difficulty with which Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were faced in their work.

¹⁸ Elst, section 2, paragraph 9

Sannyasa, the stage of life in India requiring complete renunciation, is also used by Abhishiktananda and Griffiths as a symbol. The difficulty of equating *sannyasa* with the Western monastic tradition will be dealt with in the next section. Both writers use it as a shorthand for going beyond all creeds and traditions. They could describe such a move in radical Western terms, but instead turn to an *Advaitic* term to define their enterprise. In *The Marriage of East and West*, Griffiths maintains that Christ is the 'sign' of God's grace, and that the sign will pass when the reality of God's presence is realized. Also, 'God himself, in so far as he can be named...is a sign, a name for the ultimate truth.'¹⁹ Griffiths turns to the concept of *sannyasa* to signify a move beyond such states of consciousness, and in this sense uses it as an imported symbol: the *sannyasin* 'is called to go beyond all religion and seek that ultimate goal.'²⁰ Griffiths is not speaking of *sannyasa* as a final state brought about by observance of Indian tradition and the training of a *guru*, but as a symbol that can be used to describe anyone who goes beyond tradition and religion. Using the symbol in this way could be defined as mimicry, since the role of Hindu *sannyasa* implies much more than in Griffiths' use of the term, and that more does not find a place in Christian tradition.

Abhishiktananda pondered on how he could get himself 'accepted as a Christian *sannyasi*':

The *sannyassi* is by definition free from every bond. Dependence on a Church, on a Superior, the obligation to perform religious rites etc. – is that not incompatible with *sannyasa*?²¹

He therefore recognizes that he is using *sannyasa* as a symbol which does not fit with his situation, as he remained obedient to Church superiors and continued to celebrate the Eucharist. His motives are also somewhat mixed, as he maintains that the *kavi* colour makes the monk 'highly respected and revered among our people when his life is conformable to the significance of his dress,'²² which again speaks of an acknowledgment that the role of *sannyassi* was assumed as a symbol, at least to some extent, for its effect

¹⁹ Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, p38

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Stuart, p106

²² Abhishiktananda, *Benedictine Ashram*, p69

on others, precisely the accusation that was levelled against both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths by some Hindus.

Finally in this section on symbols, mention must be made of Griffiths' use of the concept of 'myth'. It is the major theme which runs through the chapter headings in *The Marriage of East and West*, and Griffiths had been interested in poetic and symbolic language from his time at Oxford with C.S. Lewis. The centrality of 'myth' in his thinking enables him to make connections by relativizing parts of scripture and doctrine, and by so doing, make connections between Christianity and *Advaita* which would be far harder if more literal interpretations were employed. In attempting to make the Old Testament less reliant on its historicity he states that, 'It is as a work of imaginative genius that we have to approach the biblical revelation, or in other words as a mythology.'²³ Plainly considerable portions of the Old Testament have a strong historical focus, and his comment is a partial construction of the Judaic tradition which omits its historicity. Elsewhere he states that 'what the Hebrew brought into human experience was [a] movement from myth to history.'²⁴ However, Griffiths is in no way equating 'mythology' with untruth, stating: 'To know a myth in the proper sense is to be initiated into a unique experience of reality.'²⁵ He does at times, however, reduce or even deny the importance of the historical nature of Christian faith. Thus, whilst asserting the historical nature of Jesus, he maintains that if the virgin birth, death, resurrection and ascension were only historical events 'these would be remarkable phenomena, but they would have a very limited interest.'²⁶ It is the myth and the events together, argues Griffiths, which have the significance.

Griffiths considers myth to impart meaning, but this is to reduce the primacy of the historicity of Christianity. The argument is a self-construction needed in order to define, for example, Krishna as a similar type to Christ as a manifestation of God's action in the world, as even by Hindu estimation there is not the same emphasis on the historicity of Krishna. The resultant construction of Christian faith, partially argues away what has been called the scandal of historical particularity – a particular man at a particular time in a particular place has universal significance. It could well be argued that in the case of

²³ Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, p104

²⁴ Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*, p119

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, p79

Christianity, the myth of those events is wholly and historically caused by the events themselves, which contain within themselves their meaning. Faith promulgates the meaning. The alternative is to argue that subsequent theology has added significance to the events and built up a mythology around them, which would be an unorthodox view. The lack of the use of the word 'faith' in the writing of these two authors will be commented upon in the next section.

3. RELIGION AND DHARMA

The most obvious theological movement that took place in both Abhishiktananda's and Griffiths' spaces of meeting between the two traditions was a move away from 'fulfilment theology', which maintains that *Advaita* will find its fulfilment in Christianity in due time. As might be expected, *Indian Benedictine Ashram*, published in 1951 and the first published work from either author, bases itself on fulfilment theology almost exclusively. But Abhishiktananda is still writing, in 1965:

A truly Christian and catholic view of the religious traditions of the world will regard them in the light of the eschatological fulfilment, their perfection within the very fullness of Christ.²⁷

Hindu-Christian Meeting Point was written about the same time as the French edition of *Saccidananda*, in which strong elements of fulfilment theology are also found, but in the introduction to the English edition of the latter, published in 1974 he disclaimed elements of fulfilment theology found within the original. Indeed, even as he wrote *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point* he seems to have been aware of the limitations of this mode of thinking, recording that when the Calcutt group met at Nagpur, 'we studied the Scriptures of India in the perspective of a "theology of fulfilment" which in those days was widely accepted.'²⁸

Griffiths also writes on occasions in terms of a fulfilment theology, particularly early on, and maintains in *The Golden String*, before he comes to India, that all religions contain elements of the way to salvation, but that Christ is the only true and complete way to the

²⁷ Abhishiktananda, *Hindu Christian Meeting Point*, p3

²⁸ *Ibid*, p41

Father.²⁹ Once in India he writes that India's quest for God in Christ 'must come as the fulfilment of her own tradition, the end to which by secret ways God has been leading her from the beginning of her history.'³⁰

A theology of fulfilment sometimes becomes confused with Christian ideas of the fulfilment represented in the Incarnation. Thus Griffiths can write that he looks forward to the day when, 'Christ comes to fulfil Hinduism as He fulfilled Judaism.'³¹ This is early – 1955 – but the Hinduism-Judaism comparison does not work – it is an essentialist assumption that there is one thing called religion, and that the Christian development from a Judaic root is the same thing as a Hindu-Christian hybridity. A similar strand of thought is found when Monchanin and Abhishiktananda state that their aim is to '...make people realize that Christianity is as much Indian as it is Roman or Jew [sic],'³² assuming a religious essentialism (all religions are the same but with different beliefs). Jesus did not have a Hindu background upon which to build, and had he, Christianity would arguably be a very different religion. A similar point can be made if the ultra-orthodox Jewish background of Paul is considered. These examples therefore interpret the notion of fulfilment for *Advaita* in the terms of a Christian soteriological theological imaginary, whereas the former examples interpret fulfilment as a result of the superiority or completeness of Christianity in general.

The word 'fulfilment' continues to be used by Griffiths, but it is usually fulfilment in Christ, rather than fulfilment in Christianity. So writing in 1989 he states that, 'with the coming of Christ the final fulfilment of [the] experience of ultimate reality was reached,'³³ but that, 'For the Semitic religions...it is important that they give up the exclusive claims that characterize them.'³⁴ There remains in both authors, however, a general 'mystic East' perspective which overlays or conflicts with fulfilment theology, expressed in Griffiths' statement that, 'If the West as a whole has lost th[e] intuitive awareness of the presence of God in man and nature, the Church in the West is faced with the same problem.'³⁵ This

²⁹ Griffiths, *The Golden String*, p176-177

³⁰ Griffiths, *Christ in India*, p65

³¹ Griffiths, *On Friendship*, p141

³² Abhishiktananda, *Benedictine Ashram*, p6

³³ Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, p281

³⁴ *Ibid*, p287

³⁵ Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, p6

is a generalization which could be said to have many exceptions. It is an Orientalist construction of the West in opposition to the East. It may be true that the interest in Christian spirituality has grown in the twentieth century and up to the present time, but Griffiths' statement is too extreme and prompted by 'mystic East' thinking.

For both authors, in their earlier works, there is a distinction between *Advaita's* 'fulfilment' in Christianity, and Christianity's 'learning' from *Advaita*, and plainly the terms are not synonymous. Over time, the tendency away from an emphasis on fulfilment and towards more 'deep learning', to use Francis Clooney's phrase³⁶, and towards more hybrid interpretations is apparent in both authors. This is a move towards new comparative theology, albeit also a move towards the complexity outlined by Clooney.³⁷ The qualities of interreligious dialogue, as outlined by Cornille, become more apparent: humility, commitment, interconnection, empathy, hospitality.³⁸ The vulnerability that Goosen points to becomes apparent,³⁹ which poses threats to the individual's identity, and which Moyaert contrasts with an invulnerability that seeks to control the in-between space.⁴⁰

There is, in these authors' writings an assumption that, in opposition to Christian ideas of exclusivism, 'in the Hindu view all religions are but different paths towards the same goal.'⁴¹ This can be seen as something of an exaggeration, a loss of the subtlety of the Hindu position, an Orientalist reliance upon a Western concept of 'tolerance', and as having a 'mystic East' view of Hindu inclusivity. In 1897, Vivekananda, having returned from the West, described Christianity as a 'collection of little bits of Indian thought. Ours is the religion of which Buddhism with all its greatness is a rebel child, and of which Christianity is a very patchy imitation.'⁴² Both Vivekananda and his guru Ramakrishna, were major exponents in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of the belief that all great religions were valid paths, but the comment above suggests that some may have been thought of as more equal than others. However, whilst this quotation can be seen

³⁶ See Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Boundaries*

³⁷ *Ibid*, p11.

³⁸ Empathy is a theme throughout Cornille's writing, but see, for example, Cornille, *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, p140.

³⁹ Goosen, p77

⁴⁰ Moyaert, p1148

⁴¹ Griffiths, *Christ in India*, p39

⁴² Vivekananda, p94

as a negative reflection on Christianity, it can also be seen as a reflection of the Hindu belief that no 'religious system' is complete, and that Christianity's claim to unique authority condemns it as a lesser faith than Hinduism.

Abhishiktananda and Griffiths both express anxiety about the challenge that *Advaita* presents to Christianity in terms of its catholicity in the widest sense. Abhishiktananda writes that if Christianity cannot assimilate *Advaitic* experience, it loses its claim to being a 'universal way of salvation'. It 'could not be "another" peak of spiritual experience alongside that of Vedanta'.⁴³ He supposes that this would mean the Advaita 'includes and surpasses the truth of Christianity'. A 'universal way of salvation' suggests an essentialist view of human nature, culture and religion – all human natures, regardless of culture, need the same route to salvation.

Griffiths shows less anxiety about a deficit in Christianity when compared to *Advaita*, and is more convinced of the possibility of incorporating its insights. He is also more inclined to include other religions, unlike Abhishiktananda, who tends to focus on *Advaita*:

Christianity will never realise its full stature as a genuine Catholicism, that is, as the universal religion of mankind, until it has incorporated into itself all that is valid and true in all the different religious traditions. If we believe that in Christ is to be found the revelation of Truth itself, then we must recognize that all truth wherever it is to be found is contained implicitly in Christianity.⁴⁴

Another tradition can produce anxiety about one's own either by similarity or by difference. For both authors, sameness is recognized, a deep connection between the two traditions, which leads them towards the incorporation of new elements into Christianity – towards hybridization. This however, requires that new insights can be incorporated without the destruction of the essential integrity of Christianity, and Abhishiktananda's anxiety over this surfaces when he states that '...if Christianity cannot be expressed in the religious cultural terms of India without dissolving away, then it is not *catholic*'.⁴⁵ Both Christianity and *Advaita* are capable of leading to experiences of unity,

⁴³ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p49

⁴⁴ Griffiths, *The Golden String*, pp174-5

⁴⁵ Stuart, p217

the connection he identifies, but he is anxious about the account given of unity by the respective traditions. This is 'sameness simultaneously recognized and repudiated', as identified by Huddart.⁴⁶

Understanding another religion in its own terms, yet being able to learn from insights gained from it, is one of the characteristics of new comparative theology suggested by Paul Hedges.⁴⁷ Learning from insights is a distinctly different process than seeking similarity, and the precise nature of the learning suggested in new comparative theology tends to move away from the type of sameness-difference dynamic that Huddart refers to. However, Abhishiktananda and Griffiths braved modes of immersive involvement with another tradition which, probably necessarily, involved just this dynamic, and which can themselves be learned from.

Abhishiktananda reacts to anxiety about difference when he states:

We should not indeed suppose that Advaita was developed by the Spirit in the heart of India as something completely foreign to the Christian revelation. In fact Advaita is presented in the Gospel already.⁴⁸

The problem with *Advaita* being 'completely foreign', is that it would present a threat to Christian teaching in the mind of any Christian who found great value in it. There can be little debate that, just in simple terms of the teaching presented, *Advaita* is substantially different from Christianity. It is certainly 'foreign' culturally. Abhishiktananda may be right in finding a core of mystical doctrine and experience which the two share, but this is little more than to state that both claim to be concerned with supreme Being. Here it is not the sameness that produces anxiety, but Abhishiktananda's own attraction to *Advaita* which is substantially different from Christianity. This is resolved by such statements as 'Nothing can remain outside Christ,'⁴⁹ which can only be seen as culturally neutral if it is accompanied by a statement about the universal applicability of the *Advaitic*

⁴⁶ Huddart, pp5-6

⁴⁷ Hedges, 'The Old and New Comparative Theologies', p1125

⁴⁸ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p194

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p194

understanding of *Brahman* as supreme Being. In fact, Abhishiktananda usually qualifies such statements, particularly with regard to the importance of Trinity.

Hinduism, in its many guises, has historically maintained its peace by not placing too much emphasis on unity in theological doctrines or beliefs. T.M.P. Mahadevan states that 'it is not to be considered as a single creed or cult, but as a league of religions, a fellowship of faiths.'⁵⁰ Rather, it relies for unity upon religious duties and ways of life – *Dharma*. Arvind Sharma quite specifically ascribes Hindu tolerance, both of other religions and of its own religious diversity, to the existence of *varna* or caste, and to the prime importance of the related *Dharma*, though he introduces more modern and Gandhian notions of *varna*.⁵¹ Quite ironically, Hinduism is intolerant of other religions which are intolerant and which claim a primary status amongst traditions, which to Hindus is proof of a false or highly partial belief system. Christianity's emphasis on mission and conversion is therefore rejected by Hindus on two grounds – it is ultimately dismissive of Hindu belief, and also shows a crucial flaw in Christianity itself: its very dismissiveness – a closed mind which is necessarily spiritually inferior. Bhikhu Parekh maintains that other religions

...claim perfection, condemn or take a demeaning view of other religions, and deny their adherents the freedom to borrow from them. For Hindus these religions are therefore inferior.⁵²

If one takes this criticism of Christianity to heart it is, of course, a crucial argument in favour of the work undertaken by Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, and its hospitality towards *Advaita*. The very word 'hospitality' suggests the 'living together' which both authors practiced.

In dealing with Christianity and *Advaita* as systems with the same theological imaginary, as though the parts correspond with each other or as though the grammatical structure were the same, Abhishiktananda and Griffiths do not always make clear the disjunctures which exist. It is notable that neither makes any major use of the idea of faith within the

⁵⁰ Mahadevan, p21.

⁵¹ See Sharma, *Hinduism for our Times*, pp76-77 and pp82-83

⁵² Parekh, paragraph 27

Christian tradition. Abhishiktananda's treatment of faith in the last chapter of *Saccidananda* is very much concerned with faith as an experience of unity rather than as a promise of salvation. The latter is a major element in any description of Christianity and a glaring omission once noted, but easily missed in their work of comparison and hybridization. This most important of Christian concepts finds no easy parallel in *Advaita*, and so it does not appear as they attempt to bring the two traditions together. It is lost because it does not have a counterpart.

The difficulty that they faced in this respect throughout their work was the fundamental difference between the faith of Christianity and the *Dharma* of Hinduism. *Dharma* is essentially duty, religious ritual, appropriate behaviour, all traditionally related to caste, and to right action. Christianity, whilst requiring righteousness or right action ascribes that righteousness primarily to God in which the Christian has faith. Even the word usually translated from the Sanskrit as 'faith', *śraddha*, expresses the distinction, since it also means the performance of actions with faith. It speaks of more certainty or assent than does the Christian 'faith'.

Śraddha itself is an indication of the difference between *Dharma* as duty and performance, and the Christian understanding of religion and faith. Rubens Turci states that '...śraddhā has sometimes been defined as trusting judgement, or affirmative conviction – āstikya-buddhi, a Vedic ritualistic state of mind, which is totally different from later theistic forms of "faith."' ⁵³ There is a greater degree of certainty. In commenting on the *Bhagavad Gita* Turci states that, 'It is śraddhā which gives us enough certainty about our intuitions. When one is able to develop śraddhā and experience this state of oneness dealt with in the Gītā by means of the concept of ātman, the mind realizes what has been called the sacredness of nature and of the whole universe.' ⁵⁴

The complexity of Hindu tradition, and therefore of the religious and cultural setting in which *Advaita* finds itself, is another area which is not well dealt with by either author. Christian religion cannot be considered a type to which Hinduism or *Advaita* conform. Griffiths writes of orthodoxy in both traditions:

⁵³ Turci, p4

⁵⁴ Ibid, p5

By the orthodox tradition of Hinduism I mean the Vedanta and by the orthodox tradition of Christianity I mean the theological tradition, which was common to both Eastern and Western Christendom for over a thousand years and which still remains the basis of Christian orthodoxy.⁵⁵

Griffiths is here suggesting both that the *Brahminical* tradition is 'orthodox' in the kaleidoscope of traditions that make up Hinduism, and also that this 'orthodoxy' can be used of Hinduism in the same way that it can be used of Christianity – that Hinduism has the sort of control of doctrine and structures that are present in Western tradition. He admits that Vedanta 'presents us with a complex system of thought,'⁵⁶ but does not make clear the difference between a Roman Catholic Church's maintenance of doctrinal and disciplinary traditions and the very much looser and amorphous traditions of Hinduism. To use 'orthodoxy' to describe both traditions is a construction of *Vedanta*, and a failure to understand it in its own terms. To define *Vedanta* as Hindu orthodoxy calls to mind Richard King's description of 'the construction of an image of "Hinduism" as a type of mysticism centred upon the philosophy of the Vedanta.'⁵⁷

Both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths viewed Hinduism, and in particular *Advaita*, as a 'cosmic religion'⁵⁸ A cosmic religion is defined by them as a religion learnt by reason and by exploration of the experience of the world by the wise. It is distinct from a revealed religion, dependent upon revelation by God, which is how they define Judaism, Christianity and Islam. However, this view is not consistent. Griffiths himself refers to the 'Vedic revelation,'⁵⁹ states elsewhere that Śankara based his whole doctrine on *sruti*, that is on the revelation of the *Vedas* and *Vedantic* scripture, and claimed to be simply interpreting that doctrine, like a true theologian, in the light of reason. Griffiths holds here that the ultimate truth cannot be known either by sense or reason, but only by

⁵⁵ Griffiths, *Vedanta and Christian Faith*, p2

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ King, p3

⁵⁸ See, for example, Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p52-53, and, Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*

⁵⁹ Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*, p9

revelation.⁶⁰ He maintains that *sruti* is 'from the root *sr* which means to hear, in other words, revelation.'⁶¹

The classification of Hinduism and *Advaita* as a cosmic religion can be seen as a mystic East construction. It is an example of an enunciation of difference, and is an attempt to make *Advaita* definitionally different from Christianity so far as revelation is concerned, or an Orientalist attempt to define the East in opposition to the West. Hinduism and *Advaita* are, in fact, intensely scripturally based, a scripture possibly more concerned with the natural world in the case of the *Vedas*, but to say that this scripture is not 'revealed' seems unwarranted. Quite why both authors used the 'cosmic religion' description, which was prevalent at the time and related to the notion of a 'perennial philosophy' is not clear. It is, however, an enunciation of difference that preserves a specific place in their thinking for a historical revelation, and specifically for the revelation of the Incarnation, as distinct from the generally non-historical nature of *Advaita*. As such it serves as a strategy to relativize *Advaita* with reference to the Incarnation.

Faced with the sameness but difference of Christianity and *Advaita*, both authors reach for the notion of evolution to evoke a continuity, but the explanation of the process of evolution within human consciousness is not consistent. Sometimes it appears as an evolution towards self-awareness, which could be interpreted as an evolution of Christianity in the direction of *Advaita*. On other occasions it seems as though *Advaita's* evolution towards an understanding of a personal relationship with God is proposed. Thus, in an extended section in *Saccidananda* Abhishiktananda proposes an evolutionary explanation of humanity's spiritual awareness: 'Man's consciousness, or more precisely his conscious awareness of himself, has been constantly evolving.'⁶² He writes of a 'cosmic process of evolution' directed towards the purification of this self-awareness. But in a passage suggesting an evolution from a cosmic religion to a realization of revelation in the Incarnation, he states: 'First, there was the cosmic revelation: God manifested himself through the forces of nature, and even more through the inner motions of the

⁶⁰ Griffiths, *Christ in India*, p202

⁶¹ Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, p2

⁶² Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p68

heart. Then, when man was ready to listen to his Word...the stage was set for God's manifestation "in person".⁶³

Griffiths was strongly influenced by both Aurobindo's and Teilhard de Chardin's notions of evolution, though made a stronger connection than did Abhishiktananda with a scientific understanding of the concept:

As the universe matures the intensity of this radial force of Christ-consciousness increases exponentially, being continuously contributed to and reinforced by all the centuries of consciousness in the universe.⁶⁴

Both Griffiths and Abhishiktananda, therefore, rely quite strongly and in main sections of their argumentation on progression and on evolutionary ideas to explain the need for a 'new move' in Christianity and the West which needs to incorporate Eastern approaches as it continues its development in the current stage of humanity's evolution. They also refer to a development of *Advaita* towards a recognition of Christian truths. They both, therefore, justify the need for Eastern approaches in humanity as a whole (not just in a reformed Christianity), and also the need for *Advaita* to come to a 'personal' relationship with supreme Being, with reference to a predominantly Western theological imaginary. This double use of evolutionary ideas is not clarified.

