

In the Bosom of the Father

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The Collected Poems of a Benedictine Mystic

Swāmī Abhishiktānanda

Translated from the French by
Jacob Rieff

Foreword by
Cyprian Consiglio

Afterword by
Swāmī Ātmānanda Udāsīn

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IN THE BOSOM OF THE FATHER
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For Mamie

*“Écrire? Pour cet au-delà, la théologie ne suffit plus,
il faut la poésie ou son équivalent. Il faut l’inspiration au sens le plus fort. . . .
C’est trop fort de se sentir en présence du Vrai,
et comment dire en mots ce que les mots ne peuvent que trahir?”*

“To write? For this which is beyond, theology does not suffice,
poetry or its equivalent is needed. There is need of inspiration in its fullest
sense. . . .

It is too overpowering to feel oneself in the presence of the True,
and how can one express in words that which words would only betray?”

—Swāmī Abhishiktānanda
Letter to Odette Baumer-Despeigne
May 22, 1973

*“Nimirum, inuisibilis conditoris species,
repressa omni corporae uisionis imagine, in cubili cordis inuenitur.”*

“Without a doubt, the appearance of the invisible Creator,
without any image of bodily appearance,
is found there in the chamber of the heart.”

—St. Gregory the Great
Morlia in Iob 8.24.41

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Foreword

WHEN I FIRST JOINED monastic life, almost everyone in my community had read something by, or knew something about, Swāmī Abhishiktānanda. For me, a typical Midwestern American cradle Catholic, even though I had already been immersed in the environs of religious life for significant periods, everything from the exotic sound of his Sanskrit name to the discussions about advaita/non-duality and the *sannyāsa* mendicant monastic tradition of India was a new world and the unfurling of a hitherto undreamt-of dimension to and possible expression of Christian spirituality.

My own Benedictine congregation, the Camaldolese, takes certain ownership of Swāmī Abhishiktānanda. His successor at Saccidānanda Āshram (Shāntivanam), which Swāmī Abhishiktānanda founded with Père Jules Monchanin, was Bede Griffiths, an Oxford-educated English Benedictine and an intimate friend of C. S. Lewis. After years of exclaustation from his own Prinknash Abbey in the Cotswalds of England, Fr. Bede brought himself and the monks of the āshram under the protection of our congregation in 1983, and so Shāntivanam is now a Camaldolese community, which I have visited numerous times. Swāmī Abhishiktānanda's remains were transferred to the cemetery there next to Bede's and a memorial to Monchanin. Whenever I was at Shāntivanam, each morning after prayers I would join several others singing a *bhajan* in honor of the gurus at the graves.

I had the great privilege of meeting Fr. Bede during his last trip to America in 1992. (He died back in India the following May.) He spent several days with us and gave a chapter conference at the end of the week. I often recount that that conference was a seminal moment in my spiritual journey, and the one that certainly set the tone of my own monastic life. In

that one encounter Bede opened up that new world to me, offering me a new vision of reality (to quote one of his own book titles) and introducing me to a new language for articulating the Christian religious experience.

These last two elements strike me as the most important—experience and language, a new language for articulating the Christian religious experience, perhaps a new depth experience of Christianity.

After that experience with Fr. Bede, I delved deeply into Bede's own writings on universal wisdom and interreligious dialogue, which of course led me to Swāmī Abhishiktānanda, all of whose writings I eventually absorbed as well. As a matter of fact, I believe I have re-read his book *The Further Shore*, his essay on *sannyāsa* with an introduction to the Upanishads, nearly every time I have been in India.

Bede and Swāmī Abhishiktānanda were two very different personalities, and most folks who have read both have a strong preference for one or the other. Having met several people who knew them both, I can safely say that they didn't seem to enjoy each other's company all that much. While himself writing in a very prophetic way exploring the limits of Christian philosophical and theological assumptions, Bede was very measured in his writings. Apparently at one point Swāmī Abhishiktānanda referred to him as "the fog of the Thames." Bede, on the other hand, referred to Swāmī Abhishiktānanda as a "fiery Breton" and hinted that he thought the other had gone too far.¹ Swāmī Abhishiktānanda's experience of oneness with God while in a cave on the mountain of Arunāchala in Tiruvannamalai was in fact so profound that it "shook his faith in the traditional form of Christianity," Bede wrote with uncharacteristic frankness. In his experience of advaita, Swāmī Abhishiktānanda was left with a sense of absolute oneness in which he no longer felt any difference between God and the individual human person. For the rest of his life, as evidenced in his diaries, Swāmī Abhishiktānanda had to wrestle with how to interpret this experience as a Christian. It seemed to involve a denial of the "rational difference between God and creation, whereas his Christian faith called for the recognition of distinctions in the Godhead and the Incarnation and the church."²

