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Book Review:*Pilgrimage of Awakening: The Extraordinary Lives of Murray and Mary Rogers*

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Pilgrimage of Awakening: The Extraordinary Lives of Murray and Mary Rogers.
By Mary V. T. Cattan. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016, 421 pages.

THIS beautifully organized and written book by Mary Cattan tells the story of Murray Rogers, an Anglican priest, and his wife, Mary, and of Heather Sandeman, their faithful companion, who in the 1950's and 60's, partly under the early influence of C. F. Andrews and later the actual experience of working at Sevagram (one of Gandhi's ashrams), established an ecumenical Christian ashram in Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, India, which they called Jyotiniketan, the Abode of (Uncreated) Light. Jyotiniketan turned out in the course of their long lives, led well into their eighties, to be much more than just a particular community of local provenance; it evolved rather into a model of spiritual friendship and unity that found fresh expression in places and communities as disparate as Jerusalem, Hong Kong, Canada, and England. But even beyond that function, Jyotiniketan evolved into a symbol of radical openness to the Divine and to the growth and transformation such openness brings. Hence, the apt title of the book: *Pilgrimage of Awakening*.

We must count ourselves fortunate that the book was written in the first place. So busy and preoccupied were the Rogers and Sandeman, who formed the core of Jyotiniketan, with their day-to-day challenges and tasks of service, that they rarely found time to compose a written record of the events, places, people, and social and ecumenical movements they encountered beyond occasional and sparse letters that they would periodically send to their vast circle of friends. Fortunately, late in life when they returned to England in 1998, they were befriended by Judson Trapnell, author of works

on Bede Griffiths and Swami Abhishiktananda, who made a beginning in providing a record on tape. Mary Cattan builds on his work, but this comprehensive book is the result of a twenty-five year association with the Rogers and is a meticulously researched and thoroughly documented account of their entire lives and of the times they lived through. We stand greatly in her debt.

The Rogers lived in India at a time of extraordinary ferment: social, political, and ecclesiastical. In the heady days after Independence, the urgent tasks of nation-building with its economic and political challenges occupied national attention. In that environment when foreign missionaries were still encouraged within India because of their contributions to education, health care, and social uplift, the Anglican Church Missionary Society with its headquarters in London, to which the Rogers belonged, appointed English bishops to run local dioceses and was, alas, not very sensitive to Indian post-Independence realities. However sympathetic to the national cause of Gandhian *swaraj* some of them might have been, it's obvious that this was an unstable situation destined to create problems. The Rogers to their credit quite quickly went native, adopting Indian dress and forms of life marked by simplicity and relative poverty. Beyond that, they were also swift to embrace the challenges of the Indian church striving to decolonize and Indianize itself in its self-understanding and forms of worship and personal and social life. They were also fortunate to come under the influence of a remarkable group of Indian

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church leaders and thinkers, among whom may be mentioned M. M. Thomas, Bishop Mar Chrystostom of the Mar Thoma Church of India, Swami Abhishiktananda, and Raimon Panikkar.

Being parents to three children whose education was wholly supported by the CMS created inevitable tensions. Jyotiniketan strove to be self-sufficient in terms of daily upkeep, but money for the maintenance of the facilities and a modest stipend to the Rogers and to Heather Sandeman was still provided by CMS. This “contradiction” of being financially dependent and yet increasingly out of sympathy with missionary ideology of CMS led inevitably to a bitter parting of the ways. Furthermore, the Rogers were in the late 60’s and early 70’s increasingly committed to the goal of having Jyotinketan itself run by Indians and were prepared to oversee a smooth transition to Indian leadership while they themselves uprooted a twenty-five-year-old life and sought fresh pastures in Jerusalem. They publicly resigned from CMS at great cost, financial and personal to themselves, because they felt with their spiritual mentor, Raimon Panikkar, and others, that the Western church had sadly mistaken an imperialistic and dominant form of Christianity with Christianity itself, and that this mistake has immured the church within a particularism quite incompatible with its true catholicity. What the Rogers by sharp contrast called “Real Church” was rooted in the cosmic and universal Christ whose radical love and compassion seek ever new cultural forms of expression.