It can be argued, a little superficially, that notions of evolution fit with a Christian view of coming end times and a Western linear understanding of time. In fact the Kingdom of God is not defined as the moment when humanity as a whole reaches a certain level of consciousness or awareness of God. However, evolutionary ideas are radically opposed to the theological imaginary represented by the cyclical understanding of time which is deep in the Indian tradition. The usual *Vedantic* view is one of steady deterioration in human consciousness through the four *Kalpas* or Aeons. The use of evolutionary ideas to interpret *Advaita's* place in a proposed development of consciousness can therefore be seen as Orientalist, in that it uses a Western theological imaginary and understanding to interpret the East.

⁶³ Ibid, p98

⁶⁴ Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, p26

Hindu *Dharma* understands human life in terms of certain stages. Both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths identified themselves with the description *sannyasi*, the final stage of life involving total renunciation, although certain individuals may be called to *sannyasa* earlier in life. Abhishiktananda wrote rather more about that role than did Griffiths, equating it specifically with the Western term 'monk'. However, both wore *Kavi* robes, and since the term and the dress are specifically Indian it is justifiable to ask to what extent this constitutes a mimicry within their Third Space. If it is a mimicry that does not necessarily make it unjustifiable considering the attempts that both authors were making to live close to *Advaitin* ideals, despite the objections of some conservative Hindus. However, if their use of the term and the dress can be shown to be grammatically inconsistent with Hindu understanding this produces a new significance. In other words, it is not a simple translation, but, within the context of their deep emersion in *Advaita*, an exercise in hybridity.

Griffiths identifies himself with *sannyasa* in *The Marriage of East and West* in his quest to go 'beyond all religion and seek [the] ultimate goal'.⁶⁵ In his writing he does not employ the term *sannyasi* extensively but it is well attested that he wore *kavi* robes from early on in his time in India. For Griffiths there is an implied connection with the role of the monk; for Abhishiktananda the connection is made explicit:

There remains the hope that the Church of India will one day contribute to the universal Church and authentic Christian *sannyasa* as the finest jewel of monastic life. Thus the Church will recover after centuries the purest tradition of the Desert Fathers and the Hesychast movement.⁶⁶

Abhishiktananda's wholesale adoption of the word *sannyasa* as an equivalent to monasticism can only really be seen as syncretic, occurring when the two traditions meet, and as grammatically faulty. This is particularly so in a quote in which Abhishiktananda makes reference to the Carthusian and Carmelite orders as examples of the current 'semi-eremital' orders. A *sannyasin* undergoes a very structured initiation into that

⁶⁵ Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, p38

⁶⁶ Abhishiktananda, *Prayer*, p60

state in classical *Vedanta*, and it was the absence of such rites and of exclusive devotion to a *guru* that, to some Hindus, made the assumption of the title offensive.

Closely connected with this is Abhishiktananda's use of the concept of *Guru*. As he states in his letter to Marc Cheduc who joined him as his 'disciple' towards the end of his life, 'It is really the *chela* (disciple) who *makes* the guru,' a point he reiterates to Cheduc in separate letters.⁶⁷ But early on, in *Benedictine Ashram*, he and Monchanin state that:

In the Benedictine family, the *Abbot* – the Father – is in the very place of the Heavenly Father. He is not there as a manager...but especially as the spiritual head, father and *guru* of every monk the Lord has committed to him.⁶⁸

In support of this statement, Swami Sivananda Sarasvati is quoted, including the statements, 'He [the disciple] feels intensely that he is a cipher, and that whatever qualities shine in him, all flow from the Guru,' and 'He is conscious that the Guru is the great light, of which he is an unworthy and faint glimmer of reflection.'⁶⁹ In no way would these be recognized as descriptions of a healthy relationship of a monk with an Abbot in a Benedictine monastery. This is a self-construction of Western monasticism.

With regard to *sannyasa*, Abhishiktananda goes on to say in *Prayer*, that 'A Christian *sannyasa* will not, however, be an *order* in the canonical sense of the word, since its essential spirit is incompatible with any kind of institution.'⁷⁰ This questions his earlier link between monasticism and *sannyasa* and he may be proposing a new hybridity in the Christian Church – given his strong Catholic faith he is unlikely to be proposing something entirely outside the Church – but it cannot really be imported as something related to current practice within the Church, particularly given the problem over the *guru* role. As syncretism it is a proposed equivalence. It has no relation to the 'grammar' of Christianity, but is a result of Abhishiktananda's Third Space encounter with *Advaita*.

⁶⁷ Stuart, p258 and p261

⁶⁸ Abhishiktananda, *Benedictine Ashram*, p54

⁶⁹ Ibid, p55

⁷⁰ Abhishiktananda, *Prayer*, p61

The inconsistencies and incongruences which emerge in these authors' writings occur as Christian religion and *Vedantic Dharma* meet each other. Early on, in *Hindu Christian Meeting Point*, in writing of the scriptures of the two traditions, Abhishiktananda acknowledges the liminal and uncertain space he occupies:

What we must do is to make use of all that we have gained from our study of those texts [the Indian scriptural tradition] in order to enter into a deeper and more experimental knowledge of our own Scriptures.⁷¹

This is to paraphrase Paul Hedges' characteristic of new comparative theology, that one needs to understand another religion in its own terms, yet be able to learn from insights gained from it.⁷² Abhishiktananda was not always able to maintain quite such an analytical approach, and almost certainly doing so was not his primary aim. The use of 'experimental knowledge' speaks of the shifting nature of the Third Space he occupied; discoveries and hybridities are hypothesised and provisional. Abhishiktananda speaks of his experience of *Advaita* as an 'expedition'; something embarked on and returned from. He may in later life have reached the conclusion that return was not desirable.

4. CREATION

The problem facing Abhishiktananda and Griffiths with regard to the nature of the relationship between the material world and the divine is the radical nature of *Advaita's* non-dualism – a non-dualism so radical that the Christian term 'creation' by supreme Being cannot be used of that material world. Within the inter-faith space they inhabited was both a creator God and *Brahman*, the latter having no direct connection with the world. Abhishiktananda makes his position clear:

It cannot be said with reference to God there could be something *other*. If there was ever the bare possibility that that there could be something *other* than Being, then Being would no longer be Being.⁷³

⁷¹ Abhishiktananda, *Hindu Christian Meeting Point*, p83

⁷² Hedges, 'The Old and New Comparative Theologies', p1125

⁷³ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p86

It is not at all clear that Christian theology would agree that there can be nothing other than God. Abhishiktananda is here using 'God' and '*Brahman*' as synonyms and as 'grammatical' equivalents. He is drawing his understanding from *Advaita*, and then maintaining that what can be said about how *Brahman* relates to other religious concepts (*Atman*, *Jiva*) can be said about how the Christian concept of God relates to creation and creatures in general. The relationships in the two 'grammars' are not, however, the same, because of the very different views of the relationship between the divine and the material world. Abhishiktananda, in making such an unequivocal statement, is entering into a hybridity – melding the concept of Christian monotheism with an *Advaitic* concept of non-duality. The hybridity draws supreme Being from both Christianity and *Advaita*, and imputes the unity of creation with supreme Being to Christianity.

If the statement were more exploratory or tentative, seen in terms of posing a question to Christian theology, or emphasizing certain strands of Christian thinking or mysticism, then it could be seen as 'interreligious and complex' appropriation and interplay, to quote Clooney,⁷⁴ or as a 'new insight' as promoted in new comparative theology, which throws light on Christian theology. The learning process could then continue with an exploration of the implications for sin and salvation and Christian theology as a complete grammar.

Abhishiktananda speaks of the challenge which *Advaita* presents to Christianity, either for Christianity 'to remain ever on the level of what is multiple and relative, or to allow their identity to be dissolved in the overwhelming experience of the Absolute.'⁷⁵ He goes on to refer to Parmenides' poem on nature, which contains a basic denial of creation from nothing, and includes the passage:

It needs must be that what can be thought and spoken of is; for it is possible for it to be, and it is not possible for what is nothing to be.⁷⁶

It is, however, a fundamental Christian belief that things come into being through a God who is the one, single supreme Being. Creation from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) is part of the catechism of the Roman Catholic Church. Parmenides' poem asserts that nothing can

⁷⁴ Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Boundaries*, p11

⁷⁵ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p45

⁷⁶ Burnet, p198

become, rather what is has being and cannot be either made or unmade. This plainly contradicts the prologue to John's Gospel, 'Apart from the Word nothing came into being,'⁷⁷ which maintains the concept of creatures and things coming into being through the Word. In his attempt to defend the *Advaitic* insight of the unity of one's Self with the divine, Abhishiktananda is mimicking *Advaita's* solution of an uncreated world. A hybridization between an uncreated world and a creation is hard to conceive, though the two concepts can challenge each other productively in a Third Space, and may lead to insight into each tradition.

A common expression of *Advaita* is that it holds that the world is an illusion. In fact, the *Advaitic* explanation of the material world cannot simply be described as a belief in its unreality, or that *maya* denotes non-existence. Śankara's own view of the process of creation was subtle and nuanced, and he often described it as a mystery. Griffiths states that Śankara describes the external world 'in an admirable phrase as "an appearance of being, without origin, inexpressible in terms of being as of not being."⁷⁸ One must assume Griffiths finds common cause with this 'admirable expression', and is here entering into hybridity, or maybe showing interreligious learning, acknowledging the inability of the human mind to understand God's act of creation. Christianity is quite clear ontologically about the being of creation, but Śankara's statement, in implying the mysterious nature of the universe, allows for some cross-fertilization. Christianity does not share *Advaita's* view of the mysterious nature of creation in quite the same way, but the account of Creation in Genesis can hardly be said to be without mystery; *creatio ex nihilo*, does not, after all, admit of logical explanation. It may be that in a West in which notions of creation are consumed by arguments between creationists and radical evolutionists, Christians could do worse than learn from Śankara's view of a mysterious creation.

However, Griffiths' understanding of the relationship between supreme Being and the world is confused mainly because he is attempting the Orientalist task of explaining it in Western terms, that is in relation to a Christian theological imaginary. So he writes of the world and time and history, saying that 'their appearance is an effect of "ignorance"

⁷⁷ John 1:3

⁷⁸ Griffiths, *Vedanta and Christian Faith*, p33

(*avidya*) and when known for what they are, they disappear like the form of the snake which has been mistakenly superimposed on a rope.⁷⁹ Speaking of ‘Śankara’s understanding’ of our bodies, trees, earth and sky he writes, ‘...when we awaken to pure consciousness, when, that is, we get beyond our sense consciousness, all this disappears.’⁸⁰ Whilst this may be a description of certain states, for example, deep meditation or contemplation, it would be extremely inconvenient for an awakened person to be unaware of, or unable to relate to, any physical occurrence.

So far as a human’s awareness of the world, Sara Grant, in *Lord of the Dance*, maintains that a person’s final awakening occurs in such a way that

Atman-Brahman suffers no shadow of mutation and his own finite individuality no ontological diminution...this awareness itself transcends but does not destroy the lower levels of consciousness; the “realized man” – as, for example, Ramana Maharshi in recent times – can go about his daily tasks with his powers of sense perception and judgement unimpaired, though perpetually illuminated from within by the light of the “Indweller”, the *Antaryamin*.⁸¹

Griffiths agrees with this, when he contradicts his earlier statement about the disappearance of the physical world and states that ‘...as one makes [the] ascent through all the levels of consciousness one always has to integrate each level as it is transcended...one assumes, gathers up, all these levels of consciousness.’⁸² In fact Griffiths is quite inconsistent on this point, and elsewhere describes the ‘sheer illusion’ view of *maya* as Monist, and ‘only one school of Vedanta,’⁸³ and that ‘[t]he Hindu is always in danger of dismissing matter as *maya*.’⁸⁴

Griffiths also attempts to explain *maya* in terms of a Christian theological imaginary when he connects it with sin; *maya* is

⁷⁹ Griffiths, *Christ in India*, p31

⁸⁰ Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, p152.

⁸¹ Grant, Sara, *Lord of the Dance and Other Papers*, p30

⁸² Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, p201

⁸³ Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*, p71

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p126

a defect in human nature and also in the universe. There is a cosmic sin, the sin of the angels, that is, of the cosmic powers. So the divine is not fully manifested in the universe...Our present human state is a state of sin...That state of sin and ignorance is *maya*.⁸⁵

Nothing could be further from the Hindu concept of *maya*. Both the notion of sin and the statement that the divine is not fully manifested are quite alien to *Advaita*. This is either a hybridity, associating sin and Christian notions of the fall with the ignorance associated with perception in *maya*, or is an Orientalist misrepresentation of an *Advaitic* concept, interpreted as 'something like' a Western and Christian understanding, and a failure to understand *maya* in its own terms.

Dealing more in general with the concept of *maya*, the notion that the world 'disappears' upon realization of unity is a monist interpretation of *Advaita*. This interpretation is maintained by some *Advaitins* but lacks the nuanced nature of *Advaitic* thought. What removes the snake-rope error, according to Śankara, 'is just and only [the] cognition *this is not a snake*, which is entailed by the judgement *this is a rope*.'⁸⁶ Srinivasa Rao makes clear that one is speaking of correct and incorrect cognition when the snake-rope analogy is used. 'To cognize is to become aware, and our awareness may or may not faithfully reflect the state of affairs in the world.'⁸⁷ Faulty knowledge is involved in perceiving the rope as a snake, and correct knowledge would not be that neither snake nor rope exist, but that 'all is Brahman'. In short, the analogy refers not to a 'hallucination' of what is *not* there, but to a misapprehension of what *is* there. To suggest, as does Griffiths, that, 'as in the case of a hologram, we project a three-dimensional world around us...the world is a projection of our minds,'⁸⁸ has much more to do with the subjective idealism propounded in the eighteenth century by the philosopher George Berkeley than with the *Advaitic* concept of *maya*. Again, it is making *maya* 'like' some aspect of Western thought.

Sara Grant states that '... the earth and all it contained, including individual human beings, were very much there for Upanishadic man, in all their concrete individuality: as Śankara

⁸⁵ Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, p223

⁸⁶ *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, p69

⁸⁷ Rao, p9

⁸⁸ Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, p31

himself was to say later, 'when I see a post, I see a post,' by which he meant a solid extramental post, not a mental image of one.'⁸⁹

The issue is extremely subtle in its distinctions. However Sharvani and Sattar can say, '*Maya* is dependent on *Brahman*. *Maya* has created the world of appearances. So the world is illusion. But this does not mean at all that the world is non-existent. The *Advaita Vedanta*, with the help of the famous "rope-snake" illustration, maintains that it is neither ultimately real, nor wholly unreal, illusory and non-existent.'⁹⁰

Śankara's argument is related to his acceptance of the notion of 'Two Truths' – the truth from the point of view of *Brahman* and from the point of view of the subject in the phenomenal world. This rejects a subjective idealistic view of the world – that the world is an imagination in the consciousness of the subject – *Advaita* is not Berkeleyan. Śankara accepted that in the sphere of subject and object, both are real:

The non-existence of external things cannot be maintained because we are conscious of external things. In every act of perception we are conscious of some external thing corresponding to the idea, whether it be a post or a wall or a piece of cloth or a jar, and that of which we are conscious cannot but exist.⁹¹

The fact that Śankara accepted a doctrine of two truths in only one ultimate reality is ascribable to his view of the mysterious nature of *maya*.

It sometimes appears that the interpretation of *maya* as illusion in the Western sense of that word is more common in the Western interpretation of *Advaita*, but it also comes to prominence in later *Neo-Vedanta*, which became highly influential as India discovered her own national destiny. However, Radhakrishnan, first vice-president and the second president of India, who was a teacher of philosophy and of *Advaita Vedanta* and important to the *Neo-Vedanta* movement, himself had a nuanced interpretation of the meaning of *maya*. He did not hold an idealistic interpretation that *maya* is pure illusion, or that there is a disjuncture between the world and *Brahman*, but rather that *maya* is a

⁸⁹ Grant, Sara, *Towards and Alternative Theology*, p37

⁹⁰ Sharvani, p330

⁹¹ Śankara, *Vedanta Sutras*, II.2.28

misapprehension of the world. Reflecting the range of meanings with which a Sanskrit word can often be translated, Donald Braue maintains that Radhakrishnan gives six meanings of *maya*: inexplicable mystery; power of self-becoming; duality of consciousness and matter; primal matter; concealment; one-sided dependence.⁹²

With the undoubtedly profound difficulty in translating the concept of *maya* and the relationship between supreme Being and the world into a Christian theological imaginary, Ramana Maharshi's formula is extraordinarily lucid:

Shankara has been criticised for his philosophy of *Maya* (illusion) without understanding his meaning. He made three statements: that Brahman is real, that the universe is unreal, and that Brahman is the Universe. He did not stop with the second. The third statement explains the first two; it signifies that when the Universe is perceived apart from Brahman, that perception is false and illusory. What it amounts to is that phenomena are real when experienced as the Self and illusory when seen apart from the Self.⁹³

The Christian concept of the Kingdom comes under examination when the reality or otherwise of the world is in question. The concept is not uni-dimensional, but to some extent it relates to the ontological reality of the world. To the view that the Kingdom of God will come on earth, leading to peace and happiness for human kind, Griffiths responds, 'all this is an illusion. It is the great "maya" which deceives the world which veils the truth.'⁹⁴ This is a self-construction which ignores the ethical dimensions of Jesus' Kingdom teaching, the expectations of the early Church and notions of the eschaton. The combined 'already' and 'not yet' qualities of the Kingdom tradition cannot be spiritualized into ideas about personal realization. Realized eschatology traditionally goes along with issues of justice and peace, and future eschatology is not without implications for the world in the Christian faith.

Later on in *The Marriage of East and West* Griffiths himself proposes a destination for creation in contrast to *Advaitic* and Hindu notions of time, stating that the

⁹² See Braue, *Maya in Radhakrishnan's Thought*

⁹³ Maharshi, *The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, p4

⁹⁴ Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, p40

Judeo/Christian story of creation ‘is not as in the ancient myth of the “eternal return”, a cyclic movement of emanation and dissolution, but a movement of progress to a final state.’⁹⁵ This contradiction shows that in this Third Space of encounter only recognition of both sameness (the spiritual aspect of the Kingdom) and difference (the reality of a definite destination) can cope with the incongruent nature of Christianity and *Advaita*.

The concepts of the Kingdom and of realized eschatology are an important theme in Abhishiktananda’s *Prayer*, in which he states that ‘[w]e...have to work together on building the earthly city, the substructure, so to speak, of the City of God. But we can never forget that the City of God, our final home, is already present “even now”, since the Kingdom is in the midst of us.’⁹⁶ He captures the elusive nature of Kingdom theology which can never really be incorporated into an understanding of *maya*, since the former requires a distinct ontology and centrality of creation which the latter relativizes.

Abhishiktananda is also often hovering on the edge of stating the unreality of the world, though he says that ‘The world is real for the *jnani* [one who knows], just as it is for the *ajnani* [the ignorant].’⁹⁷ However, he also slips into language which describe a ‘dream-world’.⁹⁸ His struggles to reconcile the Christian and *Advaitic* accounts of the material world speak volumes about the incommensurability not only of the terminologies, but also of the grammars – the place which the material world takes in both systems of thought.

Griffiths thought that the understanding of creation was at the heart of the difficulties in relating Christianity to *Advaita*. He begins his chapter on ‘Creation and Incarnation’ with a translation of what is sometimes called The Perfect Prayer:

That is full; this is full. The full comes out of the full.

Taking the full from the full, the full itself remains

⁹⁵ Ibid, p111

⁹⁶ Abhishiktananda, *Prayer*, p50

⁹⁷ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p44

⁹⁸ Ibid, p47

This verse [continues Griffiths], which forms the invocation of the Isa Upanishad expresses in a marvellous way the mystery of creation. The world comes forth from God, and yet the world takes nothing from God and adds nothing to him.⁹⁹

The Perfect Prayer admits of different translations, but the implication by Griffiths is that this is a universal description of the mystery of creation, and the act of creation, and that these verses can be understood in Christian terms. Griffiths states that creation is a mystery and goes on in this chapter to explore the relationship between an *Advaitic* concept of creation and a Christian one in some detail. He recognizes the disjuncture, but in this introduction to the chapter he is suggesting a correspondence between the two which simply does not exist. He is suggesting that creation comes forth directly from the supreme Being in both *Advaita* and Christianity. This is, however, a construction of the meaning so far as *Advaita* is concerned. His interpretation of the perfect prayer is flawed, and he almost certainly knew, to judge from the rest of the chapter, that he was glossing over great differences. He is suggesting by this opening that beliefs are 'the same', but goes on in the chapter to say 'not quite'. It would probably be more accurate to say, in terms of the two theological imaginaries concerning creation which the chapter discusses, that he goes on to say, 'not at all'. This is an example of a recognition, taking that chapter as a whole, of both sameness and difference.