And so we are back once again to experience and language—how first of all to understand it, and then how to express this experience, let alone be transformed by it. How many songs have been written about

1. Du Boulay, *The Cave of the Heart*, 154 and Fr. Francis Mahieu in personal communication with foreword author, 2000.

2. Griffiths, "Our Founders," 7–8.

the experience of falling in love, and yet do any of them ever fully capture it? Jesus himself in the gospels never says exactly what the reign of God is in all its dimensions. Rather, he speaks in parables: the kingdom of God is like a pearl of great price, like yeast in the dough, like a mustard seed.

But we must never forget that the transformative experience itself, undoubtedly, is the most important factor. As Swāmī Abhishiktānanda wrote in a letter toward the end of his life, “Of course I can make use of Christ’s experience to lead Christians to an ‘I AM’ experience, yet it is this I AM experience which really matters.”³

The original inspiration of Christianity, obviously, is Jesus, who articulated that experience according to his own background and that of his listeners, as a Palestinian Jew steeped in the Torah (the Law), the Prophets, and the language of the psalms. By the time that *kerygma* is being first written down, starting some thirty years after Jesus’ death and resurrection, there is already a bit of a “spin” being put on the story, if you will. Certainly each of the Gospel writers has a particular audience in mind—Matthew is preaching to Jewish converts, Luke more to Gentiles, for example. St. Paul borrows from many sources to try to articulate the Gospel, particularly to people who have been steeped in Hellenistic thought, both Gentiles and Jews of the diaspora. So another level of interpretation is coming on to the Gospel, using a set of terms to try to describe the initial experience that are foreign to that experience. And certainly by the second and third centuries, from the neo-Platonic period onward, a whole new philosophical and epistemological layer is going to be added on to the Christian *kerygma*, trying to convey the mystical heart of the experience to a whole new generation of thinkers. In the end Greek philosophical language came to be so wedded to Christian theology—just like Roman law!—that we tend to think of it as almost canonical, inspired at the same level of authority as Scripture itself. But many scholars are quick and eager to point out that it is not, and not essential to the inner meaning of the Gospel and the experience of adoption, filiation, union, and divinization that Jesus inspires and offers.

What teachers such as Swāmī Abhishiktānanda asked was, what if Christianity could be interpreted and passed on using the language of the Vedānta (Indian philosophy, based on the Upanishads), the language of Mahāyāna Buddhism, or the language of Taoism or Confucian philosophy? And, if not then, why not now? Is it possible to take our experience of the

3. Stuart, *Swāmī Abhishiktānanda*, 349.

Gospel and our tradition, and try to articulate it using other philosophical or mystical language? This may perhaps be a primary contributing factor to the failure of evangelization efforts in Asia. We have used a philosophical language that in many cases makes little sense to the Asian mind. We have so often tried to pass on Greek terms and Roman culture (e.g., the Roman Rite of the Mass and Gregorian chant) instead of allowing the seed of the *kerygma* to take root in the soil of native philosophical and cultural, iconographic and poetic genius, acknowledging that the spark of the Divine and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit has been at work in other traditions as well. Swāmī Abhishiktānanda and Bede thought this was especially true in India, where Christianity failed to express the *kerygma* of Christianity in words and ideas capable of resonating with India's inmost depths. (Perhaps underlying this was a suspicion that many Christians themselves had not had the deep level of experience that the sages and rishis of India had had.)