It is impossible in a short review to do much justice to the richness of this book. But for readers of this journal, I will focus on their Indian sojourn. This left a permanent mark on their inner and outer lives and while they

adapted to and embraced the challenges of other environments, it is quite clear that for the rest of their lives they were indelibly shaped by their experiences in India. I will comment briefly on three features of their years in India.

First, the Jyotiniketan community provided a concrete expression in its particular time and place of an evolving Hindu-Christian mode of existence in the pattern of its daily life, rooted in Hindu-Christian worship, and flowing spontaneously into service to the wider community. Not only was the design of the various buildings—the chapel, the room for silent retreat, the study, etc.—recognizably Indian, but they were all constructed with local materials with the help of teams of workers both local and regional. Over the years it gained recognition nationally and internationally as an ecumenical center where people could experience at first hand the adroit blending of Christian and Hindu forms of worship. This was not quite a traditional monastic community because the Rogers were also parents of three children whose education and welfare, first in South India and then in England, they were responsible for with all the attendant financial and familial pressures, exacerbated by geographical distance.

Second, Jyotiniketan was an example of the Christian ashram movement modeled in this case more along the lines of Sevagram than the contemplative ashrams associated with Swami Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths, or Christa Prema Seva Ashram in Pune, founded in 1922 by the Anglican missionary Fr. Jack Winslow, but later associated with Matthew Lederle and Sara Grant. Visitors of all faiths could and did drop by for rest and renewal, secure in the knowledge that this was a place quite free of proselytizing attitudes, and where, on the contrary, the

spiritual wisdom that visitors brought was warmly welcomed. It is a pity that this Christian ashram movement, which had its heyday in the period roughly from the 1960's through the early 80's seems now to have died down.

The lives of Murray and Mary Rogers indeed exemplified a pilgrimage of awakening from their fundamentalist and conservative origins to their final evolution as deeply mystical Christians, who did not attempt merely to follow the living Christ but actually to incarnate Him in

their lives and witness. It is this third feature that in this ecumenical age of inter-religious openness provides continuing inspiration by offering an example of inter-religious existence capable of absorbing the best that religions and cultures have to offer, but yet looking beyond to farther horizons.

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***Modern Hindu Personalism: The History, Life and Thought of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī.* Ferdinando Sardella. Oxford University Press, 2013, xv + 342 pp.**

THIS study is an excellent introduction to Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, an important figure in the history of Vaishnavism and one who directly inspired the better known Swami A.C. Bhaktivedānta Prabhupada of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. As the subtitle accurately states, the author has tried to situate Bhaktisiddhānta in his whole cultural and historical context so that we can see how the thought and the movement he created are to be understood with respect to other interpretations of Hinduism which competed for the Indian public's attention and support in a colonial and then postcolonial context. India was finding its identity as an independent nation-state and also as a democracy troubled by poverty and by religious divisions between Muslims and Hindus.

To assemble this context, especially for readers outside of India, and simultaneously describe Bhaktisiddhānta's own spiritual evolution from his family roots onward is no

small feat, and the author has succeeded in reconstructing this from various archives.

He has also given us background on the classic three prejudices of Protestant Christian missionaries in the period 1739 to 1850, who reacted to Hinduism based on their hatred of so called idolatry, their contempt for sexual expression, and their high regard for science and rationality (Geoffrey A. Oddie). We could note that Catholic missionaries would not share this Protestant tendency toward iconoclasm and the bias against ritual in favor of preaching.

Sardella is interested in showing the distinctive characteristics of Vaishnava religiosity as compared to "Brahmanic-Sanskritic" Hinduism. He also points to the influence of Freemasonic esotericism which stressed universalism, tolerance and openness to all religions in the intelligentsia of the bhadrakalok class of the time, to include educated Bengalis like Vivekānanda. The bhadrakalok "middle class", often engaged in connection