Griffiths' understanding of The Perfect Prayer is novel. The usual interpretation of the prayer is; 'That (unconditioned) *Brahman* is perfect; this (conditioned) *Brahman* is perfect', The unconditioned *Brahman* being *nirguna Brahman* without qualities and the conditioned *Brahman* being *saguna Brahman* with qualities, also called *Isvara*. Moreover, *Isvara* is not usually considered to be the creator in any sense that a Christian would comprehend, but is more properly understood as 'God within creation'. The whole work of creation (which Christianity would assign to God, the supreme Being), is assigned by Hinduism not to *Brahman*, nor to *Isvara*, but to the *Trimurti* – typically said to be composed of *Brahmā* the creator, *Vishnu* the preserver, and *Shiva* the destroyer. *Brahmā*, not *Brahman*, is the god of the act of creation.

Griffiths acknowledges the problem of the different understandings of the act of creation:

⁹⁹ Griffiths, *Vedanta and Christian Faith*, p31

To my mind the *Vedanta* has never found a completely satisfying answer to this problem [of the relationship between the divine and creation], and this may well be the point at which Christian faith could add something to the understanding of the *Vedanta* and at the same time at which Christian faith could also learn to express itself more adequately in terms of the *Vedanta*.¹⁰⁰

Griffiths is here speaking very much in terms of Clooney's notion of seeing each in the light of the other, each tradition assisting the understanding of the other. Yet it is Christianity that will 'add' to *Vedanta*, while Christianity will learn to 'express itself more adequately'. To need addition is to lack something, while better expression of what is already known is not such an addition. Griffiths is here showing very clearly which tradition he believes holds the greatest truth, which will 'fulfil' the other. In terms of equality this is very much Bhabha's 'the same but not quite', and does have a ring of a postcolonialism about it, even though Griffiths goes on in the chapter to explore in some depth and with some accuracy *Vedantic* views of creation.

Griffiths' understanding of *maya* is an attempt to find similarity and strays into subjective idealism to explain a subtle concept, resulting in a construction of the notion of *maya*. He ignores the usual interpretation of The Perfect Prayer in order to draw a parallel. Abhishiktananda, in stating that nothing can exist besides God, and his acceptance of *Advaita's* rejection of *creatio ex nihilo*, is importing a concept of the material world into Christianity which has no basis in Christian doctrine. Where this sort of importation is made more-or-less wholesale, with no attempt to examine how it might relate to established Christian belief, this study is employing Bhabha's term 'mimicry' to denote a copying of the other tradition in an area of incommensurability. With regard to their views of the world and the material universe it is hard not to conclude that it is a case as suggested by Christopher Brown,¹⁰¹ in which the traditions are so different that no meaningful conflict can be posited, let alone similarity.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p32

¹⁰¹ See Brown, p164. Of Christianity and Buddhism: 'Such fundamental differences preclude direct conflict.'

Chapter 6

Supreme Being, Incarnation and Human Beings

1. INTRODUCTION

Having looked at Abhishiktananda's and Griffiths' treatments of space, religion and creation in chapter five, we now consider what in many ways lies at the heart of their thinking, the concept of divinity and how it relates to an understanding of humanity. Differing concepts of supreme Being lead into a consideration of how they dealt with the Christian Trinity and its proposed counterpart, *Advaitic saccidananda*. Trinity, often seen as a key understanding in the relationship between God and humanity, and *saccidananda*, an expression of the human experience of divinity, lead naturally into a consideration of their approaches to the Incarnation, the ultimate relationship between God and humanity in Christianity, and thence into their theology of the individual's relationship with the divine.

2. TWO CONCEPTS OF SUPREME BEING

The nature of the understandings of supreme Being in Christianity and *Advaita* and the differences between them appear, as could be expected, throughout the themes dealt with in this research. The main discussion on this subject will concern the connection which both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths made between the Christian Trinity and the *Advaitic* experience of *saccidananda*, but there are, however, two matters regarding concepts of supreme Being which need to be addressed first. One is the issue of monism, and the other is the perceived conflict between personal and impersonal interpretations of supreme Being.

Monism is the belief that there is only one existent reality, all else being illusion, and issues around this have been partly dealt with in the section on creation in chapter five. Abhishiktananda disavowed monism, writing that the *jnani* or knower of the truth 'will not say that the I, the world and God are simply one, any more than he will reduce being to a philosophical monad, as he is often praised or blamed for doing.'¹ This is a selective statement. There are many formulations of *Advaita* proposing it as monist, as recognized

¹ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p44

by Bradley Malkovsky when he remarks that 'Advaitins, especially those in Indian universities, normally espouse an acosmic monism'.² This research is not able to determine whether such academics are *jnani* or not, although it does take the view that *Advaita* is not monist in nature. The relatively common presence of the view that it is monist, however, is one of the main criticisms that Christians make of it, who claim that no convergence is therefore possible. *Advaita's* views of the nature of reality are, as we have seen, both subtle and complex, and involve levels of reality or existence, rather than an absolute dualism between what is and what is not. But it is not unfair to say that the shadow of monism can threaten understandings of *Advaita*, and the personal anxiety which that shadow caused for Abhishiktananda, who wrote that 'the aloneness of the Monad can and must be transcended,'³ is addressed later in this chapter.

The clearest statement of the personal-impersonal incongruence is made by Griffiths: 'God is the personal God, and Brahman is the impersonal aspect of the Godhead. It is important to maintain this distinction.'⁴ Abhishiktananda did not write directly in terms of a conflict between personal and impersonal apprehensions of supreme Being, but more in terms of a personal anxiety already mentioned that 'in *Advaita* there is absolutely no place for a real "face to face" encounter, or for any true dialogue.'⁵ Griffiths can both say that the 'Oriental, though using personal language about God, habitually goes beyond such language,'⁶ yet also maintain a supreme position for a personal God in his treatment of Krishna in *River of Compassion*. Certainly for Griffiths the problems of conceiving of how personal and impersonal experiences of supreme Being could be reconciled was important: '...there perhaps has always been a certain conflict in the Hindu tradition between the concept of a personal God who manifests himself in love and the Advaitic conception of *Brahman* as the pure bliss of conscious existence without relationship to another.'⁷

What is key is to recognize that much of what is said by Abhishiktananda and Griffiths about *Brahman* is said in the context of a Western understanding of God. If personal

² Malkovsky, section entitled 'Advaita and Christian Faith in Conflict', paragraph 3

³ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p103

⁴ Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, p122.

⁵ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p63

⁶ Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, p22

⁷ Griffiths, *Vedanta and Christian Faith*, p26

does not exist in *Brahman*, as an *Advaitin* would contend, then neither does impersonal. In Griffiths' distinction above, the Christian God forces him to imply an impersonality over against the personal. Such a duality of options does not exist in *Brahman*. This lack of clarity in theological grammar is displayed by the many occasions on which *Brahman* is referred to as God, or the word 'God' is used to express both Hindu and Christian concepts.

Griffiths enunciates other differences, as when he states: '...the heart of Christian mysticism is a mystery of love, whereas in both Hinduism and in Buddhism it is primarily a transformation of consciousness.'⁸ In this study the term 'enunciation' signifies those statements that are made in the space between two cultures that concern or are about the Other or about oneself in contrast to the Other, and which represent strategies for dealing with perceived difference. Griffiths' statement about love and transformation of consciousness assumes that the grammars coincide, or that the two play the same role in each tradition and that there can therefore be a simple comparison. *Advaita* does not use any of the many words it has for different forms of love in the sense it is used in Pope Benedict XVI's 2005 encyclical *Deus caritas est* (God is Love), which is understandable in the context of a proposed unity between *Brahman* and *Atman*. The two concepts have different relationships with their traditions – love God, love your neighbour, definitional in terms of Christian understanding, does not have an equivalent in *Advaita*, even though one could well argue that Christian love is a transformation of consciousness, as opposed, for example, to a warm feeling. The statement *Brahman* 'is not specifically love'⁹ is not strictly definitional but simply emphasizes the very different theological imaginaries – the whole structure which includes an understanding of the divine. Similarity is recognized in the transformation of consciousness in the experience of *saccidananda* and the change in the Christian who realizes the immanent love of God within, but it is expressed as 'the same but not quite' in order to preserve a place for the Christian understanding. Plainly in the lives of both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths the challenge of this particular example of similarity and difference led to deep contemplation upon the nature of God.

⁸ Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, p253

⁹ *Ibid*

Grammar poses a problem for Griffiths when addressing the issue of *Brahman* or *Isvara* and *lila*, or play. *Advaita* proposes a particular relationship between *Brahman* and the world, Christianity quite another. *Lila* is the play of the supreme Being, and Griffiths writes that the concept 'is hardly satisfactory for it means that all the suffering of the world is ultimately meaningless,' and goes on to say that in the *Bhagavad Gita* 'this *lila* of God has a meaning and a purpose...God is not merely at play but is purposefully working in the world.'¹⁰

Lila is bound to be a problem for any Christian interpretation of *Advaita*, and although it is true that Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* has the wellbeing of the world at heart it is not clear that this is closely related to the concept of *lila*. The usual translation 'play' does not express the creative nature of 'playing in,' which is the meaning in *Advaita*, rather than a heartless 'playing with' implied by Griffiths. He is creating a hybridity composed of the *lila* of an immanent *Brahman* playing in the world of *maya*, with a version of the Christian God as transcendent. He rejects 'playing with', which is not *Advaitic* at all, and creates a hybrid purposeful *lila*. *Lila* really has no grammatical place in Christianity, and cannot be translated as 'purposefully working', which is to Christianize the concept. There is also, of course, the perennial problem of the word 'God', which Griffiths is using to express both Hindu and Christian concepts of divinity. This problem is purely textual; both Griffiths and Abhishiktananda were fully aware of the divergence between the two concepts, but regularly neglected to distinguish between them in their texts. It is an indication that they were engaged in making the Orient understandable to the West. For example, it is notable that whilst both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths use 'God' to include *Brahman*, they do not use the word '*Brahman*' to signify Christian concepts of the divine. Had they done so it would have been a glaring innovation in their texts, but in fact it would have been no more incongruous than calling *Brahman* 'God' with a capital 'G', even though it is a usage much found in Western writing about Hinduism. I have attempted to avoid the error.

3. TRINITY AND SACCIDANANDA

Trinitarian theology and the possibility of its congruence with the *Advaitic* concept of *saccidananda* are key elements in the writing of both Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths.

¹⁰ Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, p87

Abhishiktananda was not so keen as Griffiths to propose a direct equivalence between *saccidananda* and the Trinity, and dealt with *saccidananda* more in terms of mystical experience, and implies its use as a mantra.¹¹ However, he did often equate *saccidananda* with *Brahman*, the Hindu supreme Being. The *ashram* which he founded jointly with Jules Monchanin was named *Saccidananda Ashram*, and the current website of the *ashram* (commonly called Shantivanam or 'Grove of Peace') makes the connection between the original name and the Trinity:

...the name 'Saccidananda', 'Being, Consciousness and Bliss' [is] a Hindu term for the Godhead used as a symbol of the three persons of the Christian Trinity...¹²

This is a suggestive expression, the use of 'symbol' indicating the problems involved in making this link.

Griffiths provides a detailed account of the proposed correspondence which has become highly influential in later treatments of the link between *Advaita* and Christianity:

We could then speak of God as *Saccidananda* – Being, Knowledge, Bliss – and see in the Father sat. Being, the absolute eternal 'I am', the ground of Being, the source of all. We could then speak of the Son as the cit, the knowledge of the father, the Self-consciousness of eternal Being, the presence to itself in pure consciousness of the infinite One; Being reflecting on itself, knowing itself, expressing itself in an eternal Word...Finally, we could speak of the spirit as *Ananda*, the Bliss or Joy of the Godhead, the outpouring of the super-abundant being and consciousness of the eternal, the Love which unites Father and Son in the non-dual Being of the Spirit¹³

Since both authors make extensive use of the word it is necessary to gain an appreciation of how *saccidananda* is used in the *Advaitic* tradition. This is not an easy task, since different *Advaitins* use it in different or ambiguous ways. Its use varies over time, with later commentators being rather looser in its use.

¹¹ Abhishiktananda, *Benedictine Ashram*, p77

¹² Shantivanam website [accessed 23/3/2017]

¹³ Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, pp190-191

As Griffiths says, *saccidananda* is composed of three Sanskrit words: *sat*, *cit*, and *ananda*. They are variously translated as consciousness, knowledge, bliss; or being, awareness of being, joy, with many other variants found in the literature. There is a tendency in some literature to state that that the word *saccidananda* can stand in the place of the word *Brahman*¹⁴. It seems as though it is more accurate to say, with Arvind Sharma: ‘The cumulative insight of the Vedantic tradition leads it to describe *Brahman*, or the ultimate reality, as *saccidānanda*.’¹⁵ It is a cumulative insight as *saccidananda* is not a term used by Śankara himself in his genuine texts¹⁶ according to Paul Hacker,¹⁷ although Griffiths does ascribe use of the word to him more than once.¹⁸ For example, the *Atma Bodha* (Knowledge of Self), attributed to Śankara, in which knowledge-consciousness-bliss is referenced is unlikely to be by him.¹⁹ So far as its presence in the *Upanishads*, only one place is usually referenced, namely the *Taittirīya Upanishad* (2.1), which contains, in one translation, the statement, ‘*Brahman* is truth, knowledge, and infinite’.²⁰ Another translator renders it as ‘He who knows *Brahma* as the real (*satya*), as knowledge (*jnana*), as the infinite (*ananta*),’²¹ showing that the terms are different, but also that even this verse can be construed as pertaining to human comprehension rather than to actuality.²² Śankara does not use the word *saccidananda* in his commentary to the *Taittirīya Upanishad*.

Referring again to Sharma’s statement, the word is also a description, in that, as Richard De Smet states, *saccidananda* ‘is apprehended not merely as a concept but as an

¹⁴ For example, P.T. Raju states in three places that Brahman is sat-chit-ananda, see Raju, p228 and p229. Karel Werner rather hedges his bets when he states that *saccidananda* is ‘the Advaitic expression for the ultimate reality or the expression thereof’ (Raju, p88). Chad Meister states that: ‘Reality is infinite being, undifferentiated consciousness, and eternal bliss (sat-chit-ananda). Referred to as “Brahman”, this unitary reality is what is ultimately and only real.’ (Meister, p103)

¹⁵ Sharma, *A Guide to Hindu Spirituality*, p7

¹⁶ A discussion of which of Śankara’s *Bhashyas* can be considered authentic is beyond the scope of this study. For a full examination of the subject, see Grant, Sara, *Shankaracharya’s Concept of Relation*, pp7-14

¹⁷ Hacker, p53

¹⁸ See, Griffiths, *The Golden String*, p171 and Griffiths, *Christ in India*, p203

¹⁹ See Isaeva, p98

²⁰ This translation is from Śankara, *Eight Upanishads*, Volume 1, p287. Swami Sharvananda translates the words as, ‘The real, the Conscious, the Infinite is Brahman’ (*Taittirīya Upanishad*, p53), showing the imprecision of translations of Sanskrit into English. The word *saccidananda* is not present.

²¹ *Thirteen Principle Upanishads*, p283

²² From a later theistic and *Vasnavic* stance, rather than an *Advaitic* stance, Chattopadhyaya writes that, ‘...from the *Taittiriya Sruti* we have learnt that Brahman is absolute truth, knowledge, and bliss...from the point of view of the material world we can comprehend Brahman as *saccidananda*.’ Chattopadhyaya, p4

experience...'²³ Deutsch and Danvi are even more specific than this when they state that '*Brahman* may, for the purposes of orienting the mind towards it and for pointing out the basic features of one's experience of it, be represented or designated as *saccidananda*.'²⁴

A twentieth-century *guru*, Shantananda Saraswati, Shankaracharya of Jyotish Peeth, who spent much time in conversation with Western students,²⁵ expresses *saccidananda* in very down-to-earth, very personal, terms;

...there are those who only know that they exist and partake of '*Sat*'. They live at a very low level. Others think and know, so they can reason and with that regulate their lives. They partake of '*Sat*' and '*Chit*'. A third kind have known *Sat* and *Chit*, and get *Ananda* also. For them the world is full. They experience the Self as threefold (*Sat-Chit-Ananda*).²⁶

Although Shantanand Saraswati states elsewhere that the Self (*Atman*) and *Brahman* are, in truth, one, at no point in the meticulously documented record of thirty-three years of conversation with his Western listeners does he directly equate *saccidananda* with *Brahman*.

Eliot Deutsch states that *sat*, *cit* and *ananda* would be considered a 'definition with reference to essence', rather than a 'definition with reference to accidents', thus implying that they are not attributes of *Brahman*. They 'are not so much qualifying attributes of *Brahman* as they are the terms that express the apprehension of *Brahman* by man [sic]. *Saccidananda* is a symbol of *Brahman* as formulated by the mind interpreting its *Brahman*-experience.'²⁷ A definition with regard to accidents would require *Brahman* to have attributes or qualities, and this is exactly what *nirguna Brahman* does not doctrinally have. Following Deutsch's lead and considering *saccidananda* as a definition with regard to essence, it could therefore be argued that '*Brahman is saccidananda*' is a statement comparable in nature with the Christian statement, 'God is love', not comparable in

²³ De Smet, p392

²⁴ *The Essential Vedanta*, p393

²⁵ Shantanand Saraswati served as *guru* to two Western schools from 1960 to 1993 that wished to understand *Advaita*.

²⁶ 'A Record Of Audiences & Correspondence with His Holiness Shantananda Saraswati', pp501-502

²⁷ Deutsch, p9

nature to the statement, “God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’ The attraction of the latter to Abhishiktananda and Griffiths is that *saccidananda* and Trinity are both triune, and lead towards convergence between the two traditions, whilst the former raises questions about the place of love in *Advaita* referred to above. As was noted in chapter three’s treatment of comparative theology, Clooney warns against ‘the danger of identifying similarities which are only apparent’²⁸

Sri Aurobindo, in the first half of the twentieth century, played a considerable part in bringing the concept of *saccidananda* to the West, his concern for human development and his version of yoga proving attractive. He states in many places that *Brahman* is *saccidananda*, but in a revealing passage writes:

...the Vedantic Seers, even after they had arrived at the crowning idea, the convincing experience of Sachidananda as the highest positive expression of the Reality to our consciousness, erected in their speculations or went on in their perceptions to an Asat, a Non-Being beyond...²⁹

Aurobindo, with his concern for providing a metaphysic that helps the individual to develop, is finding himself faced with the uncomfortable ‘unknowableness’ of the supreme Being, who may not be Being in the way that a human can comprehend. Yet even so, he recognizes that *saccidananda* is the ‘highest positive expression of the Reality to our consciousness,’ as opposed to a definition of essence or an enumeration of accidents.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis either to attempt a full analysis of the use of *saccidananda* in *Vedantic* commentary, or a detailed treatment of the history and use of the word in literature in the English language. However, although ‘*Brahman* is *saccidananda*’ and similar statements appear, notably in later material intended for Western audiences, this study will take the view that the term primarily denotes the experience in humans of unity with supreme Being. This is based on the absence of this

²⁸ Clooney, ‘Comparative Theology’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, p666

²⁹ Aurobindo, p39

equivalence in authoritative texts, particularly the *Upanishads* and Śankara 's commentaries, and on scholarly opinion.

As already mentioned, *saccidananda* became important when genuine efforts to seek convergence between Hinduism and Christianity began. Keshub Chandra Sen (1838–1884), involved in the monotheistic Hindu reform movement, the *Brāhma Samāj*, gave a lecture in 1882 entitled 'That Marvelous Mystery – the Trinity.' His seems to have been the first attempt at an equivalence between Father, Son and Holy Spirit in Trinity and *sat*, *cit* and *ananda*.³⁰ Sen remained a Hindu, though a reformist. More important in Hindu-Christian theological thinking, however, was Brahmabandhav Upadhyay (1861–1907), who has been mentioned in chapter four. His place in twentieth-century Christian thinking in India can hardly be overstated, and both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths acknowledge their debt to him. He is sometimes called 'the father of Indian theology' and was a Bengali Brahmin who converted to Christianity in 1891. He was writing at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of the relationship between *saccidananda* and Trinity. Aleaz states:

In the view of Upadhyaya [sic] the Christian doctrine of God as Trinity is 'exactly the same' as the Vedantic conception of Brahman as *Sat-chit-ananda* because in the Trinity (Father, Son and the Spirit) the knowing self is the Father, the known self or the self-begotten by His knowledge is the Son and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of reciprocal love proceeding from the Father and the Son.³¹

However, in commenting on Upadhyay's thought, Robin Boyd says that he

... is *not* a Hindu drawing an interesting parallel between *Saccidananda* and Trinity. Rather, having come himself to know God in Christ, his own personal experience of God is triune, and he finds the Vedantic teaching fulfilled here in a more meaningful way even than in Śankara. And so, for the benefit of his countrymen, he is led to explain the mystery of the Godhead, the *real* of Brahman, in terms of the Trinitarian *Saccidananda*.³²

³⁰ *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, vol 6, p87

³¹ Aleaz, p103

³² Boyd, p73

Again, Kaj Baago states that Upadhyay presents the doctrine of Trinity as ‘the solution to the problem of how Brahman is to be known.’³³ Both Boyd and Baago imply that *saccidananda* is about how Brahman is known, Boyd suggesting that this is a parallel with experiential knowledge of the triune Christian God. Boyd also implies that Śankara’s *Advaita* does not adequately reflect this view of *saccidananda*, which is unsurprising, since he probably did not use the word.