In my own interreligious encounters I have often distinguished three different levels of inter-religious study, dialogue, and immersion: philosophical, practical, and devotional. As for the first, philosophical, the Catholic Church, beginning at least with *Nostra aetate*, the document on relations with Non-Christians of Vatican II, encouraged Catholics to be involved at this level. Most people forget that Christianity didn't have its own philosophy and so borrowed a "pagan" philosophy, from Greece, in order to articulate itself. Justin Martyr's famous defense of this was his idea of *semina verbi*, the "seeds of the Word" that were scattered everywhere, particularly for him in the Greek philosophers.

However, we have come to recognize those seeds of the Word in other places as well, as Pope John Paul II wrote in his letter *Fides et Ratio*:

In preaching the Gospel, Christianity first encountered Greek philosophy; but this does not mean at all that other approaches are precluded. Today, as the Gospel gradually comes into contact with cultural worlds that once lay beyond Christian influence, there are new tasks of inculturation, which mean that our generation faces problems not unlike those faced by the Church in the first centuries.

My thoughts turn immediately to the lands of the East, so rich in religious and philosophical traditions of great antiquity . . . Among these lands, India has a special place. A great spiritual impulse leads Indian thought to seek an experience which would liberate the spirit from the shackles of time and space and would therefore acquire absolute value. The dynamic of this quest for liberation provides the context for great metaphysical systems.

FOREWORD

In India particularly, it is the duty of Christians now to draw from this rich heritage the elements compatible with their faith, in order to enrich Christian thought . . .⁴

The duty! (We Camaldolese Benedictines, by the way, have a special mandate from Pope John Paul II to involve ourselves in interreligious dialogue. It's part of our charism.) Hence, again, why we dearly cherish the legacy of Swāmī Abhishiktānanda.

Yoga is based on Sāmkhya philosophy, for instance, which is one of the six classical *dharshanas* (philosophies) of India, and it is actually *non-theistic*. There is no mention of any deities at all. And classical Yoga philosophy itself is only mildly theistic. The only name used for the Divine in the Yoga Sūtras of Patanjali is *Īshvara*, which means something like “Lord,” and is a word that is used in Christian prayers in the vernacular as well. Part of the work those of us involved in interreligious dialogue do is to try to find out what of Sāmkhya and classical Yoga philosophy is “compatible with our faith.” This is the genius of many of Swāmī Abhishiktānanda’s writings; particularly again I point to his essay on *sannyāsa* (*The Further Shore*) and even more his book *Saccidānanda*, a book steeped in philosophy and comparative theology, written rather late in his life.

A second level is practical. In regards to Yoga, for instance, this entails the actual physical exercises of stretching and breathing, as well as the various methods of concentration in preparation for meditation. There was a “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation,” issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1989, which we have good reason to believe came pretty much from the pen of Pope Emeritus Benedict himself when he was the head of that congregation. This is from Chapter V on “Questions of Method”:

The majority of the great religions that have sought union with God in prayer have also pointed out ways to achieve it. Just as “the Catholic church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions,” neither should these ways be rejected out of hand simply because they are not Christian. On the contrary, one can take from them what is useful so long as the Christian conception of prayer, its logic and requirements are never obscured. It is within the context of all of this that these bits and pieces should be taken up and expressed anew.⁵

4. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §72.

5. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter,” §16.

FOREWORD

I actually have a copy of the news article from 2005 when the same Pope Benedict gave permission for Yoga to be taught in the seminaries of India. So many of us have obviously found great health benefits, both physically and mentally, from Yoga. My own experience of religious life is that so many of our priests and religious here in the US are overweight and/or depressed, and take solace in alcohol or various forms of “self medication.” It’s no wonder that so many people look at folks from other traditions who are healthy and happy and wonder what they have got that we don’t. And we *should* have it, because Christianity is supposedly the most incarnate of all the religious traditions. I no longer wonder if there is something “useful” we could actually learn; I am convinced of it.

As for the last, the devotional path (what is referred to in India as the *bhakti mārṅa*), there are obviously people who worship the deities of Hinduism. I do not and never encourage it; in fact I discourage Christians from it. Even when I visit India, I do not take part in temple services and *pūjas*. Then I would be in danger of idolatry. Yet when dealing with these poems of Swāmī Abhishiktānanda, we are certainly at the borderline of his own *bhakti*. We are also back once again to experience and language—how first of all to understand it, and then how to express this experience, let alone be transformed by it. Or perhaps we could start with the transformation itself! How do we understand and express it? Again I ask, how many songs have been written about the experience of falling in love, and yet do any of them ever fully capture it?