The problems of the use of *saccidananda* as congruent with Trinity become apparent when *sat*, *cit*, and *ananda* are directly related to the Persons of the Trinity. The problem that arises is that nowhere is it suggested that supreme Being is present in its fullness in *sat*, and in *cit*, and in *ananda*. The doctrine of the consubstantial nature of the three persons of the Trinity is a key Christian belief not reflected in *saccidananda*. For that to be the case for *saccidananda*, *Brahman* would have to be present in its fullness in *sat*, and in *cit*, and in *ananda*. Only in this way could the unity of *saccidananda* be preserved as is the unity of the Trinity. Abhishiktananda goes some way to consubstantiality when he states that ‘[s]at and *cit*, being and awareness of being, cannot be “other” to each other, their relationship is irreducibly non-dual, an *advaita*,’³⁴ but this is a novel statement in the Indian tradition. Related to this but in terms of *Brahman* defined as *saccidananda*, *Brahman*’s unity can only be preserved when described as *saccidananda* if an identity or unity between *sat*, *cit*, and *ananda* can be maintained as in the Persons of the Trinity.

The difficulty of equating the elements of *saccidananda* to the Persons of the Trinity is shown clearly in the case of the Holy Spirit. Abhishiktananda notes the connection between Spirit and God’s ‘breath’, and states that the *Vedic* equivalent would be *prana*. He goes on to say, on the same page, that ‘in an Indian context God’s “Spirit” would best be understood as meaning his [i.e. God’s] *atman*,’³⁵ transferring the term for the human Self to God. Griffiths maintains in much of his writing that the Spirit relates to *ananda*, but at one point equates it with *sakti*, and on the following page maintains that the Spirit is the individual’s *atman*.³⁶ In linking various *Advaitic* concepts to the Holy Spirit,

³³ Baago, p40

³⁴ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p169

³⁵ Ibid, p95

³⁶ Griffiths, *Return to the Centre*, pp129 and 130

Abhishiktananda in effect equates, God's *atman* (itself a novel concept), and *prana*, whilst Griffiths equates *Ananda*, *sakti*, and the individual *Atman*. This is, in terms of *Advaita*, grammatical confusion and lack of fluency.

In an extended section of *Saccidananda* Abhishiktananda writes of the 'Paschal awakening', of the awakening from 'the apparent sleep in which all consciousness of himself had faded away in the overwhelming awareness of Saccidananda,'³⁷ but 'only the Lord in fact is capable of raising man from this slumber.'³⁸ Now, however, with this new awakening, 'the Spirit of Wisdom makes known to him his last secrets:'³⁹ that Being or *sat* gives birth eternally to the Son; that Being is essentially communion; that self awareness, *cit*, involves mutual giving; that *ananda* is the fruit of love.⁴⁰

This is a hybridity of the two systems. In *Advaita*, *saccidananda* is the highest experience of supreme Being. For *Advaita*, this is a sufficient statement. We are not told whether the experience of *saccidananda* includes the experience of supreme love, or of communion. Further description is considered unnecessary, possibly unhelpful. *Saccidananda* is beyond further description – essentially an experience rather than a doctrinal statement about what is. But Abhishiktananda adds the Christian message to an experience upon waking from (or maybe upon waking within) the experience of *saccidananda*. He cannot accept the sparse *Advaitic* formula, but colours in the detail with the shades of the Christian faith – Son, communion, love – because without it, he believes, it does not make enough sense in Christian terms. Such Christian 'colouring' of *Advaita* is, in the terms of this study, a hybridity, but he is, in the process of forming a hybridity, describing *saccidananda* as 'something like' Christianity in order to make the term useable. However, he is also describing Christianity as 'something like' *Advaita*. He finds *saccidananda* immensely attractive as an expression of deep human experience, and needs to find a congruence with Christian faith. Neither remain quite themselves, which is typical of a true hybridity. To make clear once more, my purpose in this study is not to determine whether the hybridity is correct or even useful, though the desire to

³⁷ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p175

³⁸ *Ibid*

³⁹ *Ibid*, p176

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

define Christian experience clearly may be welcome to some; more of this will be touched on in chapter seven.

Griffiths also finds a congruence between *ananda* and God's love:

...we could speak of the spirit as *Ananda*, the Bliss or Joy of the Godhead, the outpouring of the super-abundant being and consciousness of the eternal, the Love which unites Father and Son in the non-dual Being of the Spirit.⁴¹

Coping with the general absence of emphasis on love in *Advaita* is a major problem for any dialogue between the two where foundational texts are concerned. Whilst later *Advaitins* are happy to refer to the love of God (i.e. God's love), for example Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) and Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), possibly as a result of Christian influences during the colonial period, love as an attribute of supreme Being does not feature largely in *Advaita*. It could be maintained that it does not feature with any significance and can be inferred, but that the individual's love of God is the focus, more than the love exhibited by God himself. This is the reverse of the Christian emphasis. It is not so much that Śankara denies the importance of love, rather that he does not place it in a prominent position in his theology. His main arguments mentioning love concern the objects of the senses, and link it as the binary opposite of hatred or aversion.

Commenting on *Bhagavad Gita* II,64, he states:

He who longs for deliverance resorts only to unavoidable objects with senses— hearing, etc.— devoid of love and hatred and brought under his own control, his inner sense (atman = antah-karana) being made obedient to his own will.⁴²

Brijen K Gupta, in a comparison between Swedenborg's and Śankara's models of supreme Being, finds the concept of love absent in the latter:

We can thus see that whereas on the concept of wisdom and knowledge Swedenborg and Sankara come very close, the concept of love is almost

⁴¹ Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, p191

⁴² Śankara, *The Bhagavad Gita : with the Commentary of Sri Sankaracharya*, p74.

conspicuously absent in Sankara. This is largely because Sankara's mysticism has epistemological and cognitional character, whereas Swedenborg's mysticism is emotional and ethical.⁴³

In considering how the individual views loss of, for example, a son, Yohanán Grinshpon, states that *Isvara* or *saguna Brahman*, 'stand[s] aloof from the world', and that 'Sankara does not conceive *Isvara* as a warm, loving God.'⁴⁴ In this way, Grinshpon is focussing on the link between love and identification, which is present in Śankara's thought. In general it is fair to say that the concept of love in Advaita is not the unqualified good of service and self-sacrifice which it is in Christianity. Writing Christian concepts of God's love into *Advaita* is a construction which both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths found necessary in the Third Space which they occupied. Their *Advaita* therefore 'mimics' Christianity in this respect in order to achieve a convergence, and in doing so it loses or softens the challenge it presents in terms of its critical approach to identification, or love of, materiality. With Clooney it could be said: 'What begins as theological may end as a simpler and flatter comparison of religious ideas on neutral grounds, without theological identity and grounding in a faith community.'⁴⁵

This correspondence then, between Trinity and *saccidananda*, is a key hybridity in the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, based on the earlier views of Sen and Upadhyaya. Both in using *saccidananda* to stand for *Brahman* and in considering it congruent with Trinity, they are assuming the unity represented in the Christian concept of the Godhead. The unity within *saccidananda* was earlier presumably assumed as the *Advaitic* tradition began to make this connection itself, as it would not have split *Brahman* into three, but that tradition was always more concerned with the experience of the individual which itself had a unity with *Brahman*, not so much with a doctrinal statement of belief.

4. CHRIST AND INCARNATION

An attractive piece of syncretism which is found commonly on internet blogs is that Jesus Christ was an *avatar* in the Hindu sense, an incarnation of God, and one of many.⁴⁶ This is

⁴³ Gupta, p26

⁴⁴ Grinshpon, p43

⁴⁵ Clooney, 'Comparative Theology' in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, p664

⁴⁶ See, for example, <<https://www.ananda.org/yogapedia/avatar/>> or <<http://www.light-weaver.com/LW-old/reappearance/reap1004.html>> [both accessed 31/11/18]

an equivalence which neither Abhishiktananda nor Griffiths make. The nature and place of Christ, and the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, do however present immense problems for an integration between Christianity and *Advaita*. Abhishiktananda makes an enunciation of difference when, in writing of *avatars*, he states:

From the point of view of the cosmic religions there is hardly any place for a real intervention of God in History...The opposite is true of Christianity...For the Christian, God is...the one who according to his sovereign free and unpredictable decisions intervenes in the evolution of the cosmos and in the drama of human history.⁴⁷

Abhishiktananda implies that *avatars* do not have an effect on human history, and in contrasting this with the belief that the revelations to the Judeo-Christian patriarchs and the Incarnation do affect history he relativizes the concept of *avatar*, placing it in the context of Christian Incarnation. In fact, Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* states that he manifests himself from time to time for the sake of human kind⁴⁸ – which would suggest a change in human history. Abhishiktananda is enunciating a difference – but the difference is not quite as he proposes, and is more to do with the impassibility of an *avatar* and the fear of the Docetist nature of any parallel with Christ, which is the notion that the history and bodily presence of Christ was a semblance and not true reality. *Avatars* are generally believed to be unaffected by a human nature personal to them. In the Third Space the Hindu concept of *avatars* undoubtedly threatens the Christian concept of unique and physical Incarnation and the human nature of Christ, and therefore Abhishiktananda needs to enunciate a difference to produce a strategy within the Third Space that defends not only Christ's passibility, but also his beneficial effects for human history.

Swami Vivekananda translates verse 4.7 of the *Bhagavad Gita* as: 'Whenever virtue subsides and vice prevails, I come down to help mankind.'⁴⁹ Vivekananda was much concerned to bring Hindu understandings to the West, and in commenting on *avatars*, he said, in a speech entitled 'Krishna' delivered in 1900:

⁴⁷ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p56

⁴⁸ *Bhagavad Gita*, 4.7-8

⁴⁹ Vivekananda, p154,

...if [one of the great souls] comes as Jesus or as Buddha, why is there so much schism? The preachings must be followed! A Hindu philosopher would say: These are the great souls; they are already free. And though free, they refuse to accept their liberation while the whole world is suffering. They come again and again, take a human embodiment and help mankind. They know from their childhood what they are and what they come for. ... They do not come through bondage like we do. ... They come out of their own free will, and cannot help having tremendous spiritual power.⁵⁰

If the non-unique nature of the concept *avatar* presents a threat to a once-for-all Incarnation, the Hindu 'cosmic man', *Purusha*, does not, and both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths gravitate to this concept rather than to that of the *avatar*. Abhishiktananda proposes a direct equivalence when he states: 'All is taken up in the liturgy of the Lamb – or as India might call him, the sacred and immortal *purusa*...' ⁵¹ However, the comparison has many problems. *Purusa* is a complex concept that developed over the period of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. *Purusa* in the *Vedas* is involved in sacrifice at the creation of the world,⁵² whereas Christ's sacrifice is at a specific point historically, once for all, and for the sake of humanity, although there is also the strand of thought that creation itself is redeemed by that sacrifice. It is not, however, a sacrifice at the point of creation. Abhishiktananda cites Revelation 13:8 to support the link with *Purusa's* sacrifice from the beginning of creation.⁵³ It is an apocalyptic Biblical verse about 'the Beast' which admits of two translations:

All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. (New King James Version)

Or:

⁵⁰ Ibid, p444

⁵¹ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p60

⁵² *The Hymns of the Rgveda*, 10.90

⁵³ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p211

...and all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered. (New Revised Standard Version)

The latter is the version used by the Catholic Church in the New Revised Standard Version, and the former conflicts with all other scriptural statements about Christ's death. Steve Moyise, in his study of the Book of Revelation uses the latter translation and does not mention the former at all.⁵⁴

Purusa, though, is both transcendent and immanent (above and below), and is also unique – there are not multiple *Purusas*, as there is more than one *avatar*, and it is therefore, from the Christian perspective, less risky in terms of Christian doctrine. It provides a better fit with a *logos* existing from eternity. One could argue, however, that in terms of content, *avatar* is as well or better fitted with Christ if only it did not threaten his uniqueness and his passible human nature. The issue is not so much that the issues with *avatar* are raised, as that the problematic nature of *Purusa* is not acknowledged.

In attempting to understand the place of Christ, Griffiths seeks to define Jesus as the servant of Yahweh, rather than as having identity or consubstantiality with him. He contends that in the phrase, 'before Abraham was I am,'⁵⁵ Jesus is attempting to identify himself with 'primordial man', or in the Hindu tradition, *Purusa*.⁵⁶ The main Biblical passage usually used to associate Jesus with primordial man is I Corinthians 15:45-50, in which Paul writes about the first and second Adam. Paul may have been relying on Hebrew tradition, maybe from material that was collected as Midrash in the second century CE. The notion of primordial man becomes Adam Kadmon in the Kabala and in Gnostic texts. However, to extend I Corinthians 15:45-50 to imply cosmic man rather than a description of Son of God is a specific choice on the part of a commentator, to accept that first and second Adam share an identity, and is not Biblically supported elsewhere. It would be far better to think in terms of resonance, rather than to mimic a concept which has no supporting grammar in Christian theology.

⁵⁴ Moyise, p71-72

⁵⁵ John 8:58

⁵⁶ Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, p120

There is also a problem with the *Purusa*-Christ comparison internal to Griffiths' own theology. He states that '...in Śhankara's view even *Purusha* is a projection of the mind, useful and helpful in the present state but also to be transcended until we reach the ultimate Reality which has no differentiation whatsoever.'⁵⁷ He maintains that 'it is necessary to go beyond the cosmic person to the absolute transcendence, the One beyond all.'⁵⁸ Griffiths is therefore either constructing a Christian *Purusha* which has identity with ultimate reality, or demoting Christ to a projection of the mind. It shows that the grammar of this does not work as a direct comparison, but may be a hybridity in which the Christian eternal Word gains a connection with a primordial state of creation, and in which Christ is seen in some sense as the 'authentic human', in the way that *Purusha* is seen as primordial man, neither of which is foreign to Christian notions of a Christ of whom is said 'through him all things were made'.⁵⁹ The difficulty of defining *Purusa* in one way, and in one way only, remains.

The fact that Christ cannot be an identity with the Father in quite an *Advaitic* way leads to some statements which suggest a separation which is unorthodox. Writing of Christ, when considering the significance of high places, Abhishiktananda states:

He is the summit which towers up into the sky to seize hold of the One who is and who is Life...It is he who is portrayed in the myth of Shiva, the Ascetic of the Himalayas, who received on his head grace from on high, and let it stream down his body on to men.⁶⁰

The suggestion of Christ going up to seize hold of God is quite contrary to notions of the unity with God of the Incarnation. Also of Christ, he states: 'It was imperative for Christ to climb the path which goes up the Mountain which is himself,'⁶¹ which appears to equate Christ, who in Christian theology is always at all times in unity with the Father, with the disciple searching for realization. Abhishiktananda appears to be seeking a hybridity by applying a mimicked *Advaitic* search for unity to the figure of Christ. He is

⁵⁷ Ibid, p152

⁵⁸ Ibid, pp200-201

⁵⁹ from the Nicene Creed

⁶⁰ Abhishiktananda, *Guru and Disciple*, p148

⁶¹ Ibid, p143

also, in Clooney's terms, 'flattening out' the distinct nature of the doctrine of the Incarnation to accord with *Advaitic* insights.⁶²

Griffiths, at various point in his writings, implies a similar development of the relationship between the Son and the Father which relates to the difficulty in reconciling the Christian orthodox view of two natures, human and divine, united in the one person of Jesus Christ, with an *Advaitic* perspective. This, at times moves towards an adoptionist position – the view that Jesus was adopted by the Father as Son of God during life or at his resurrection. Griffiths states:

In the resurrection Jesus passed from our present state of material being and consciousness into the final state when matter itself, and with it the human body, passes into the state of the divine being and consciousness, which is the destiny of all humanity.⁶³

Rather than two natures, Griffiths proposes a divinized human nature. However, it is no more satisfactory in Christian terms to account for the Incarnation in terms of the *atman-Brahman* identity. Griffiths states:

We have to make the discovery of Christ as the Atman, the true Self, of every being. For 'in him', says Paul, 'everything in heaven and earth was created...and the whole universe has been created in him and for him, and he exists before everything and all things are held together in him'.⁶⁴

As the quotation from Paul suggests, the traditional understanding is of being 'in Christ', and the identity of an individual Self with a universal Self is novel to Christianity. The *Advaitin* says *Aham Brahmasmi*, and the Christian does not say, 'I am Christ'.⁶⁵ The

⁶² Clooney, 'Comparative Theology' in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, p664

⁶³ Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, p90

⁶⁴ Griffiths, *Christ in India*, p14

⁶⁵ It is notable that neither Abhishiktananda, nor Griffiths employ the concept of 'divinization' or theosis in their writing, and the concept is therefore not dealt with in this thesis. Theosis, mainly used in Orthodox theology, though is not inimical to Catholic theology, refers to the work of grace and the atonement of Christ, but would not usually be used to imply that the difference between God and humanity can disappear: '...God's inner essence is for ever beyond our comprehension...' Ware, p22.

Advaitin says, 'ayam atma brahma'⁶⁶ – 'This Self (*Atman*) is *Brahman*'. The Christian says, 'Christ is (Son of) God, i.e. has full divinity, and I am in him.' This is connected with the Christian belief in the salvific work of Christ, which unites the Christian with Christ. The Christian concept of salvation finds no comfortable home in the grammar of *Advaita* in terms of Christ who has 'done a work', which is quite unlike the fact of the eternally given identity between *Atman* and the supreme Being. The Christ-*Atman* equality therefore adds salvific work to the individual Self, which is novel to *Advaita*, and implies that Christ is the Self of all people. This latter proposition is not necessarily foreign to Christianity, but is a particular view which disregards the usual requirement of faith in, and love of, Christ and obedience to his words, as in Jesus' statement in John's Gospel: 'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.'⁶⁷ This shows that any understanding of the Incarnation that takes as part of its explanation the *Advaitic* view of the simple identity between *Atman* and *Brahman* is certainly going to emerge from the Third Space of encounter as a hybridity.

Relating to Christ's passibility, and giving a clear indication of why the *avatar* concept was problematic for Abhishiktananda, Ramana Maharshi's answer to the question, 'Why did Jesus call out "My God! My God!" while being crucified?', shows how foreign is the suffering of Christ to an *Advaitin*:

It might have been an intercession on behalf of the two thieves who were crucified with Him. Again a *jnani* has attained liberation even while alive, here and now. It is immaterial as to how, where and when he leaves his body. Some *jnanis* may appear to suffer, others may be in *samadhi*, still others may disappear from sight before death. But that makes no difference to their *jnana*. Such suffering is apparent only to the onlooker and not to the *jnani*, for he has already transcended the mistaken identity of the Self with the body.⁶⁸

Bede Griffiths makes a comparison similar to Abhishiktananda's between the Son and *Purusha* when relating the Trinity to *Advaita*:

⁶⁶ *Mandukya Upanishad*, 1:2

⁶⁷ John 14:23

⁶⁸ Maharshi, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, pp87-88

The Son would ... be *Saguna Brahman*, *Brahman* 'with attributes', as Creator, Lord, Saviour, the Self-manifestation of the unmanifest God, the personal aspect of the Godhead, the *Purusha*. He is that 'supreme person', (*Purushottaman*) of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the 'unborn, beginningless, great Lord of the world, the 'supreme *Brahman*, the supreme abode, the supreme purity, the eternal divine Person (*purusha*), the primal God (*adideva*), the unborn, the omnipresent (*vibhum*).'⁶⁹

To describe the Son as *saguna Brahman* (with qualities) is to place him at a 'lower level' than the Father, described as *nirguna Brahman* (without qualities), and it is hard not to describe the equating of Christ with *Purusha* as syncretic. Both Griffiths and Abhishiktananda make a more or less one-to-one comparison with *Purusha*, without reference to the background grammatical differences: Christ as historical incarnated Saviour; *Purusha* as a sacrifice of the gods in ancient *Vedic* tradition, and Spirit over against matter (*Prakriti*) in later *Vedanta*. It is difficult to define it as hybridization, since it is hard to comprehend a concept which incorporates both *Purusha* and Christ without almost completely destroying content essential to each tradition, hybrid as those traditions are themselves. The use of *Purusha* cannot really be defined as mimicry, because it is not simply an import, but a proposed equivalence. It is an Orientalist attempt to make *Advaita* understandable in Western terms, or to convert 'the Orient from something into something else', to quote Said.⁷⁰ The weighing up of the respective merits of the concepts of *avatar* and *Purusha* is a search for something that is 'like some aspect of the West', with a particular emphasis on, and search for, uniqueness.

Abhishiktananda is also tempted to take the *logos* or 'Word' description of Christ found in the prologue to John's Gospel, and to equate the Christian concept of 'Word' to the Hindu AUM: 'we could recognize in the OM that Word which eternally proceeds from the silence of the Father – to use the striking phrase of St Ignatius of Antioch.'⁷¹ He goes on to say that 'OM stands for God unmanifested.'⁷² However the quotation according to Lightfoot from St Ignatius is:

⁶⁹ Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, p191

⁷⁰ Said, p76

⁷¹ Abhishiktananda, *Prayer*, p113

⁷² *Ibid*

...there is one God who manifested Himself through Jesus Christ His Son, who is His Word that proceeded from silence, who in all things was well-pleasing unto Him that sent Him.⁷³

The problem is plain. AUM is a gross manifestation, a word which can be uttered which expresses the unmanifest, whilst the Christian 'Word' is God made manifest in a person. To refer to Michael Ramsey's oft-quoted dictum: 'God is Christlike, and in Him there is no unchristlikeness at all,'⁷⁴ meaning that Christ is a complete manifestation of the divine. AUM can more properly be said to 'stand for' the unmanifest, the closest a human can come to uttering either the name of the supreme Being or the first word of creation. In Christian terms there is no reference to a word that emanates from the supreme Being other than the Word who is made flesh in Christ. The hybridity formed therefore amalgamates both Incarnate and unmanifest understandings of the divine in Christ. It challenges *Advaita* to think in terms of complete embodiment of divinity, and Christians to think in terms of an unmanifest Son, which has echoes of the classic theological teaser, 'was the Son absent in heaven during the Incarnation?' and may be seen to relate to the Son's eternal place in the Trinity. The powerful role of word and mantra in *Advaita* and Hinduism more generally – the belief, for example, that Sanskrit is the closest that human kind can come to a natural and naturally creative language – poses a real challenge to Christians to be clearer about their use of the phrase 'Word of God'.

In his Christology, Abhishiktananda maintains that beyond *Advaita* lies a further Christian form of unity with the supreme Being, which contains diversity in that unity. He grapples with what can only be called speculations about Jesus' inner life in relation to the Father. While maintaining that his experience of unity encompasses an *Advaitic* unity, he also maintains that, 'there remains the "face-to-face" of the Son and the Father.'⁷⁵ Abhishiktananda solves the problem by stating (here and elsewhere) that in Christianity there is a level of being 'beyond' the *Advaitic* experience, which is found only in Christ. '...the experience of Jesus includes the *Advaitic* experience, but it certainly cannot be

⁷³ Lightfoot, p57

⁷⁴ Ramsey, p98

⁷⁵ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p82

reduced to the commonly accepted formulation of that experience.'⁷⁶ This is a claim of ultimate Christian supremacy resulting from interpreting *Advaita* by means of Christian grammar.

Christology is a majorly problematic area for Abhishiktananda, and generally for the relationship of Christianity with *Advaita*, and in this area he enunciates a distinct difference. Whilst elsewhere he has said that the *Advaitic* experience is the 'acme of man's spiritual experience in the cosmic religions,'⁷⁷ he is not necessarily saying it is the highest spiritual experience. He is moving towards a position in which the experience of Christ as Son, and by extension his followers who incorporate non-duality into their faith and experience through Christ, taste of a 'knowing' or 'being' which is both non-dualistic and personal. Implicitly, at this stage of his life, he is placing the Christian experience beyond, and probably above, *Advaita*, but making clear that it is the 'perfect' Christian experience which he talks about with reference to Christ. All the problems that Christians experience in terms of identification with *nama-rupa* (name and form), stand in the way of this 'perfect' experience. Identification with *nama-rupa* stands in the way of an aspirant *Advaitin* as well, but he or she has more direct teaching on the subject in that tradition.

This is very much a case of Homi Bhabha's 'the same, but not quite.' In terms of comparative theology it can be seen as a failure to understand *Advaita* in its own terms and as a claim of supremacy. In this meeting with *Advaita*, the similarity between complete unity with the divine in both traditions is noted, but is then drawn back from, in order to preserve identity and difference, and to defend a unique doctrine with regard to the Incarnation. Abhishiktananda does not say that these are different ways, in different cultures, of contemplating divinity.

The problems of not distinguishing the distinct nature of Christ in the Christian tradition can be seen in a quote from Ramana Maharshi, which equates Christ with other fully Self-aware people:

⁷⁶ Ibid, p82

⁷⁷ Ibid, p68

The doctrine of the Trinity was explained: God the Father is equivalent to *Ishwara*, God the Son to the Guru, and God the Holy Ghost to the *Atman*.⁷⁸

Advaita is just as capable of making constructions of Christianity as Christianity is of *Advaita*; here Maharshi is describing a Christian concept in Hindu terms to make its mysteries plain for and to the Orient, and relying upon agreed codes of Hindu understanding.

5. HUMAN KIND AND SUPREME BEING IN RELATIONSHIP

For Abhishiktananda, the '*Advaitic* experience', the experience of unity with supreme Being, became his overriding concern, and led him to experience turbulent feelings about his Christian faith and personal doubts about the adequacy of Christian doctrine with regard to the relationship of the divine to humanity. The suffering that this caused him is a significant indicator of the liminal and uncertain nature of the Third Space he occupied, and deserves an extended treatment here. His struggles with issues around non-duality call to mind Bhabha's phrase, 'the same but not quite,' and represent a constant attempt to enunciate a difference and so defend a Christian standpoint at the same time as attempting to find congruence. This shows itself in *Saccidananda*:

Simple monotheism, as it was revealed to Abraham, cannot easily answer the *Vedic* challenge...To prostrate oneself before God is doubtless a very noble thing: yet in the very act of prostrating, is not the believer asserting himself over against God?⁷⁹

This is a construction of the Abrahamic faith, which would not see itself as asserting the individual over against God in the egocentric way that is being suggested, but rather the opposite. The very name of God, the Tetragrammaton, is a statement of Being with no comparable being in creation. In this respect Abhishiktananda has constructed the Abrahamic faith in opposition to his notion of *Advaita*. It is also fair to remark that his life as a Western monk would have involved many prostrations, but he is uncertain or anxious about this experience in the face of *Advaita's* absolute statement of unity with

⁷⁸ Maharshi, *The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, p52

⁷⁹ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p45

supreme Being. The sameness of the other – alike in an experience of transcendence – is also a difference in expression of the nature of encounter, causing anxiety.

He finds comfort in the Hindu tradition of *bhakti* (devotion), stating that acts of religion enable the believer to ‘participate in the non-temporal experience which he has of self,’⁸⁰ but also maintains that *Advaita* allows of ‘no place for a real “face to face” encounter, or for any true dialogue.’⁸¹ In his objection to prostration but attraction to *bhakti*, he shows confliction and the simultaneous recognition and repudiation which Huddart claims leads to anxiety.⁸²

The pull that Abhishiktananda is experiencing in two directions is shown when he writes of the need to combine the *Advaitic* experience with that of Christian sonship:

Only then will we be able to show our Hindu brethren that the Christian experience does not fall short of that of the Vedanta, but that, without in any way threatening the essential values of the Hindu experience, it reveals within it even greater depths of the unfathomable mystery of God.⁸³

This implies that the non-dual nature of the Christian faith is not clear, and he shows a self-construction of the Christian faith as appearing to be dualistic in counterpoint to *Advaita*. Abhishiktananda’s writing does not in general focus on the examples of non-dualistic thought which are to be found throughout the Christian tradition. It is fair to acknowledge that this is not his theme, but the absence tends to make for a ‘mystic East’ projection of non-dualism onto *Advaita*, and the impression that there is a need for new non-dualistic theology and experience in Christianity. There is here a lack of recognition that different traditions do ‘theology’ in different ways, and that there is no independent ‘yardstick’ of non-duality by which to judge them. There are different ways to be non-dual.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p55

⁸¹ Ibid, p63

⁸² Huddart, pp5-6

⁸³ Abhishiktananda, *Hindu Christian Meeting Point*, p9

Abhishiktananda's notion of *Advaita's* non-dualism itself causes him anxiety when he contemplates losing the I-Thou relationship with God (though he does not explicitly reference Martin Buber's *I and Thou*):

Only in and through Christ can the isolation of the *atman-brahman* unfold into communion, so that the solitary *atman* opens up to the *tvam*, the *Thou*, of mutual yet undivided love⁸⁴

Abhishiktananda is proposing a unitary human nature and resultant experience distinct from culture, and that what is true of a Western person's nature and experience must be true of an Indian's nature and experience. This is an essentialist episteme according to Inden.⁸⁵ The notion of *Atman-Brahman* seems to Abhishiktananda to be a concept redolent of isolation. However, compare Ramana Maharshi's statement: 'One who renounces desires actually merges in the world and expands his love to the whole universe.'⁸⁶

Statements from Ramana Maharshi are significant when dealing with Abhishiktananda's understanding of *Advaita*, as Maharshi affected him deeply. In speaking of isolation, Abhishiktananda is making a construction of *Advaita*. It is an enunciation of difference that, according to Maharshi's statement, does not have a referent. It aims to maintain the I-Thou of Christianity. But an *Advaitin* would not speak of the isolation a person experiencing unity between *Atman* and *Brahman*. To put words into Maharshi's mouth, 'From what could you be isolated?' It is essentialist in assuming that different cultures will experience unity similarly, and also maintains that the *Advaitin* cannot, in fact, experience what the Christian can. Abhishiktananda, here and elsewhere, is enunciating a difference not simply of terminology or theology, but of the capacity within the *Advaitic* tradition. He does not allow that there may be different forms of non-duality.

The theme of loss of the individual self surfaces in *Saccidananda*. The Christian is not 'swallowed up "like a drop of water in the ocean,"'⁸⁷ yet in *Advaita* is required 'to make

⁸⁴ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p88

⁸⁵ Inden, 'Orientalist Constructions of India', p402

⁸⁶ Maharshi, *Be As You Are*, p79

⁸⁷ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p177

the final plunge into the abyss that attracts him so powerfully.⁸⁸ Abhishiktananda is experiencing the uncertain, shifting, nature of the Third Space, as suggested by the personal conflict he experienced, and seems to be feeling a separation from Christian certainties.

Opposed to such sense of loss, Abhishiktananda maintained that the Christian can go beyond *Advaita* in an experience of the Trinity – particularly into an experience of sonship in unity with the relationship between Trinitarian Father and Son. The Christian who experiences this is designated repeatedly throughout *Saccidananda* as a Christian *jnani*, or ‘knower’ – an enlightened Christian. Abhishiktananda does not use the terms ‘saint’ or ‘mystic’ for those who delve deeply into the Christian experience of God. This study is using the word ‘mimicry’ to indicate instances such as this – using the Hindu word *jnani*: *jna* = knowing; *jnana* = knowledge; *jnani* = one who knows, in the sense of knowing oneself as *Atman-Brahman*. Bhabha states that:

...colonial mimicry is a desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*...Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power.⁸⁹

Abhishiktananda’s use of the term *jnani* is often separate from the context of *Advaita*. The term has no ‘grammatical’ place in Christianity, and its use can be seen as representing an attempt to appropriate the Other and to somehow control the threat that *Advaita* presents to the concept and experience of the Trinity, which is, he claims, inaccessible to the *Advaitin*. It looks to tame *Advaita* into conformity with Trinitarian doctrine, by means of a borrowing.

To be clear, I am not maintaining that the use of the term *jnani* of a Christian is ‘wrong’, but is a non-grammatical borrowing that speaks of hybridity. If one maintains that knowledge of the Self, in its deepest sense, is the object of Christianity and has ultimate salvific value, then the use of *jnani* is appropriate. The same would be true if one believes

⁸⁸ Ibid, p195

⁸⁹ Bhabha, p86.

that knowledge or experience of the Trinity is the aim of Christianity, though the *jnana* of the *jnani* would be different in the two traditions. However, although there are a number of theologies of the atonement in the Christian faith, it would not be contentious to state that the aim of the Christian is to have faith in Christ and to act accordingly, and salvation is through this faith, that salvation being the goal. The use of *jnani* disrupts that basic grammatical relationship and produces a hybridity which shifts the emphasis from salvation to knowledge of self (or Self). Knowledge of the individual self is not unimportant in Christianity; it is the emphasis that has changed.

This notion of 'going beyond' the *Advaitic* experience appears in several places in *Saccidananda*:

Diversity harmonized in love, multiplicity transcended in communion – such is the marvelous experience of the Christian *jnani*. The Spirit has borne him beyond even the *Advaitic* experience of being into the mystery of Jesus' own experience...⁹⁰

This is a plain enunciation of difference – 'the same, but not quite'. *Advaita* gets close, but misses the mark – the Christian standpoint is defended. Needless to say, an *Advaitin* would maintain that *Advaita* opens the door to a total experience of all that is, but Abhishiktananda is maintaining that this further experience is not known in *Advaita*. Yet he still refers to a Christian *jnani*. He wishes to claim that connection, but to define a difference. It is like Huddart's 'sameness simultaneously recognized and repudiated', which leads to anxiety.⁹¹

What Abhishiktananda cannot seem to do at this point in the development of his understanding in 1965 is to allow *Advaita* a full experience, even though his whole journey thus far has told him how much value there is in *Advaita*. At the same time, he cannot simply allow Christianity to be itself and *Advaita* to be itself, different in a particularist sense, that they both are valid in their totality and in their context, that they can learn from each other as Clooney suggests, or that resonances can be explored as

⁹⁰ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p134

⁹¹ Huddart, pp5-6

suggested by Christopher Brown. As he did 'give in' more to *Advaita* over the coming years, and dropped some of his qualifications of the experience of non-duality as found in the system, Abhishiktananda's personal suffering became greater, as he lived trying to stay faithful to both traditions.

The Western theological imaginary posits a unique identity for the individual and the individual soul, and *Atman* cannot be matched comfortably with 'soul'. *Advaita* does not claim that 'this *Atman* can become *Brahman*', or lose itself in *Brahman*, or realize *Brahman*, or find unity with *Brahman*. It is not the equivalent of the Christian soul finding a home, rest or peace in God. The identity of *Atman* and *Brahman* is a fact of *Advaita* (the fact of *Advaita*, for everyone, at all times), not something to be achieved through meditation or self-discipline, which are there to remove ignorance (*avidya*) of this truth. The confusion of soul and *Atman* led Abhishiktananda into worries about loss of personal identity, as shown in the use of the word 'abyss' in the quotation above – the loss of not only self, but also the contents of faith. This is a theme which appears in Abhishiktananda's diaries, right up to nearly the end of his life, and which was only resolved after his last heart attack. In him, the two systems of faith do collide quite spectacularly, because he took both so very personally and felt the incongruity between the two very deeply. Said's statement that, 'the Orientalist makes it his work to be always converting the Orient from something into something else,'⁹² gives a clear lead in showing what is happening here – the attempt to turn the *Atman-Brahman* relationship into the soul-God relationship, and for Abhishiktananda the anxiety that follows upon the feared destruction of the unique and personal elements of the latter.

The subtlety of the relationship between the *jiva* and *Atman* is expressed by Śankara as follows:

That individual soul is to be considered a mere appearance of the highest Self, like the reflection of the sun in the water: it is neither directly that (i.e. the highest Self), nor a different thing.⁹³

⁹² Said, p76

⁹³ Śankara, *Vedanta Sūtras with the Commentary by Sankarakarya*, II.3.50

A second translation has:

The individual soul is not directly the highest *Atman*, because it is seen to be different on account of the *upadhis* [limiting adjuncts]; nor is it different from the *Atman*, because it is the *Atman* who has entered as the *jivatman* in all the bodies. We may call the *jiva* as a mere reflection of the *Atman*.⁹⁴

Griffiths also defends the status of the individual soul, when he writes: 'We have to show the Hindu in the light of our faith, that in this ultimate experience of God, the absolute being, the world and the soul are not lost, nor is the personal being of God absorbed in the impersonal Godhead.'⁹⁵ For him, the 'face-to-face' that Abhishiktananda claims is absent in *Advaita* is present in the highest levels of consciousness. Those who attain *Advaitic* unity may say that in such unity there is no worship or love, but beyond such unity 'there is activity, there is love, there is adoration.'⁹⁶

Proposing an experience which is beyond *Advaitic* unity is not a main theme for Griffiths as it is for Abhishiktananda, and his treatment of it does not contain that sense of fear at a supposed loss of identity which is found in the latter's writing. His claim that we 'discover ourselves to be in communion with everyone and everything'⁹⁷ accords with Maharshi's view quoted above about the expansion of love, and he in fact moves away from pure *Advaita* in appealing to a notion of 'ideas' in God as found in Aquinas when he states that '...the supreme being...contain[s] within itself all the multiplicity of creatures in their principles or "ideas" in the simple unity of its being.'⁹⁸ In Indian terms this relates to Ramanuja's *Vishishtadvaita*, or 'qualified' *Advaita*, rather than to Śankara's *Advaita*.

Abhishiktananda leaves entirely alone the topic of reincarnation, but Griffiths attempts to ameliorate the quite stark contrast with Christian doctrine by appealing to Ananda Coomaraswamy's view that the Lord is the only transmigrator who transmutes,⁹⁹ rather

⁹⁴ Śankara, *Brahmsutrābhāṣya*, II.3.50,

⁹⁵ Griffiths, *Christ in India*, p173

⁹⁶ Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, p273

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p123

⁹⁸ Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, p94

⁹⁹ Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, p14

than the *jivatman*.¹⁰⁰ Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) was an early interpreter of Indian culture to the West. He quotes Śankara's statement in the *Brahmasutra Bhashya*, (1.1.5) 'Verily there is no other transmigrant but the Lord,'¹⁰¹ but Śankara goes on immediately to state that the Lord has 'limiting adjuncts', i.e. is known as the *jivatman*. The problem with Coomaraswamy's solution is that it renders the concept of reincarnation redundant. Griffiths interprets him as saying that the *Atman* reincarnates, but *Atman* is already present in all persons by definition, and is the only unchanging reality within each person, according to *Vedanta*. It does not transmigrate; it simply is present. This version of reincarnation is an attempt to do away with a concept not acceptable to Western Christian thought, and Griffiths achieves this by abolishing it. It would be fair to say that he is failing to understand another religion in its own terms. It is an example of where systems of belief can be so different that no meaningful conflict can be posited, let alone similarity.¹⁰²

Griffiths also deals with the relationship between *Atman* and soul, but in his writing, hybridization is more apparent and anxiety less in evidence:

The experience of the *Atman* in Hindu tradition is the soul's direct intuition of itself, in which the subject and object are no longer distinguished; the knower, the thing known and the act of knowing are all one. In this experience the soul goes beyond itself, that is beyond its phenomenal being, and reaches the transcendent Self in the consciousness of infinite, transcendent Being.¹⁰³

This is very close to Clooney's fear that the real goal of comparative theology can appear to be 'to discern some truth parsed according to the norms of Christian theology,'¹⁰⁴ or in Orientalist terms it is attempting to make the Orient 'something like' the West. The Christian concept of soul is not equatable with *Atman*, corresponding more to the *jivatman*, with its limiting adjuncts. Griffiths, in suggesting that the 'soul's direct intuition of *itself*' takes the soul beyond itself to the Supreme Being, takes a step further and

¹⁰⁰ See Coomaraswami, pp66-87

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p66

¹⁰² See Brown, p164

¹⁰³ Griffiths, *Vedanta and Christian Faith*, p21

¹⁰⁴ Clooney, Clooney, Francis X, 'Comparative Theology' in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, p666

conflates soul and *Atman*. The distinction in *Advaita* between supreme Being, which has unity with *Atman*, and *jiva* (living being) or *jivatman* (individual essence or soul) is important. The *Upanishads* have two passages which refer to 'two enjoyers' or of two birds living in the same tree. In both cases one of the two is engrossed in the results of action, the other 'looks on without eating'¹⁰⁵ or is as light to dark.¹⁰⁶ The ancient fable of two birds goes back to the *Rig Veda*, and the meaning is explained in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, a later *Purana*:

Two birds with fair wings, knit with the bonds of friendship, in the same sheltering tree have found a refuge. One of the two eats the sweet fig-tree's fruit; the other eating not looks on.¹⁰⁷

Two birds, namely, *Īśvara* and the *Jiva* — both conscious entities and both friends through eternity, reside by chance as it were, in the same nest on the same tree of the body. Of these, one bird, the *Jiva*, eats the fruits of that tree, while the other, *Īśvara*, though not eating the fruits, thrives splendidly on the same tree...Being engulfed in beginningless *avidya* (ignorance), [the *jiva*] is ever bound, while *Īśvara*, who is of the nature of *vidya* (knowledge), is ever liberated.¹⁰⁸

The *jivatman*, eating the fruit of action, is more akin to the human soul, subject to the fruit of its action, than is supreme *Atman*, which is of the same nature as *Paramatman* or *Brahman*. In the analogy of the two birds, the second bird is said in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* to be *Īśvara*, often described as *saguna Brahman*, *Brahman*, the Lord of *Maya*, rather than *nirguna Brahman*, who stands apart from all manifestation.

The conflation of *Atman* and soul is therefore fraught with contradictions. The suggestion that the soul can experience *Atman*, as can the *jivatman* when it attains true knowledge, would be an example of interfaith learning if one maintained that the soul can attain unity with supreme Being, or hybridity if one sees this correlation as a change in the understanding of soul. An *Atman*-soul identity is novel to both systems of belief, and

¹⁰⁵ Śankara, *Eight Upanishads, vol 2, Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.1.1

¹⁰⁶ Śankara, *Eight Upanishads, vol 1, Katha Upanishad*, 1.3.1

¹⁰⁷ *The Hymns of the Rgveda*, 1.164.20

¹⁰⁸ *Srimad Bhagavatam, Vol. 4, 11:11:6-7*

encompasses the eternal from both Christianity and *Advaita*, the sin-bearing nature from the former, and the identity with supreme Being from the latter, to name only three of its supposed qualities. This identity would have considerable implications for a faith in which it was contained, and it belongs in neither the traditions of *Advaita* nor of Christianity. This is not the same as to say it is theologically 'wrong', simply that it is a new hybridity or new learning – an identity which changes the nature of the two components of which it is formed.

Griffiths' attempts to tackle the fact that the concept of sin and original sin is incommensurable with classical *Advaita*, stating in *River of Compassion* that *karma* is 'closely akin to the Christian idea of original sin. We are all born into this condition as a result of primordial sin, without being able to help it,'¹⁰⁹ although he draws a distinction between the two later in the same book.¹¹⁰ He connects sin with *maya*,¹¹¹ and elsewhere he defines original sin as a mystery. He writes:

It is only in the light of that infinite wisdom which transcends reason, that we can have any understanding of the mystery. In the doctrine of Sankara there is, of course, no problem; original sin is simply the state of ignorance, of blindness, by which the mind falls from the pure consciousness of the *Atman* and imagines the unreal world.¹¹²

If one is looking for a parallel in *Advaita* for 'sin', then the obvious choices are *sanskara*, or *karma*, the former being the imprint of action on the individual, the latter being the results of that imprint. *Sanskara* and *karma* affect the *jiva*, in this life and future lives – they do not attach to the *Atman*.