Swāmī Abhishiktānanda’s poetry comes from this *bhakti* element in his spiritual life. If he wondered if Christians would perhaps “become angry, / crying, ‘Sacrilege!’ / when they hear that India’s Sages and Rishis / here are heard and venerated / as Job and Melchizedek were” (as you shall read below), how much more so when they hear of him singing in praise of Shiva. And what about this concept of the *Purusha*?

One of the elements that Swāmī Abhishiktānanda and his peers (e.g., Bede Griffiths, Raimon Panikkar) open up for us is what is known as the apophatic dimension of spirituality in general and of Christianity in particular, that is, the recognition that the Divine is *anāmarūpa*—beyond name and form. This is sometimes referred to as the *via negativa*, the negative way. As Pope Benedict describes it, the characteristic feature of the apophatic way “is the conviction that it is impossible to say who God is, that

only indirect things can be said about him; that God can only be spoken of with the ‘not,’ and that it is only possible to reach him by entering into this indirect experience of ‘not.’”⁶ In Christianity an apophatic strain traces all the way back to Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius (about whom Benedict was writing the above words), *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Meister Eckhart, and especially John of the Cross, the latter of whom Swāmī Abhishiktānanda quoted often. Swāmī Abhishiktānanda wrote fervently about this mystical awareness beyond name and form, this awareness that gave him a sense of ever increasing internal peace.

One might be tempted to think, however, that this experience of the Divine beyond name and form is so iconoclastic as to be impersonal, as if God were just a nameless force of some sort, or solely the Ground of Being (Brahman) and/or the Ground of Consciousness (ātman). There is a famous story told by John Cassian in his *Conferences* about an “old man” of the desert whom Abba Paphnutius was able to convince that God was beyond all anthropomorphic images, that he could not “undergo anything typical of human experience and likeness” that could be observed “by the eye nor by the mind.” But later they met that same old man breaking into the “bitterest, most abundant tears and sobs. He threw himself on the ground and with the mightiest howl he cried out: ‘Ah the misfortune! They’ve taken my God away from me. I have no one to hold on to, and I don’t know whom to adore or to address.’”⁷ The opposite was true for Swāmī Abhishiktānanda: the encounter with this Ground *anāmarūpa* (beyond all name and form) sparked in him a new strain of devotion, of *bhakti*.

As an example of this strain of Swāmī Abhishiktānanda’s experience and expression, note how many times “Shiva” appears in his writings. A cursory understanding might accuse this Catholic monk of idolatry, worshipping another god besides the Judeo-Christian one. Indeed, at the level of popular devotion Shiva is worshipped as one of the *trimūrti*—the trinity of Hindu gods along with Brahmā and Vishnu—represented as a yogi wearing a tiger skin holding a trident with snakes coiled around his neck and arms. But a deeper understanding of Shiva is that this is simply a name for the all-pervasive supreme reality who manifests in functions, qualities, and principles but that/who is beyond all name and form. Here, for example, are the first and last verses of the famous hymn of Shiva attributed to Ādi Shankara, the great eighth-century sage of Advaita Vedānta:

6. Benedict XVI, General Audience.

7. Cassian, *Conferences*, XIII.3.

FOREWORD

I am not mind, intellect, ego and the memory.
I am not the sense organs.
I am not the five elements.
I am Shiva in the form of bliss consciousness.
I am formless and devoid of all dualities.
I exist everywhere and pervade all senses.
Always I am the same,
I am neither free nor bonded.
I am Shiva in the form of bliss consciousness.⁸

And yet, as you will witness in his poetry, Swāmī Abhishiktānanda shows himself to be a devotee—a *bhakta* of this Ground of Being who is formless and devoid of all dualities, and a lover of this fathomless abyss of the godhead. There is a beautiful compound word in Sanskrit that describes Swāmī Abhishiktānanda well—*bhakti-rūpāpanna-jnāna*: not just love of God but knowledge that has become devotion. One way to see Swāmī Abhishiktānanda's path is that he entered into this experience of “not” and came out of it a lover of God in a whole new way.

Again you will read below a sentence our poet wrote in his diary that seems to capture his conviction as well as the energy behind his quest to reconcile his Christianity with this experience of the spiritual genius of India: “The experience of the Upanishads is true, *I know it!*”⁹ And then he immediately quotes this famous “hymn” from the Shvetāshvatara Upanishad.

*Vedāham etam purusham mahāntam
ādityavarnam tamasah parastāt
tameva viditvā ati mrityum eti
nānya panthā vidyate'yanāya.*

I know the Great Person [*Purusha*]
of the color of the sun beyond darkness.
Only by knowing that one do we overcome death.
There is no other way to go.

Perhaps the main significance of this hymn is that it is part of the *sannyāsa dīkshā*, the initiation into the life of renunciation. As Swāmī Abhishiktānanda describes it in *The Further Shore*:

8. Ādi Shankara, *Ātmashatkam*. Foreword author's personal file.

9. Swāmī Abhishiktānanda, *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart*, 348–49.

FOREWORD

The new sannyāsi plunges into the water. Then the guru raises him like the Purusha of the Aitareyopanishad:

Arise, O Man! Arise, wake up, you who have received the boons; keep awake!

Both of them then face the rising sun and sing the song to the [Purusha] from the Uttara-Nārāyana:

I know him, that supreme Purusha, sun-coloured, beyond all darkness; only in knowing him one overcomes death; no other way exists.¹⁰

As I understand it there are multiple uses of the term *purusha*. At a mundane level, it can refer to an individual, akin to our English word “man,” the non-inclusive word for human beings. (In Hindi, closely related to Sanskrit, indeed it is the word specifically for the male.) As Sāmkhya philosophy and classical Yoga use the term, *purusha* is the soul, the Self, pure consciousness, and the only source of consciousness. But this *purusha* is pure and distant, beyond subject and object. The term *purusha* can also, as we see in this hymn, designate the Cosmic Person, the Great Person, the original Self from which all else comes.

The Upanishads, which Swāmī Abhishiktānanda loved so much, are known for little mention of the deities, nor of sacrifice and rituals. They concern themselves mainly with the journey to the cave of the heart, where the Ground of Consciousness (ātman) realizes its identity with the Ground of Being (Brahman). Yet the notion of the Purusha as a personal god is not entirely missing from the Upanishads either. The Upanishads begin with Brahman, the mystery of being; then they come to the realization that this mystery of being is not different from ātman, the inner Self, and that the human self is one with the Supreme Self, the Being of the whole creation. But then, as thought develops further in the Upanishads, this ātman, this Brahman, comes to be seen as *Purusha*, who is not, however, just an impersonal ground of being nor an impersonal ground of consciousness, pure and distant, beyond subject and object, but *Purusha* as Person again, even an object of devotion.

There are already hints of this personal god even in early Upanishads, in the Brihadāranyaka and the Īsha, for example. But this strain is more fully developed in the Shvetāshvatara Upanishad, which is a rather late one. In chapter 1:7–9, we hear of the triad, the perishable, the imperishable, and

10. Swāmī Abhishiktānanda, *The Further Shore*, 54.

that which is beyond the two.¹¹ This third aspect, beyond perishable and imperishable, beyond that which is immanent in nature and consciousness, beyond the impersonal ground of being and ground of consciousness, is the *Purusha*, to whom Swāmī Abhishiktānanda reveals his devotion in that *sannyāsa* hymn from the same Shvetāshvatara Upanishad: “I know that Great Person of the color of the sun beyond darkness. Only by knowing that one do we overcome death.”

In his spiritual diary Swāmī Abhishiktānanda writes, “God is invisible, non-manifested, *a-vyakta*. This God is the Father, the Source, the First [*Prathama*].”¹² In another place Swāmī Abhishiktānanda says of this passage that Christ himself is “the *Purusha* who looks on, while the ‘other’ *purusha* enjoys the world and lives in anxiety.”¹³ From a Christian standpoint, it is not that he has forsaken the Trinity nor the “persons” (whatever that word may mean!) in the Trinity, but he has instead found a new way to express his experience of them and It (the Trinity), with a new language and even a new ardor.