¹⁰⁹ Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, p165

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p213

¹¹¹ Griffiths, *Return to the Centre*, p28

¹¹² Griffiths, *Vedanta and Christian Faith*, p52. *Vedanta and Christian Faith* was published in 1973, but twelve years earlier, in a letter to Richard Rumbold, Griffiths was defending a much more orthodox view of original sin, based on childhood experiences 'fixed' for later life, and personal wrong choices (Griffiths, *On Friendship*, pp 182-183). He expresses, in 1956, in a letter to Rumbold, the view that 'the great weakness of both Buddhism and Hinduism [is] that they do not sufficiently face the reality of evil (Griffiths, *On Friendship*, p146). In 1957 he maintains the view that suffering is a result of 'evil in us', and is not the result of a 'malignant fate' (Griffiths, *On Friendship*, p155), so is seeking a personal cause for suffering, which could relate to the idea of *Karma*; he does not express it in these terms, though he does try to convince Richard Rumbold that his disease 'arises from your nature' (Griffiths, *On Friendship*, p155). In 1966 he is maintaining that 'Sin is not an illusion which can be dispelled by knowledge but a fault in our nature for which atonement has to be made' (Griffiths, *Christ in India*, p31).

Original sin, in the Christian tradition is caused by disobedience, not by ignorance; it is a conscious decision, at least at the outset. *Avidya* leads to identification with the material world, and with actions and the results of actions; that leads to *sanskara*, or the imprint on the individual's *chitta* (subconscious mind or heart) which affect *karma*. Another candidate for a comparison with 'soul', therefore, would be *chitta*, being the organ upon which the past imprints. Disobedience leads to sin, which in the Christian tradition (unlike a possible interpretation of the Hebrew tradition) does not produce a future store of events or reactions to events, but produces a separation from God. Sin also has strong moral overtones, involving separation from a God who judges between right and wrong. Ramanuja's *Brahman* has such a moral sense, but classic *Advaita's Brahman* is above right and wrong – it contains no opposites of this nature. Griffiths has, however, just rejected Ramanuja's understanding of *Brahman* a few pages earlier in *Christian Faith and Vedanta*.

Griffiths is here either constructing *Advaita's Brahman* as a moral being, or constructing Christian original sin as morally neutral. He does not define which he is doing. He could be creating a hybridity by choosing a point mid-way between the two; a *Brahman* that is more concerned with right and wrong in the world, and an original sin that can be made void by knowledge, for example. This study is not suggesting that such a hybridity is wrong, simply that it is a hybridization. If he is not proposing a hybridity it could be claimed that Griffiths' borrowing of *avidya* from *Advaita* is an example of mimicry, since the use of *avidya* in Christianity does not link with Christian grammar, as indeed original sin finds no place in *Advaitic* grammar.

The attempt to seek congruence between sin and *avidya* is one example of the problems inherent in a Third Space in which two traditions are meeting, and in which understanding and learning is pursued. Had Abhishiktananda and Griffiths not attempted to comprehend and use the insights of *Advaita* such problems would not exist, but their honest endeavours to encounter *Advaita* with open minds produced the processes which are the subject of this research. These last two chapters have indicated hybridities, constructions, mimicries and other movements in their Third Space, and the changes which occur in each tradition. Whether such changes are fundamental or even destructive must be concluded by each reader of their work, as must be the value of the

insights they provide. It now remains to investigate the potential within their work to expand religious vision, the opportunities they give their readers to re-examine their own traditions in the light of another, and the pitfalls it leaves for the unwary who assume too easily that two cultural and religious traditions can be conflated without changes occurring in each.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The purpose of this conclusion is to summarize the results of the analysis in the previous two chapters, and to show, by the conclusions reached, that new insights into the interreligious space occupied by Abhishiktananda and Griffiths are given by employing the methodology that has been proposed in this research. Before doing this, however, there are three important points which have arisen as a result of this research and which need clarification. The first is the nature of the response of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths to India itself and the difference between this and Orientalism, the second is the absence in the main of a treatment of Christian ethics in their writing, and the third is the distinction apparent in this research between an inclusive and a particularist approach to the relationship between traditions.

Firstly, then, it is clear from their statements about their first impressions of the sub-continent that both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths experienced strong emotional responses to India. It is not unreasonable to describe these as romantic views, and I have made a connection here with Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* to give an indication that all experiences of place and space have an emotional content. It would be strange indeed had these two authors not experienced a strong reaction. To quote from Lonely Planet's *India*: 'It's a place that fires the imagination and stirs the soul like nowhere else on earth.'¹ I have also made a connection with India's own approach to place and space, its understanding of sacred locations and *tirthas*, or 'crossing places', its placing of meaning on the natural world, and its spiritualization of place which sometimes excludes the practical.

However, beside the sensory overload to which many travel sites refer, there appears in the approach of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths an Orientalist romanticism that has its own consequences. Jukka Jouhki has written of the European romantic view of the Indian Village, sometimes shared by Indians, but which also describes an Orientalist romanticism that hoped to 'help the West...regain something from the lost spirituality of Europe.'² He

¹ India, p2

² Jouhki, p10

notes Said's own description of a 'Romantic Orientalism that sought to regenerate materialistic and mechanistic Europe by Indian culture, religion and spirituality.'³ So besides the romance or poetics of space that in itself is a reaction to sensory stimulation and to strangeness, there is 'romanticism with a purpose', the Orientalist romanticism that has an agenda.

I would suggest that both of these work together, the former giving power to the latter. It is, however, the latter which for a westerner is self-referential. In the former a comparison of the Orient with the Occident is not necessary; in the latter it is the substance of the romanticism. I would further argue that, though the comparison of Christianity and *Advaita* in the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths produces immense and valuable insights, it is also in this reference of India back to the West in their work that some of the key components of Christianity are lost.

Secondly, then, relating to Christian ethics, reading their work it is perfectly possible to miss the fact that Christianity speaks of day-to-day life and its morality, of how to live an ordinary life, and of how to find spiritual meaning and fulfilment within such a life. This is quite substantially caused by the difference between a Western view of religion with its description of lived ethics, and the more socially structured Indian view of the ethical demands of *Dharma*. The two do not fit together to provide a seamless account of how to live. The wider Christian view of lived ethics does not, in general, give preferential status to particular social positions, nor propose a spiritual elite, quite the reverse in fact, although Christian ethics has also operated historically in highly hierarchical societies. The Hindu view of ethics traditionally references *varna* or caste, and assumes a highly structured society that has religious relevance as a given ethical element. The Hindu ethical system is also quite specific in terms of formal religious duties, while the Western ethical system is not. Whilst the modern Indian view of both *varna* and formal religious duties may have changed, such is the basis for the Hindu view of ethics.⁴

³ Ibid, p6

⁴ An early twentieth-century treatment of Hindi ethics, *Sanatana Dharma: an Advanced Textbook of Hindu Religion and Ethics*, from the Central Hindu College, Benares, provides a good insight into the traditional view of ethics, including chapters on virtues and vices in relation to inferiors, equals, and superiors. It proposes the promotion of happiness as the main aim of ethics, whilst distinguishing between the Hindu and the utilitarian view.

In referring from *Advaita* back to Christianity, the Christian social ethic and the social gospel is largely lost in the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, because there is nothing comparable to refer from, the view of social structure being so very different in *Advaita*. The significant fact is not this difference, but the fact that it leads Abhishiktananda and Griffiths to neglect a treatment of Christian ethics. In the process they also largely ignore the fact that *Advaita* is placed within the wider Hindu social structure and the ethical structure which flows from this. In other words, they lose Hindu ethics as well as Christian ethics, mainly because of the problems in relating *Advaita* to Christianity. Whilst their focus almost entirely on the individual and his or her experience may be acceptable in terms of *Advaita*, it is hardly so in terms of a treatment of Christianity, since in the Gospel accounts and in subsequent Christian theology ethical teaching has played such a prominent part. Griffiths' concern with a more 'natural', less industrialized society links with current ecological issues, but not so much in terms of a social ethic.

It is tempting to assume that writers on spirituality or mysticism must, by definition, omit consideration of social concerns. However, although there may be a particular emphasis in such writing, there are examples where spirituality and social concern are brought together by the same writer. Such a one is Thomas Merton, who 'experienced an awakening of social consciousness in the sixties,'⁵ during which decade, 'most of what he wrote related directly or indirectly to the problems of society.'⁶ The lack of an adequate treatment of social concern in the writing of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths must be seen as a major, maybe *the* major, failing in their theology, resulting in a partial representation of Christianity. Xavier Gravend-Tirole expresses this in his essay on the move that he sees happening from Christian *ashrams* to *Dalit* theology:

Pursuing the inculturation of Christianity, particularly through the use of Sanskritic and upper-caste Hindu symbols and practices (as it generally has been done) is perceived by many Dalits as giving Christian sanction to an oppressive, inegalitarian and evil culture. Conversely, Christian social work seeking justice for Dalits and other

⁵ McInerney, p38

⁶ Ibid, p39

oppressed communities would appear, on the surface at least, to require the rejection of Hinduism-reinforced Indian culture and therefore the project of inculturation itself.⁷

Gravend-Tirole states the case in an outspoken manner, and there is much scope for further research in how upper-caste and *Dalit* traditions can both be represented in Christian theology. He sees it in terms of an emerging contextual theology which incorporates both *Brahminical* and *Dalit* perspectives, and which includes feminist, liberational and ecological theologies.

Thirdly, concerning the relationship between inclusivity and particularity, Paul Hedges suggests that there is a major contemporary division in theology, and this in the context of the modern world in which contact between religions is becoming culturally unavoidable. He sees the split as between 'modernists' or 'liberals', and 'post-liberals' or 'particularists' who draw much of their conceptual framework from post-modernism.

Liberal theologians believe theology is in a new era after the Enlightenment, which is seen as a positive influence which has allowed us to shake off the shackles of tradition and theological dogma. In this situation all old doctrines and organizations are questionable and must be judged using the methods of historical criticism, contemporary understanding, reason and morality.⁸

Post-liberal theologians, on the other hand,

believe theology must reject the Enlightenment heritage and 'free' itself from the shackles of historical criticism to look upon its own internal integrity as the source of its understanding. Christianity is seen as a narrative that must be accepted on its own terms, therefore doctrines formed within this context are considered non-negotiable.⁹

In the terms of this study and interreligious learning therefore, the liberal theologians are likely to be open to insights brought in from other traditions but be less wedded to

⁷ Gravend-Tirole, pp129-130

⁸ Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*, p14

⁹ *Ibid*, pp14-15

Christian tradition and doctrine. The post-liberals, on the other hand, observe the particularity of Christianity, but may be unable to learn from a tradition which is incommensurable to some degree with it. In a situation of religious meeting, as is the situation in the twenty-first century, it could be said critically of each that, of the two, the former is most likely to lose what is valuable in Christian tradition, whilst the latter is most likely to miss new insights that would be valuable to the Christian tradition.

The encounter with other religious traditions is now not only inevitable, but is also a major way in which religious traditions, including Christianity, could develop and grow. This has already become apparent in the interest shown in the West in religions and religious practices from the East. Richard Wayne Lee begins his sociological examination of Christianity and other religions by stating that, as opposed to earlier intolerance of other traditions, 'lately institutional Christianity seems to be doing an about face.'¹⁰ More generally, the interest includes exploration of, for example, methods of meditation such as are found in Hinduism and reflected in the work of John Main, and attitudes to living such as are found in Buddhism and reflected in the work of Thomas Merton. However, I maintain that there is a need to keep hold of the concept of alterity amongst religions. Christians can be Christians, Hindus can be Hindus, and Buddhists can be Buddhists, all confident in traditions which develop as humanity and the world change, but which reach back through the centuries to their founders and their theological masters, who provided the ground upon which they now stand.

This implies that a circle needs to be squared between a tradition that can learn and a tradition which holds to its own internal integrity, both being essential if traditions are to remain both relevant and coherent. I believe this study has shown that what is required is close observation and awareness of what is occurring in the space in which religions meet – in the Third Space of encounter. Those involved in learning from other traditions need to recognize when they are constructing the Other because they are using their own theology to construe what is different. They need to know when they are enunciating a difference simply to preserve their own position, or when an imported term or mimicked concept does not have grammatical relationship with the rest of the tradition. Where anxiety about one's own tradition surfaces, an uncertainty as to where interreligious

¹⁰ Lee, pp125-139

dialogue is leading, there needs to be a recognition that it relates to a relationship between sameness and alterity, the 'same but not quite' of Third Space theory. Such awareness of movements within the Third Space are an acknowledgement of the particularity of traditions, but also allow the theologian to fully understand the hybridities which are being developed, and the interreligious learning that such hybridities may lead to.

Tuning now to the more detailed analysis with which this research is concerned, and focussing on what has been discovered in the last two chapters, it is necessary to note that to a considerable extent both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were aware of the shifting and uncertain nature of the encounter they were engaged in, which I have defined as work within the Third Space. Griffiths writes that there are 'innumerable Hindu doctrines which one can compare with similar Christian doctrines, but it is difficult to reach any agreement.'¹¹ He writes of different religious traditions and states that 'one must learn to discern among these conflicting and partial views the principle that unites them.'¹² He warns that the experience of Hindu scripture can easily throw the spiritually immature off balance,¹³ and maintains that anything challenging in *Advaita* must be 'tested by whether it is true to Christ and to that which God revealed in Christ.'¹⁴ Concerning Christianity and *Advaita*, however, it is his firm belief that 'these two complementary approaches have to meet and share'.¹⁵ In his own words, he delineates the shifting and liminal nature of the space he was in, with commitment to both traditions alongside a recognition of the difficulties involved.

Abhishiktananda is, if anything, more specific about the difficulties and dangers he perceives in his position. His writing, he admits has the defects of

...lack of clarity, continual use of approximations, parallels drawn with insufficient qualifications, difficulties over language, undue importance accorded to particular

¹¹ Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*, p16

¹² Griffiths, *Return to the Centre*, p107

¹³ Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*, p17

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p8

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p25

aspects of a question to the detriment of possibly more fruitful points of view, and above all the dangers of one-sided and mistaken interpretation.¹⁶

Elsewhere he admits that he may be 'accused of having gone too far in giving an interpretation of Hindu mystical experience which would be favourable from a Christian point of view,'¹⁷ and also that the Christian runs the risk 'of constructing for his own use a Christian version of Advaita which excludes on principle anything that does not fit into a previously determined framework.'¹⁸ These acknowledgments on the part of both authors only serve to underline the fact that the findings outlined in chapters five and six of this research are not criticisms of two writers who blindly thought they had found an easy congruence between *Advaita* and Christianity, or that their speculations were final conclusions, but instead relate to two men who were aware of the uncertainties with which they were working. The fact that they were aware of the exploratory and provisional nature of their theologies tends, in fact, to support the thesis of this research, and that they were working in a Third Space of encounter.

The results of the detailed analysis of the texts appears in chapters five and six, but a summary is appropriate here, firstly of the results relating to comparative theology, and secondly of those relating to the postcolonial approach which this research has adopted.

As noted in chapter three, Paul Hedges suggests that new comparative theology does not generalize about other religions or claim supremacy over the other. It regards interreligious reflection and the practice of dialogue as parts of one process and its practitioners are open to new insights and attempt to understand other religions in their own terms.¹⁹ There are limited claims of supremacy for Christianity in the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, mainly in the two areas of a tendency at times towards fulfilment theology, and of a claimed higher spirituality in a 'personal' relationship with the divine. There is a degree of generalization which does not always understand *Advaita* in its own terms. However, both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths meet Hedges requirement that the theological reflection must be part and parcel with interreligious dialogue.

¹⁶ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p225

¹⁷ Ibid, p194

¹⁸ Abhishiktananda, *Hindu Christian Meeting Point*, p95

¹⁹ See Hedges, 'The Old and New Comparative Theologies', p1125

Francis Clooney proposes that ‘...comparison [of religions] is a reflective and contemplative endeavor by which we see the other in the light of our own, and our own in the light of the other...we understand each differently because the other is near.’²⁰ This was certainly true of both authors, although the movement of their thinking was largely towards Christianity, in that it was in this tradition that they proposed most change. The complaint of some Hindus was not that they were proposing changes in *Advaita*, but that a deceptive mimicry was taking place. Their appropriation of the insights of *Advaita* were undoubtedly complex and interreligious,²¹ as Clooney requires, but there was a tendency to downplay the very different way in which *Advaita* ‘does’ theology.²² This is most notable in the proposition which underlies much of their writing that concepts of non-duality must look the same in the two traditions, and that what is a much clearer statement in *Advaita* shows a fundamental fault-line in Christianity, rather than a different theological approach to the whole question which has a different starting point. The transformation which Nugteren maintains is central to Clooney’s view of comparative theology²³ is plainly there in abundance in the work of both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. Their Christian theologies were massively transformed in the encounter with *Advaita*. The area in which Clooney had an argument with the Christian *Ashrams* was in their intellectual rigour, or lack thereof, which was the point he made in his letter to *Hinduism Today* in 1987,²⁴ referred to in chapter two.

The degree to which both authors reached out to another tradition in the hope of gathering insights was remarkable, both in its day, and also by today’s standards, considering their ongoing commitment to the Christian tradition throughout their exploration. They made themselves vulnerable, in Moyaert’s terms,²⁵ and both paid the price in their own ways: Abhishiktananda in terms of personal suffering; Griffiths in the frustrations he felt due to the lack of response to his work on the part of *Advaitins* and adverse reaction on the part of some Christians. Cornille’s conditions for interreligious

²⁰ Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Boundaries*, p11.

²¹ See *Ibid*, p11.

²² See Clooney, ‘Comparative Theology’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, p660.

²³ See Nugteren, p151

²⁴ Quoted in Goel, *Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?* Section III/12.

²⁵ Moyaert, p1146

dialogue²⁶ are fully met, and possibly never more so. Both authors, whilst remaining within the discipline of the Roman Catholic Church believed that a genuine connection with *Advaita* was possible, sought to understand the other tradition and did the work involved, showed considerable theological imagination in their attempts to integrate new insights, and above all were prepared to countenance the possibility of change in their own tradition.

Two notions, firstly of theological grammar or the way that the parts of a theological structure relate to and support each other, and secondly of theological imaginary or the theological landscape in which one lives, have been useful in analyzing the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. Ankur Barua has defined the former as ‘regulative principles or grammatical rules of the Christian conceptual system.’²⁷ Concerning the latter, Charles Taylor has stated that ‘...the religious language, capacities, and modes of experience available to each of us comes from the society in which we are born....’²⁸ Although theological grammar and imaginary are two different concepts found in different sources, they both refer to structure, the former to the expression of a tradition, and the latter to the way in which each person encounters that tradition in their acculturation.

In terms of grammar, Abhishiktananda’s use of the word *jnani* is an example of problematic language and finds no place in Christian grammar unless he is proposing a change in its theological imaginary which places a unity such as *Aham Brahmasmi* at its centre. Griffiths’ attempt to find an equivalence with soul in *Advaita* is again theologically ungrammatical, proposing a change in *Advaita*’s understanding of the *antahkarana* or subtle mind, or to the *jivatman*, or self. Both would be a change in *Advaita*’s theological imaginary, the way in which that tradition understands the person to relate to the divine. Griffiths hits a similar problem in ungrammatically equating sin and *avidya*, or ignorance. The theological imaginary of at least one tradition, and possibly both, is changed. There are a number of other examples outlined in chapters five and six.

Abhishiktananda writes of Christ discovering his Father’s will,

²⁶ Cornille, ‘Conditions for Interreligious Dialogue’

²⁷ Barua, web version p8

²⁸ Taylor, Charles, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, p52

in all the circumstances of his incarnation in time, in his cultural, racial and family background, in everything that 'defined him' in space and time, all that 'concretized' him as a man, as this man.²⁹

He also states that it follows from this

that the Church, like her Lord in the days of his earthly life, is called to discern the Father's will for her in all the historical, social and cultural circumstances in which she actually finds herself.³⁰

Also, on the various forms that spirituality appears, to the uninstructed, to take, he states that 'their awareness of it is gained at the mental level: for mental processes are inevitably conditioned by the philosophical, cultural and religious environment of the individual.'³¹ In these passages Abhishiktananda is clearly referring to theological imaginaries, and the work of both authors poses the question as to what extent theological imaginaries change within processes of interreligious learning.

Abhishiktananda also wrote of the need to 'outgrow the limitations inherent in every particular tradition,'³² and it is clear that for both he and Griffiths, their willingness to countenance change in their tradition did not imply minor changes at the edges, but substantial rethinking which would change the theological landscape of Christianity – its theological imaginary. Whether such substantial rethinking of a tradition can be successfully achieved on the basis of theological grammar which does not coincide with its conceptual structure is a different question.

In many ways, their unwillingness to deal adequately with incommensurability and with the fact that there are areas in which Christianity and *Advaita* simply do not meet in conceptual terms, backed them into a corner. John Cobb's view is that dialogue at its best leads to the transformation of both dialogue partners' understandings of their traditions. He writes that he has 'learnt enough about some other traditions to

²⁹ Abhishiktananda, *Hindu Christian Meeting Point*, p39

³⁰ *Ibid*, p40

³¹ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p78

³² Abhishiktananda, *Hindu Christian Meeting Point*, pxiii

understand something of the wisdom their understanding has for my understanding of Christianity.³³ He is writing of gaining insight, of dialogue in which he works within his own tradition. It is clear that the immersive nature of Abhishiktananda's and Griffiths' encounter with *Advaita* was different in nature, and that in their Third Space the boundaries between traditions became considerably more uncertain than is implied by Cobb's statement.