This is vitally important in our day and age when so many have grown jaded about and tired of the ponderous, limited, and exclusive language that often seems to be forced upon us. (See for example the latest English translation of the Roman Missal, slavishly faithful to the Latin in spite of the sometimes dubious theology that underlies the prayers themselves!) Someone like our pioneering wandering French poet strikes an attractive

11.

In song it has been called the supreme *brahman*.

In it are the triad, the good support and the imperishable.

Knowing it and merging into *brahman*,

knowers of *brahman*, intent on it, are freed from the womb.

The powerful one bears the whole, united,

Perishable and imperishable, manifest and unmanifest.

The self, powerless, is bound through its being an enjoyer.

Once it knows the god, it is freed from all bonds.

There are two billy goats, knower and unknowing, powerful and powerless;

One nanny goat, yoked to the enjoyer and the objects of enjoyment;

And the infinite self, possessing all forms, not an actor.

When one finds the triad, this is *brahman*.

Roebuck, *The Upanishads*, 296.

12. Swāmī Abhishiktānanda, *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart*, 284.

13. Ibid.

figure, not only fearlessly delving into the depth experience but ecstatically expressing it—as well as writing it down and leaving us a permanent record.

In his audience discussing Dionysius the Areopagite, Benedict XVI goes on to say that a mystic such as Dionysius (and by extension the apophatic way itself) has a new relevance today. Just as in his own day Dionysius was a mediator between the spirit of Greek philosophy and the Gospel, today these mystics who can speak of God beyond name and form can function as great mediators in the modern dialogue between Christianity and the mystical theologies of Asia, because there is “a similarity . . . between the thought of the Areopagite and that of Asian religions.”¹⁴ And here Pope Benedict, who at first glance might seem an odd bedfellow for our intrepid Breton, says something that Swāmī Abhishiktānanda could hardly disagree with. We can begin to understand “that dialogue does not accept superficiality” because

it is precisely when one enters into the depths of the encounter with Christ that an ample space for dialogue also opens. When one encounters the light of truth, one realizes that it is a light for everyone; polemics disappear and it is possible to understand one another, or at least to speak to one another, to come closer. . . . And in the end, he tells us: take the path of experience, the humble experience of faith, every day.¹⁵

Today, as the Gospel has come into new kinds of contact with cultural worlds that once lay beyond Christian influence, Swāmī Abhishiktānanda aids us in the new tasks of inculturation and helps our generation face problems not unlike those faced by the Church in the first centuries. By entering into this experience of “not,” by entering into the depths of encounter with Christ, Swāmī Abhishiktānanda, our modern Dionysius, serves as a mediator in our ongoing dialogue with the mystical theology of Asia in general and with the spiritual genius of India in particular. He opens for us a new language for articulating the Christian religious experience as well as, and most importantly, an invitation into a new depth experience of Christianity.

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14. Benedict XVI, “General Audience.”

15. *Ibid.*

Preface and Acknowledgments

I ARRIVED AT OSAGE Monastery (a Benedictine monastery modeled on Hindu āshrams outside Sand Springs, Oklahoma) for the first time on the evening of St. Stephen's day of 2007. After the community's evening prayer and meditation, I passed by the small bookcase next to the front door of the main building that served as a bookshop. There I noted in addition to a number of larger volumes by Fr. Bede Griffiths a set of slimmer volumes by someone named "Swāmī Abhishiktānanda." By the style of their binding and the feel of their paper I knew clearly they had been printed in India, and most had geometric designs on their covers. I was immediately intrigued, sat down on the floor next to the shelves, and flipped a book open. After reading a paragraph or two of *In Spirit and Truth*, I put enough money to buy three books into the small tin on the bottom shelf and scurried silently back to my cabin in the woods.

That evening, I found something articulated that I had struggled to articulate for a number of years. Swāmī Abhishiktānanda's words sang with such candor and passion of a tremendous vision of who we humans are, what the world is, and how the Trinity informs it all. His Vedantic perspective on the Christian mystical and contemplative life floored me, causing a slow smile to spread across my face again and again in the dim light of the small cabin below the Forest's—the affectionate name for Osage—dark canopy. Since that time, Swāmiji has been a regular teacher, inspiration, and challenge to me through his writings, and it brings me great joy to present to the world his collected poems for the first time in this English translation.

This project was very much a labor of love, and there are a number of people dear to me whom I wish to thank. First and foremost, I would like to thank Swāmī Abhishiktānanda himself—for helping me find a sense of home in the great, teeming, complex reality of human history, religion, and culture.

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My deep and filial gratitude also go to Sr. Pascaline Coff, Sr. Sarah Schwartzberg, and all the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration for their witness, instruction, and friendship, and most especially for making Osage Monastery (now Osage Forest of Peace) a place of silence and peace amidst an often noisy and distracted world.

This project would not have been possible without the guidance and warmth of Swāmī Ātmānanda Udāsīn of Swāmī Ajātānanda Āshram in Rishikesh, India, director of the Abhishiktānanda Centre for Interreligious Dialogue, who invited me to take up this translation project and gave me permission to publish this material. He also guided me throughout amidst his own busy schedule and offered suggestions and corrections on the manuscript. Who would have thought when I emailed the Centre out of the blue in early 2015 that we would bring Swāmījī's poems to the world in three years' time!

My thanks likewise go to Fr. Cyprian Consiglio, Prior of New Camaldoli Hermitage in Big Sur, California, for his promotion of interreligious dialogue and the universal call to contemplation through his music, writing, retreats, and shepherding of the monks and oblates at New Camaldoli, and for taking the time to contribute the Foreword to this book—especially as he and his monks were dealing with the logistical fallout from landslides that had covered their access roads on the coast outside Big Sur when he composed it!

In a similar vein, I thank and acknowledge the support of Fr. William Skudlarek, Benedictine of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, for his assistance throughout this project, his own contributions to promoting Swāmī Abhishiktānanda's teaching and legacy, and his work with Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, which carries on in an official capacity the valuable work begun by Swāmī Abhishiktānanda and others.

My appreciation also extends to everyone at the āshram of Shri Ramana Maharshi in Tamil Nadu, India, especially Vaidyanathan, whose patience with my queries was impressive and constant. Swāmījī's first real glimpse of India and the spiritual riches she had to offer a Breton Christian monk, as well as the Church at large, occurred in the caves of Arunāchala and the āshram's environs, and their blessing on this work that presents Swāmījī's renderings of Shri Ramana's own poems is both an honor and humbling.

The only other person I know of who had taken on the task of studying and making available Swāmī Abhishiktānanda's poetry was the late Judson Trapnell. Though I never met Dr. Trapnell, I have read and respect his work and wish the world could have seen what he was going to make

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of the corpus I present below. However, Dr. Ted Ulrich of the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota very kindly and generously made available to me Dr. Trapnell's archival work and beginning plans for a study of these poems. Access to these preliminary materials helped me clarify the scope and direction of this project at its beginning, and I am tremendously grateful to Dr. Trapnell for the clearly heart-felt work he put into the project and to Dr. Ulrich for sharing the materials with me. I hope this volume is at least in part a fulfillment of Dr. Trapnell's vision.

Several of my friends and colleagues helped me wade through this material, and I appreciate their expertise, patience, and camaraderie—Andrew Klein helped me get started; Emily Ransom looked over the manuscript, making suggestions, and both she and Karl Persson let me talk their ears off about Swāmījī and his spiritual teaching (even when they didn't realize it); Liza Strakhov supported my French when I saw it faltering. Throughout the various stages of this project, Kerry Olivetti, Joan Sommer, and the Interlibrary Loan staff—Vicki Meinecke, John Lunt, and Katie Eigner—at Marquette University's Raynor Library searched out a number of obscure, out-of-print, and/or foreign-language volumes for me with unrelenting effort. To all of you: thank you!

Amidst all of this help and support, any lingering errors remain my own.

And finally, profound thanks to my parents, who early on encouraged my curiosity about other cultures and the world's religions—I still recall vividly the day we visited Avol's Books just off State Street in Madison, Wisconsin when I was no more than fifteen and they encouraged me to buy a small translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā* I had found down low on a set of black lacquered shelves; my brother, Paul, who, among other contributions, introduced me to Buddhist meditation techniques up in his bedroom when I was twelve; and my wife, Mamie, who has come on a very meandering and arcane road with me and has yet to let her enthusiasm, wonder, or love flag.

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