A number of constructions of both *Advaita* and Christianity have been identified in preceding chapters, and these present probably the greatest impediment to a true meeting between the two religious traditions. A construction of the Other, strictly speaking, has no referent other than in the apprehension of the one making the construction. Abhishiktananda's and Griffiths' constructions of Christianity were often negative ones, which construct a Christianity without the spiritual depth of *Advaita*. This is not to say they held that Christianity had less depth, only that in their attempts at comparison they often define Christianity as the opposite of *Advaita*, and are led into constructions which they would quite possibly not hold to had they been examined in isolation from the comparison. In terms of self-construction, both authors, for example, are led into statements which imply that Christianity has little or no significant mystical tradition, a tradition of which both were fully aware.

Abhishiktananda provides something of a key to understanding constructions of *Advaita*, when he states, as already quoted, that the Christian runs the risk 'of constructing for his own use a Christian version of *Advaita* which excludes on principle anything that does not fit into a previously determined framework.'³⁴ Abhishiktananda is here making clear that for both authors it is in the process of comparison and in their attempt to find a meeting that construction takes place. I would argue that the 'previously determined framework' which Abhishiktananda is referring to is the emerging hybridity between Christianity and *Advaita* that was developing in his thought. In other words, Griffiths' and Abhishiktananda's nascent theological imaginaries had their own requirements in terms of the conformity of concepts that were to be integrated into them.

³³ Cobb, pxi

³⁴ Abhishiktananda, *Hindu Christian Meeting Point*, p95

From Bhabha's theories, mimicry, enunciation, anxiety and hybridization have been identified. There has rarely been the acknowledgment that these processes are taking place. There has been a disinclination to allow that "'God" can be "God" [and] "Brahman" can be "Brahman" ... without any reductionist attempt to equate the concept of "God" with that of "Brahman"', to repeat an earlier quotation from Katz,³⁵ and therefore a disinclination to value a particularist point of view. The attempt to find congruence and similarity has led to comparisons which are 'the same but not quite,' and constructions of the other where it would be more appropriate to find resonances which sent the theologian back to reflect on implications of the resonance for a deeper understanding of her or his own tradition.

I am not proposing a value judgement about the fact that such movements or processes take place in the writing of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. In their deeply immersed experience of a Third Space between Christianity and *Advaita*, such movements and processes are inevitable according to the postcolonial theory of the meeting of cultures and the Third Space theory of Homi Bhabha. This study has attempted to show that such processes take place even in the absence of involvement with the institutional power structures usually present in colonial or post-colonial situations.

In their moves towards hybridity, both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths are fulfilling Cornille's first requirement of multiple religious belonging, in that it is 'generally predicated on the belief in the unity of all religious experiences.'³⁶ Cornille's requirement to recognize the complementarity of religions by acknowledging the authentic and distinct nature of truth operative in another religion³⁷ is only partially fulfilled, as they do not always acknowledge the distinctions that a full acceptance of the particularity of each religion requires. I use the word 'particularity' not in Lindbeck's fully postmodernist sense,³⁸ which reduces religion solely to cultural and linguistic frameworks, but more in the sense implied by Ankur Barua,³⁹ who emphasizes the radical distinctiveness of religious traditions. Cornille also holds that religious belonging is accorded to individuals by the relevant traditions. To some extent both were accepted in India as *sannyasi*,

³⁵ Katz, p66

³⁶ *Many Mansions*, p5

³⁷ *Ibid*, p6

³⁸ For a lucid critique of Lindbeck's particularist view, see Hedges, 'The Inter-Relationship of Religions'

³⁹ Barua, pp215-237

despite the vehement objections of some more conservative or nationalist Hindus, even though their existential 'status' remained Christian. However, their language and their use of concepts is undoubtedly of multiple belonging.

The question remains as to what value hybridity has in interreligious learning. I would argue that this research has shown it is a tool to be used in relating one tradition to another, and as such is one step in a learning process. The mark of interreligious learning must be its effect on accepted theological imaginaries and the extent to which they remain integrated and coherent; in the case of Christianity, its effect on these even given the variety of Christian theology and expressions. For interreligious learning to be embedded, it needs to be found, in Michael Barnes term, 'in the middle of things', as opposed to the notion that religious 'experience' is discrete from communities of faith.⁴⁰ Hybridities can therefore rarely be brought back complete, but a shift in understanding in a tradition can occur due to a hybridity's implications.

The example of Griffiths' *Purusha*-Christ hybridity explored in chapter six is a clear example of a combination of traditions that cannot be brought back complete into Christian theology. *Purusha* is too complex and varied in interpretation, and it is entirely unlikely that the Christian theological imaginary, as expressed in real communities of faith, would countenance the presence of an equivalent to Christ. However, Griffiths' hybridity may cause interreligious learning if the Christian community were to reflect on whether enough attention is paid to the eternal Word's connection with a primordial state of creation, of whom it is said, 'through him all things were made'.⁴¹ It may also help Christians to reflect on Christ seen in some sense as the 'authentic human' in the way that *Purusha* is seen as primordial man. Such is implied by St Paul's statement that '...in the knowledge of the Son of God [Christians may] become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.'⁴² Pope Benedict XVI has stated that being Christian 'means considering the way of Jesus Christ as the right way for being human as that way which leads to our destination, to a completely fulfilled and authentic humanity.'⁴³

⁴⁰ Barnes, *Interreligious Learning*

⁴¹ from the Nicene Creed

⁴² Ephesians 4:13

⁴³ Benedict XVI, paragraph 1

It is undoubtedly the case that both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths were, in their attempts to redefine some key Christian concepts, reacting to their own dissatisfaction with aspects of the 'factual', existent Christian theological imaginary in an attempt to achieve what they believed to be both desirable and realizable. It is also true, however, that neither gave up their commitment to Christianity, which implies that both saw within their faith the potential for taking on the insights that they believed they were discovering, despite the difficulties of developing theologies that adequately reflected those insights. However, in the position in which they placed themselves, immersed in two traditions, it seems unlikely that the measured and cautious judgments of comparative theology were possible for them.

Against all of those difficulties of interpretation, some of which have been identified in this research, can be placed the discovery of significant, some would say profound, spiritual insights gained by faithfully occupying a Third Space between Christianity and *Advaita*. Speaking from the Christian perspective, it could be claimed that the *Advaitic* experience of the unity between the divine and the deepest level of humanity is one which Christianity finds it difficult to express. If one believes it to be a true experience then it has the most profound significance for any religious life. The very clear expression of *Advaitic* experience found in the term *saccidananda* challenges Christians to explore the relationship of the human and the divine in their own tradition. The Christian concept of 'soul' is shown as rather ill-defined when placed against *Advaitic* concepts of the individual's spiritual make-up, and the latter can be used to interrogate the former. However, occupying the Third Space and noting differences between traditions can affirm the home tradition as well as question it; placing Christology alongside a tradition which does not possess a personal saviour in the same way leads to an exploration of the crucial nature of that central element of the Christian tradition and of the radical nature of the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Those from one tradition who reject another tradition cannot, by definition, occupy a Third Space between the two. Interreligious learning is not possible, and insights from different cultures are closed off. The occupation of a Third Space always presupposes a willingness to contemplate some degree of commerce between the two. For

Abhishiktananda and Griffiths there was a basic belief in the value of *Advaita* and the truth of its experience of unity between the individual and divinity. The belief in the value of the religious experience of other traditions was central to their lives. Griffiths in particular believed that the world and its cultures are, of necessity, moving to a greater contact with, and he hoped, to a greater understanding of, each other, and although it is not the concern of this study it appears to be a working hypothesis in a shrinking world. One could therefore propose that Third Spaces between religious traditions will become more and more common, and an understanding of what is happening within them more important.

A Third Space predicates hybridization. Because of the depth of involvement in another tradition necessary for a Third Space to genuinely exist, all the various movements or processes present in the Third Space lead to this result. Those who reject another tradition and cannot occupy a Third Space observe one religious particularity. However, it is not only they who have to observe the particularity of religious traditions. In a Third Space between two religious traditions two particularities have to be observed, and it is this that leads to the liminal, shifting and uncertain nature of such a space. Theological concepts become disconnected from their surrounding grammar; they struggle to take root in another tradition. The shape of traditions change as cornerstones are subtly or substantially changed or moved.

As both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths discovered, such hybridities have limited power easily to change mainstream religious traditions. In their writing, and particularly for Griffiths in his lecture tours, they attempted to make their discoveries known – what they had found in *Advaita* that they believed were insights needed by the Christian tradition. It remains to be seen what effect this has; it is only some fifty years since their work began to be known in the West, and that is a very short time in the development of Christian theology. It may be that future theologians will read them not simply as examples of an experiment in religious living, but as writers who have something important to say about the Christian faith.

If this happens, future theologians will focus on ‘bringing home’ what they discovered, and much as Aquinas ‘brought home’ the classical tradition to Christian theology, *Advaita*

will be incorporated into a new beginning for the Christian faith. It may be that as a focus on spirituality, as opposed to specific doctrinal beliefs, becomes more apparent in those seeking a religious belonging, their work will become more theologically formative within the mainstream. Griffiths' view was that: 'The age of scientific materialism which dominated the nineteenth century [in the West] is passing and a new age of spiritual wisdom is coming to birth.'⁴⁴ There is a literature which supports this view. For example, David Tacey states: 'We are caught in a difficult moment in history, stuck between a secular system we have outgrown and a religious system we cannot fully embrace.'⁴⁵ As the quotation suggests, his book *The Spiritual Revolution* is much concerned with the inability of established, institutional religion to meet a growing demand, particularly among young people, and the book itself, covering many of the varied expressions of spirituality to be found catering for personal spiritual experience, supports Griffiths' assertion. Paul McQuillan, in 'Youth Spirituality: A Reality in Search of Expression,' identifies research which suggests 'a growing interest in spirituality that is especially strong amongst youth.'⁴⁶ Such a move amongst seekers after faith is not the subject of this study, but an acknowledgement that secularism, according to some, is being accompanied by a new interest in more experiential spirituality, particularly among young people, suggests an importance for the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths. They both made attempts to bring new insights, in the main working outside of the institutional Church, and both anchored their explorations in personal spiritual experience. They certainly deserve no criticism for such a decision, but it left them with difficulties of theological expression.

The question as to how the work of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths has developed since their deaths, and how it could or should develop in the future, is beyond the scope of this study, but is an area ripe for further research. I would suggest that such research needs to focus not only on the present Christian *ashram* movement, but more widely on how the study of Hindu spirituality and *Advaita* in particular can produce insights for the whole of the Christian Gospel, including its social ethic and Christians' actions in the world. Christian theologians need to keep in mind the criticism of Gravend-Tirole above. The methodology outlined here will allow the theologian to closely scrutinize the nature

⁴⁴ Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, p26

⁴⁵ Tacey, p2

⁴⁶ McQuillan, p2

of the hybridities, the differences and similarities, and the renewed theological imaginaries that he or she is proposing. The reception of the work of these two authors has been covered in some detail in chapter two, but a glance at the internet will show that the interest in *Advaita* in the West is strong, both *Advaita* itself and also in its relation to Christianity. If this research can arm the theologian with tools that enable her or him to discern the conceptual movements that are taking place in this Third Space of encounter, then it will have done its job. Again, although the methodology of this study has been applied to two authors and to the meeting of two traditions, I can see no reason why it should not be of value when other traditions meet.

With regard to the meeting of Christianity and other traditions, Abhishiktananda, in his diaries, states that:

One who knows several mental (or religious or spiritual) languages is incapable of absolutizing any formulations whatsoever – of the gospel, of the Upanishads, of Buddhism etc. He can only bear witness to an experience – about which he can only stammer...⁴⁷

Although the stammerings which have resulted from Christianity's meeting with *Advaita* have made no dramatic impact on the general understanding of Christian theology so far, Abhishiktananda's words express the necessary humility in approaching other traditions. Though theology does not develop overnight both Abhishiktananda and Griffiths have had a great influence on many individuals. They broke new ground, and much can be learnt from their very considerable efforts to bridge what for centuries had seemed unbridgeable in any meaningful way. In the end, it will be the developing changes in the apprehensions of individuals which will change theology. In contrast to the liminal and shifting nature of the Third Space they occupied, the need is to bring home the lessons from *Advaita* and at the same time to retain the integrity of each tradition. I would maintain, as would I believe Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, that neither tradition need attempt to mimic the other, but that each can learn about its own depths in such an encounter. This may well require a greater consciousness of the particularity of each

⁴⁷ Quoted, *Bulletin of the Abhishiktananda Society*, 19, 1998, p1.

tradition, and an awareness that hybridization is itself only a part of the process of learning from another religion.

Bibliography

(NOTE: Where internet journals have recommended a form of citation, this has been adopted. 'npl' signifies no place of publication given, 'nd' that no date is given, and 'np' that there is no pagination. In the case of journal articles the full journal reference is given wherever possible, although where only a web version has been available the footnote may cite paragraph or section, indicating that original pagination is missing.)

1. Writing by Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths

Many of the first editions of books by both Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths are unobtainable or rare. The page numbers given in this thesis correspond with the editions listed. The date of first publication is given in square brackets.

Abhishiktananda, *Guru and Disciple* (London: SPCK, 1974) [contains *Mountain of the Lord*, published 1966, and *A Sage from the East*, published 1970]

——— *Hindu Christian Meeting Point*, rev. ed. (Delhi: ISPCK, 1976) [first published in French, 1965]

——— *Prayer* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2006) [first published 1967]

——— *Saccidananda*, rev. ed. (Delhi: ISPCK, 1984), [first published in French, 1965]

Abhishiktananda and Jules Monchanin, *Benedictine Ashram* (Douglas: Times Press, 1964) [first published as *Indian Benedictine Ashram*, 1951]

Griffiths, Bede, *Christ in India* (Springfield, ILL: Templegate, 1984) [first published 1966]

——— *The Cosmic Revelation: The Hindu Way to God*, (Springfield, ILL: Templegate, 1983)

——— *The Golden String*, (Glasgow: Collins Fount Paperbacks, 1979) [first published 1954]

——— *The Marriage of East and West* (Tuscon, AZ: Medio Media, 2003) [first published 1976]

——— *A New Vision of Reality* (London: Collins Fount Paperbacks, 1992) [first published 1989]

——— *On Friendship: Letters to Richard Rumbold 1946-1961*, ed. by Adrian Rance (Springfield, ILL: Templegate, 2014)

——— *Return to the Centre* (npl: Collins Fount Paperbacks, 1978) [first published 1976]

——— *River of Compassion* (Warwick NY: Amity House, 1987)

——— *Vedanta and Christian Faith* (Los Angeles, CAL: Dawn Horse Press, 1973)

2. Other Sources

Aguilar, Mario L, *Christian Ashrams, Hindu Caves and Sacred Rivers* (London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2016)

Aleaz, KP, 'The Convergence of Dalit-Advaitic Theologies : An exploration', *Indian Journal of Theology*, 36/1, 1994, 97-108

Allen, Douglas, *Mahatma Gandhi* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011)

Anthony, Kanu Ikechukwu, 'Inculturation and the Christian faith in Africa', *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2/17, 2012, 236-244

Aspiring to Fullness in a Secular Age: Essays on Religion and Theology in the Work of Charles Taylor, ed. by Carlos D. Colorado and Justin D. Klassen (Notre Dame IND: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014)

Aurobindo, *The Divine Life: The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vols 21 & 22, (Puducherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication, 2005)

Baago, Kaj, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity* (Chennai: Christian Literature Society, 1969)

Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969)

Balagangadhara, S. N., 'Comparing India and the West', *ASIANetwork Exchange*, 16/1, 2008, 57-63

Barnes, Michael, *Interreligious Learning: Dialogue, Spirituality and the Christian Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

—— 'The Guru in Hinduism', *The Way*, 1984, 146-153

Barua, Ankur, 'Interreligious Dialogue, Comparative Theology and the Alterity of Hindu Thought', *Studies in World Christianity*, 20/3, 2014, 215-237
<<https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1810/246353/ParticularismTheology.pdf?sequence=1>> [accessed 29/5/17] np

Bauman, Chad M., 'Postcolonial Anxiety and Anti-Conversion Sentiment in the Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee', *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 12/2, 2008, 181-213
<http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1108&context=facsch_papers> [accessed 23/4/17] np

Beltrami, Enrico, 'Can One Person Belong to Two Faiths? The Experience of Three Catholic Monks', *Studies in World Christianity*, 20/2, 2014, 103-123

Bender, Courtney and Wendy Cage, 'Constructing Buddhism(s): Interreligious Dialogue and Religious Hybridity', *Sociology of Religion*, 2006, 67/3, 229-247

- Benedict XVI, Pope, *Palm Sunday Homily, Sunday, 28 March 2010*
<http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100328_palm-sunday.html> [accessed 6/4/19] np
- Berger, Peter L, and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: a Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Penguin Books, 1967)
- Bhabha, Homi, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994)
- Bloomer, Kristin 'Comparative Theology, Comparative Religion, and Hindu-Christian Studies: Ethnography as Method,' *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, Vol. 21, Article 10, 2008, 33-42
- Bouyer, Louis, *The Christian Mystery: From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1990)
- 'Mysticism: an essay on the history of the word', in *Understanding Mysticism*, ed. by Richard Woods (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1980) pp. 42–55
- Boyd, Robin, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Chennai: Christian Literature Society, 1975)
- Bratlinger, Patrick, *Victorian Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009)
- Braue, Donald, *Maya in Radhakrishnan's Thought: Six Meanings Other Than Illusion* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985)
- Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, ed-in-chief Knut A. Jacobsen, 6 Vols (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014)
- Brooke, John Hedley, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)
- Brown, Christopher A, 'Can Buddhism Save? Finding Resonance in Incommensurability', *Cross Currents*, 49/2, 1999, 164-196
- Brueggemann, Walter, *The Prophetic Imagination*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001)
- Bulletins of the Abhishiktananda Society* – archived at the website 'Monastic Interreligious Dialogue' <<https://dimmid.org>> [accessed 14/4/19]
- Burke, Peter, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009)
- Burnet, John, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908)

'Catholic Ashrams: Adopting And Adapting Hindu Dharma; Reconciliation is Underway, but Serious Obstacles Remain in the Dialogue Between Two Great Faiths', *Hinduism Today Magazine Web Edition*, December 1986, np
<<http://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=396>>
[accessed 20/4/17]

A Century of Catholic Mission: Roman Catholic Missiology 1910 to the Present, ed. by Stephen B. Bevans (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2013)

Chan, Kenneth, 'Hollywood's Sino-Chic: Kung Fu Parody, Mimicry, and Play in Cross-Cultural Citationality', in Chan, Kenneth, *Remade in Hollywood: The Global Chinese Presence in Transnational Cinemas*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 129-156

Chandra, Paresh, 'Marxism, Homi Bhabha and the Omissions of Postcolonial Theory', *Critique*, Vol. 40/2, May 2012, 199-214

Chattopadhyaya, Ramapada, *A Vasnava Interpretation of the Brahmasutras: Vedanta and Theism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1992)

Chitkara, MG, *Hindutva* (New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 1997)

Clooney, Francis X, 'Comparative Theology' in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. by John Webster, Katherine Tanner and Iain Torrence (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 654-669

——— *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Boundaries* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010)

——— 'Neither Here nor There: Crossing Boundaries, Becoming Insiders, Remaining Catholic', in *Identity and the Politics of Scholarship in the Study of Religion*, ed. by José Ignacio Cabezón and Sheila Greeve Davaney (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) 99-111

Cobb, John B Jr, *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998)

Collins, Jo, 'The Ethnic Shadow: Jung, Dreams and the Colonial Other', *The Birmingham Journal of Literature and Language*, 1/1, 2008, 22-30

Collins, Paul M, *Christian Inculturation in India* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007)

Conceptualizing Cultural Hybridization: A Transdisciplinary Approach, ed. by Philipp Wolfgang Stockhammer (Berlin: Springer, 2012)

Coomaraswami, Ananda, 'On the One and Only Transmigrant', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 3, April-June 1944, 66-87

- Copley, Anthony, *Religions in Conflict: Ideology, Cultural Contact and Conversion in Late Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)
- Cornille, Catherine, 'Conditions for Interreligious Dialogue', in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. by Catherine Cornille (Chichester: Wiley & Sons, 2013) 21-33
- *The Guru in Indian Catholicism* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1991)
- *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (Chestnut Ridge, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 2008)
- Cox, Jeffrey, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India 1818-1940* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002)
- Crossley, Emile, 'Poor but Happy: Volunteer Tourists' Encounters with Poverty' in *Tourism and Geographies of Inequality*, ed. by Fabian Frenzel and Ko Koens (London: Routledge, 2015) 41-59
- D'Souza, Dinesh, 'Report From India: The Inculturation Crisis', *Crisis Magazine*, March 1, 1986
<http://www.crisismagazine.com/1986/report-from-india-the-inculturation-crisis>
 [accessed 27/9/16] np
- Daggers, Jenny, *Postcolonial Theology of Religions: Particularity and Pluralism in World Christianity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013)
- 'Dalit Liberation Theology: Interview with James Massey', 2005
 <<http://cpiarticles.blogspot.co.uk/2005/02/dalit-liberation-theology-interview.html>>
 [accessed 17/2/16] np
- Dawson, Christopher, 'The Study of Western Culture'
 <<https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/education/catholic-contributions/the-study-of-western-culture.html>> [accessed 8/5/19] np
- De Smet, Richard, *Understanding Śankara : Essays by Richard De Smet*, ed. by Ivo Coelho, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2013)
- Deutsch, Eliot, *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1973)
- Dirlik, Arif, 'The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism', *Critical Inquiry*, 20/2, 1994, 328-356
- Du Boulay, Shirley, *Beyond the Darkness: A Biography of Bede Griffiths* (London: Rider, 1998)
- *The Cave of the Heart: The Life of Swami Abhishiktananda* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005)

Eck, Diana, *India: A Sacred Geography* (New York: Harmony, 2012)

——— 'India's "Tirthas": "Crossings" in Sacred Geography', *History of Religions*, 20/4, 1981, 323-344

Elst, Koenraad, 'Christianity, a Man-Made Religion Indebted to India', ch.1 of *Expressions of Christianity, with a focus on India*, ed. by Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan (Chennai: Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan Trust, 2007) < <https://independent.academia.edu/KElst>> np

The Essential Vedanta: A New Source Book of Advaita Vedanta, ed. by Eliot Deutsch and Rohit Dalvi (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004)

Fastiggi, Robert and Jose Pereira, 'The Swami from Oxford', *Crisis*, March 1991, 22-25

Forbes, Peter, *Dazzled and Deceived: Mimicry and Camouflage* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009)

Frawley, David, 'Hindu view of nature', nd (first published in *Hindu Voice UK*) <<https://www.vedanet.com/hindu-view-of-nature/>> [accessed 9/4/19] np

Friesen, Glen. J, 'Abhishiktananda: An Interview with Glenn J. Friesen', nd < <https://www.innerexplorations.com/ewtext/Friesen.htm>> [accessed 7/8/16] np

Frost, Christine Mangala, *The Human Icon: A Comparative Study of Hindu and Orthodox Christian Beliefs*, (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2017)

Ganeri, Martin, 'Catholic Encounter with Hindus in the Twentieth Century: In Search of an Indian Christianity', *Blackfriars*, 88, 2007, 410-432

——— 'Catholicism and Hinduism', in *The Catholic Church and the World Religions*, ed. by Gavin D'Costa (London: T&T Clark, 2011) 106-140

Goel, Sita Ram, *Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?* 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1994)

——— *Jesus Christ: An Artifice for Aggression* (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1994)

——— *Papacy: Its Doctrine And History* (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1986)

Goosen, Gideon, *Hyphenated Christians: Towards a Better Understanding of Dual Religious belonging* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011)

Grant, Rhiannon, 'Being fluent in two religions', *Journal of the Sociology and Theory of Religion*. Vol 1, 2015, 2255-2715 <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/61569449.pdf>> [accessed 18/8/17] Web version is paginated 1-23.

Grant, Sara, *Lord of the Dance and Other Papers* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1987)

——— *Toward an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian* (Notre Dame IND; University of Notre Dame Press, 2002)

——— *Shankaracharya's Concept of Relation* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999)

Gravend-Tirole, Xavier, 'From Christian Ashrams to Dalit Theology — or Beyond: An Examination of the Indigenisation/Inculturation Trend within the Indian Catholic Church' in *Constructing Indian Christianities: Culture, Conversion and Caste*, ed. by Chad M. Bauman and Richard Fox Young (London and New York: Routledge, 2014, 110-137)

Grinshpon, Yohanan, *The Secret Sankara: On Multivocality and Truth in Sankara's Teaching*, (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010)

Gupta, Brijen K, 'The Meaning of the Absolute in Sankara and Swedenborg', *Indian Journal of Theology*, April-June 1975, pp9-31

Gustafson, Hans, 'Substance Beyond Illusion: The Spirituality of Bede Griffiths', *The Way*, 47/3, July 2008, 31–48

Hacker, Paul, *Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedanta*, ed. by Wilhelm Halbfass (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995)

Hedges, Paul, 'Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics: A Gadamerian Approach to Interreligious Interpretation', *Religions*, 7/7, 2016, 1-20

——— *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London: SCM, 2010)

——— 'The Inter-Relationship of Religions: some critical reflections on the concept of particularity', *World Faiths Encounter*, 32, 2002, 3-13

——— 'The Old and New Comparative Theologies: Discourses on Religion, the Theology of Religions, Orientalism and the Boundaries of Traditions', *Religions*, 3, 2012, 1120–1137

——— *Preparation and Fulfilment: A History and Study of Fulfilment Theology in Modern British Thought in the Indian Context* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2001)

Heim, S Mark, 'The Shifting Significance of Theologies of Religious Pluralism' in *Understanding Religious Pluralism: Perspectives from Religious Studies and Theology*, ed. by Peter C Phan and Jonathan Ray (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015) 242-259

A History of the Indian Novel in English, ed. by Ulka Anjaria (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)

Huddart, David, *Homi K Bhabha* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006)

Hybridity and its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture, ed. by Avta Brah and Annie E. Coombes (London and New York: Routledge, 2000)

- The Hymns of the Rgveda*, trans. by Ralph T.H. Griffith, ed. by J.L. Shastri, rev. ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973)
- Inden, Ronald B., *Imagining India* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990)
- ‘Orientalist Constructions of India’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 20/3, 1986, 401-446
- India*, 30th Anniversary Edition, (npl, Lonely Planet Publications, nd)
- Interreligious Hermeneutics*, ed. by Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010)
- Isaeva, Natalia, *Shankara and Indian Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993)
- Jennings, Willie James, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011)
- Jodhka, Surinder S, ‘From “book view” to “field view”: Social Anthropological Constructions of the Indian Village’, *Oxford Development Studies*, 26/3, 1998, 311-331
- ‘Nation and Village: Images of Rural India in Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 10, 2002, 3343-3353
- Jouhki, Jukka, ‘Orientalism and India’, *J@RGONIA*, 8, 2006, 1-20, <<http://research.jyu.fi/jargonia/artikkelit/jargonia8.pdf>> [accessed 15/2/19]
- Kaizer, Ted, 'Identifying the divine in the Roman Near East', in *Panthée: religious transformations in the Graeco-Roman Empire*, ed. by Laurent Bricault and Corine Bonnet, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013) 113-128.
- Katz, Steven, ‘Language, Epistemology and Mysticism’, in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. by Steven Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 22-74
- King, Richard, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and ‘the Mystic East’* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999)
- Kinsley David R, *Ecology and Religion: Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995)
- Kopf, David, ‘Hermeneutics History’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 39/3, 1980, 495-506
- Kourie, Celia, and Alex Kurian, ‘Abhishiktananda: a Christian Advaitin’, *HTS Theological Studies*, 67/3, 2011, 1-8 <<http://www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/1054/1921>> [accessed 29/7/16]
- Kraemer, Hendrik, ‘Syncretism’ in *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader*, ed. by Anita Maria Leopold and Jeppe Sinding Jensen (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) 39-47

- Latifa, Inditian and Dana Hasibuan, 'The Socio-Cultural Life of Batik in Indonesia and the Limit of Cultural Heritage', *International Review of Humanities Studies*, 1/2, 2016, 57-70
- Lee, Richard Wayne, 'Christianity and the Other Religions: Interreligious Relations in a Shrinking World', *Sociological Analysis*, 53/2, 1992, 125-139
- Lewis, Bernard, 'The Question of Orientalism', *The New York Review of Books*, June 24, 1982, np
- Lightfoot, J.B. and Edward D. Andrews, *The Apostolic Fathers: What Did They Teach*, (Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House, 2016)
- Lindbeck, George, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984)
- Loomba, Ania, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998)
- MacDougall, Scott, *More Than Communion: Imagining an Eschatological Ecclesiology*, (Bloomsbury: T&T Clark, 2015)
- McGrath, Alister E., *Re-Imagining Nature: The Promise of a Christian Natural Theology* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2017)
- McInerney, Dennis Q., 'Thomas Merton and the Awakening of Social Consciousness', *American Studies*, 15/2, 1974, 37-53
- MacKenzie, John M, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995)
- McQuillan, Paul, 'Youth Spirituality: A Reality in Search of Expression,' *Australian eJournal of Theology*, 6, 2006, 1-13
<<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4ea8/97f1be12a1ba474587791dacaab3660bf7c6.pdf>> [accessed 6/5/2019]
- Mahadevan, T.M.P., *Outlines of Hinduism* (Mumbai: Chetana, 1971)
- Maharshi, Sri Ramana, *Be As You Are*, ed. by David Goodman (London: Arkana, 1985)
- *The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, ed. by Arthur Osbourne (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 2002)
- *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanashram, 2006)
- Maheshwari, Krishna, 'Mathematics of the Vedas', Hindupedia,
<http://www.hindupedia.com/en/Mathematics_of_the_Vedas> [accessed 3/2/18] np
- Majumdar, Sisir K, 'Indian Renaissance: The Making of Modern India', *Indian Journal of History of Science*, 46/1, 2011, 131-154

Malkovsky, Bradley, 'Advaita Vedanta and Christian Faith', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 36, 1999, 397-422, np

Mani, Lata, 'Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India', *Cultural Critique*, 7, 1987, pp. 119-156

Many Mansions: Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity, ed. by Catherine Cornille (Maryknoll, NY, Great Britain: Orbis Books, 2002)

Masuzawa, Tomoko, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, ILL: University of Chicago Press, 2005)

Mattam, Joseph, 'Interpreting Christ to India Today: The Calcutta School', *Indian Journal of Theology*, 1974, 191-205.

Mazumdar, Shampa and Sanjoy Mazumdar, 'Sacred space and place attachment', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 13(3), 1993, 231-242

Meister, Chad, *Philosophy of Religion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014)

Merrigan, Terrence, 'The "Theological Imaginary" in History: John Henry Newman and the Catholic Theological Imaginary', *Louvain Studies*, 34, 2010, 185-208

Mishra, Anil, *Reading Gandhi* (Delhi: Pearson, 2012)

Mizutani, Satoshi, 'Hybridity and History: A Critical Reflection on Homi K. Bhabha's "Post-Historical" Thought', *Zinbun*, 41, 2009, 1-19

Molleur, Joseph, 'The Transformation of Dom Le Saux - Swami Abhishiktananda', *Indian Journal of Theology*, 39, 1997, pp35-42

Mong, Ambrose Ih-Ren, 'Bede Griffiths' Advaitic Approach to Religion', *The Way*, 55/1, 2016, 45-56

Moyaert, Marianne, 'On Vulnerability: Probing the Ethical Dimensions of Comparative Theology', *Religions*, 3, 2012, 1144-1161

Moyise, Steve, *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 2001)

Nandy, Ashis, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983)

Nandy, Meera, 'Vedic Science and Hindu Nationalism: Arguments Against a Premature Synthesis of Religion and Science', in *Science and Religion in a Post Colonial World: Interfaith Perspectives*, ed. by Zainal Abidin Bagir (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2005)

Narayanan, Vasudha, 'Water, Wood, and Wisdom: Ecological Perspectives from the Hindu Traditions', *Daedalus*, 130/4, 2001, 179-206

Nath, Suryakant, 'Gandhi, Ambedkar and the Indian village: A study in contrasting perceptions' *International Journal of Applied Research*, 2016, 2/6 361-364

Nehru, Jawaharlal, *The Discovery of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985)

Nelson, Lance E, 'The Dualism of Nondualism: Advaita Vedānta and the Irrelevance of Nature', in *Purifying the earthly body of God*, ed. by Lance E. Nelson (New York, NY: State University of New York, 1998) 61-88

Neville Robert C, *Behind the Masks of God: An Essay Toward Comparative Theology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991)

Nicholson, Hugh. *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011)

Nugteren, A, 'Entitled to understand: A critical look at comparative theology', in *Interreligious hermeneutics in pluralistic Europe: Between texts and people*, ed. by D. Cheetham, U. Winkler, O. Leirvik, and J. Gruber (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011) 149-160

Oldmeadow, Harry, *A Christian Pilgrim in India: The Spiritual Journey of Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux)* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008)

——— *Journeys East: 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Religious Traditions* (Somerville MA: World Wisdom, 2004)

O'Neill, Gilda, *My East End: Memories of Life in Cockney London* (London: Penguin, 2000)

The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion, ed. by William J Wainwright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

Pakkanen, Petra, 'Is It Possible to Believe in a Syncretistic God', *Opuscula*, 4, 2011, 126-141

Parekh, Bhikhu, 'Some reflections on the Hindu theory of tolerance', *Seminar* 521, January 2003, pp. 48-53 < <http://www.india-seminar.com/2003/521.htm> > [accessed 6/5/2019], np

Park, Chris, 'Religion and Geography' in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. by John R Hinnells (London and New York: Routledge, 2005)

Pennington, Brian K, 'Reform and Revival, Innovation and Enterprise: A Tale of Modern Hinduism', in *The Protestant Reformation in a Context of Global History: Religious Reforms and World Civilizations*, ed. by Heinz Schilling, and Silvana Seidel Menchi (Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 2017) 149-169

Porter, Andrew, Religion Versus Empire? *British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004)

Pundir, Babita and C.P.E. Meerut, 'Mimicry, Ambivalence and Hybridity', *International Journal of Arts and Education Research*, 1/2, 2012, 55-59

Radharani, P, 'Hinduism and Natural Environment', *Journal of Dharma* 31/4, 2006, 497-504

Raghu, Jyoti, 'Rethinking Hinduism in a Postcolonial Context', *Journal of Postcolonial Theory and Theology*, 3/1, 2012, 1-36

<<http://www.postcolonialjournal.com/Resources/Raghu%20JPTT.pdf>> [accessed 1/9/17]

Raju, P.T., *The Philosophical Traditions of India* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979)

Ramsey, A.M., *God, Christ and the world: a Study in Contemporary Theology* (London: SCM, 1969)

Rao, Srinivasa, *Perceptual Error: the Indian Theories*, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1998)

'A Record Of Audiences & Correspondence with His Holiness Shantananda Saraswati, Shankaracharya of Jyotish Peeth, 1960-1993' <<https://www.ouspenskytoday.org>> [accessed 3/11/2017]

The Rig Veda, trans. by Wendy Doniger (London: Penguin, 1981)

Rogers, Murray, and David Barton, *Abhishiktananda: A Memoir of Dom Henri Le Saux*, (Oxford: Sisters of the Love of God, nd)

Rose, Kenneth, 'Interspirituality: Interfaith dialogue or dissembling monologue?', *Hinduism Today Magazine Web Edition*, October/November/December 2007 <<http://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=1519>> [accessed 21/4/17] np

——— *Pluralism: The Future of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

Ryan, Thomas P, *Disciplines for Christian Living: Interfaith Perspectives* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993)

Said, Edward W, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1995)

Sanatana Dharma: an Advanced Textbook of Hindu Religion and Ethics, 2nd ed. (Benares: The Board of Trustees of the Central Hindu College, 1904)

Śankara, Adi, *Vedanta Sutras with the Commentary by Sankarakarya*, trans. by George Thibaut, 2 Vols (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1890, 1896)

——— *The Bhagavad Gita: with the Commentary of Sri Sankaracharya*, trans: Alladi Mahadeva Sastri, corrected and reprinted, (Madras: Samata Books, 1979)

——— *Brahmsutrabhasya*, trans. by VH Date (Bombay: Booksellers Publishing Co, 2 Vols, 1954)

—— *Eight Upanishads with the Commentary of Sankaracarya*, trans. By Swami Gambhirananda, 2 vols, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1957, 1958)

Schineller, Peter, 'Inculturation and Syncretism: What is the Real Issue?', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 16, 1992, 50-53

Schmalz, Mathew N, 'A Bibliographic Essay on Hindu and Christian Dalit Religiosity', *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, Vol. 17, 2004, Article 9

Schouten, Jan Peter, *Jesus as Guru: The Image of Christ among Hindus and Christians in India*, trans by Henry and Lucy Jansen (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2008)

Sethi, Rumina 'The Road Less travelled: Modernity and Gandhianism in the Indian English Novel', in *A History of the Indian Novel in English*, ed. by Ulka Anjaria (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 88-102

Shantivanam website <<http://saccidanandaashram.com/>> [accessed 23/3/2017]

Sharma, Arvind, *A Guide to Hindu Spirituality* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006)

—— *Hinduism for our Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)

Sharvani, Zaheer Ali Khan and S. Abdul Sattar, 'Concept of God in Schools of Vedānta and Islam', *Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 6, 2016, pp327-340 <<http://www.oijrj.org/oijrj/may2016-special-issue/43.pdf>> [accessed 13/4/19]

Shinde, Kiran A, "'This Is Religious Environment": Sacred Space, Environmental Discourses, and Environmental Behavior at a Hindu Pilgrimage Site in India', *Space and Culture*, 14/4, 2011, pp448-463.

Singh, Amardeep, 'Mimicry and Hybridity in Plain English', 2009 <<http://www.lehigh.edu/~amsp/2009/05/mimicry-and-hybridity-in-plain-english.html>> [accessed 13/1/18] np

Sinha, Amita, 'Nature in Hindu Art, Architecture and Landscape', *Landscape Research*, 20/1 March 1995, 3-10

Skudlarek, William, 'Abhishiktananda's Understanding of the Monk: Essentially contemplative, Ideally Eremitic, Naturally Dialogic', *Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, January – June, 2011

<http://www.dimmid.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC=%7BA2CC0524-9A19-4901-946F-8F04A154AD63%7D> [accessed 5/8/16], np

Smith, James K A, *Imagining the Kingdom* (Ada MI: Baker Academic, 2013)

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (London: SPCK, 1978)

Soares-Prabhu, George, 'The Indian church challenged by pluralism and dialogue', *Sedos Buletin*, 1994, 26/6 & 7, 183-193

—— ‘Interpreting The Bible In India Today’, *Way Supplement* , 72, 1991, 70–80

Srimad Bhagavata, trans. by Swami Tapasyananda, 4 vols. (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, nd)

Stanley, Brian, ‘Commerce and Christianity: Providence Theory, The Missionary Movement, and the Imperialism Of Free Trade, 1842–1860,’ *The Historical Journal*, 26, 1983, 71-94

Stoeber, Michael, ‘The Comparative Study of Mysticism’, in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia, Religion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) <religion.oxfordre.com> [accessed 29/7/17], np

Stuart, James, *Swami Abhishiktananda, His Life Told Through His Letters*, rev. ed. (Delhi: ISPCK, 1995)

Sugirtharajah, Sharada, *Imagining Hinduism: a Postcolonial Perspective* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003)

Swami Bharati Krishna Tirtha, *Interreligious Learning* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1978)

Swami Devananda Saraswati, ‘Wolf in sheep’s clothing’, *India View*, July 7, 2009 <<https://indiaview.wordpress.com/2009/07/07/wolf-in-sheep-s-clothing/>> [accessed 20/4/17] np

Sweetman, Will, ‘The Prehistory of Orientalism: Colonialism and the Textual Basis for Bartholomaeus Ziegenblag’s Account of Hinduism’, *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, 6/2, 2004, 12-38

Tacey, David, *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005)

Taittiriya Upanishad, trans. by Swami Sharvananda (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Math, 1921)

Taylor, Charles, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004)

Taylor, Richard W, ‘From Khadi to Kavi: Toward a Typology of Christian Ashrams,’ *Religion and Society* 24, 1977, 19-37

Teasdale, Wayne, *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction to his Interspiritual Thought* (Woostock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2003)

—— ‘Interreligious Dialogue Since Vatican II: The Monastic Contemplative Dimension’, *Spirituality Today*, Summer 1991, 43/2, 119-133

Thirteen Principle Upanishads, Trans. by Robert Ernest Hume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921)

Time, History and the Religious Imaginary in South Asia, ed. by Anne Murphy (London and New York: Routledge, 2011)

Trapnell, Judson B, *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001)

——— ‘Two Models of Christian Dialogue with Hinduism’, *Dialogue & Universalism*, 1999, 9/7 & 8 (in three articles)

Tripathy, Jyotirmaya ‘The Broom, the Muffler and the Wagon R: Aam Aadmi Party and the Politics of De-elitisation’, *International Quarterly for Asian Studies*, 48 /1–2, 2017, 77–95

Turci, Rubens, ‘Śraddhā in the Bhagavad Gītā: an investigation on the primeval expressions of the contemporary paradigm on heart-philosophy’, *International Journal of Dharma Studies*, 3/2 2015, 1-12

Ulrich, Edward T, ‘Convergences and Divergences: The Lives of Swami Abhishiktananda and Raimundo Panikkar’, *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, 24, 2011, Article 9, 36-45

——— ‘Swami Abhishiktananda and Comparative Theology’, *Horizons*, 31/1, 2004, 40-63

van Bijlert, Victor, ‘Postcolonial Theories and the Study of Modern Hinduism’, unpublished lecture given at History Dept. Calcutta University, 20 August 2013
<<https://www.godgeleerdheid.vu.nl/nl/onderzoek/onderzoek-en-afdelingen/godsdiensfilosofie-en-vergelijkende-godsdienswetenschappen/index.aspx>> [accessed 2/3/16] np

Van Horn, Gavin, ‘Hindu Traditions and Nature: Survey Article’, *Worldviews* 10/1, 2006, 5-39

Vattakuzhy, Emmanuel, *Indian Christian Sannyasa and Swami Abhishiktananda* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1981)

Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, Vol 4, 12th ed. (Howrah: Advaita Ashrama, 1958)

Vivekananda, ‘The Work Before Us’, in *Lectures Vol. 3* (Altenmünster: Jazzybee Verlag, 2017)

Ware, Kallistos, *The Orthodox Way*, rev. ed. (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995)

Warrier, Maya, ‘Guru choice and spiritual seeking in contemporary India’, *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 7/1-3, 2003, 31–54

Werner, Karel, *A Popular Dictionary of Hinduism*, rev. ed. (Richmond: Curzon, 1997)

Windschuttle, Keith, ‘Edward Said’s “Orientalism” revisited’, *The New Criterion*, 17/5, 1999 <<http://ontology.buffalo.edu/smith/courses01/rrtw/Windschuttle.htm>> [accessed 10/4/19] np

'World Christianities c.1914–c.2000', *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Vol 9, ed. by Hugh McLeod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

World Council of Churches, *Account of the history of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism* <<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/cwme/history>> [accessed 1/1/2019] np

Young, Robert J C, 'The Dislocations of Cultural Translation', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America (PMLA)*, 132/1, 2017, 186-197

——— *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004)