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VIEWPOINTS

A New Millennium – Nearly!

C. Murray Rogers

CELEBRATION IS THE keynote of these few reflections.

In five years' time a new millennium will be born. It is time that we rejoiced. Our leaders, it is true, make stupendous misjudgements. Damage and suffering is at present caused to a majority of human beings and to our Mother Earth. Certain men and women in pursuit of riches and power for themselves, a small minority of persons (usually white and male, and a smaller minority of wealthy coloured and black persons), are undermining the life of our planet. Yet at this very same time something new is on the horizon.

There is a Buddhist saying "Those who are awake live in a state of constant amazement". What is being prepared for the new century, prepared almost entirely out of sight, as is true of all birthing, evokes in us a certain trust and amazement. During these years, when we have been taking our sometimes fumbling steps in interfaith dialogue, something unbeknownst to us has been happening as a result of those steps, something has been happening to our world religions. We used to experience these great religious systems or institutions as objects of study, objects of rivalry, objects of judgement. Now, "while people slept" a monumental change has taken place.

Something like a world consciousness is being born. More and more of us around the world, drawn from different spiritual families, are drawing on the scriptures and spiritual treasures of religious traditions other than our own, the one in which we were born. Slowly but very surely the

dualities – "we" and "they", Christian and Non-Christian, true religion and false religion, superior and inferior, natural and supernatural – are, almost without our noticing, fading away. I see my own experience as a tiny part of this process: I went to India in 1946 as an Anglican Christian missionary, hoping, praying, that through my testimony and work Hindu people and others might become Christians and baptized members of the Church. The Lord, in one of his "lilas" decided that he would rather continue *my* conversion precisely through what I had been hoping to weaken! Much light shone exactly in that place which I had been considering a place of darkness!

This revolutionary change, which happens not because we plan it, nor as a result of our mental activity, has unlimited implications. It happens not as a result of any "watering down", nor are we trying to syncretize and reduce to one form our multiple expressions of spirituality, nor are we stopping our traditional missionary activity because it simply is not successful. No, the grounds of our old attitudes and our old mental stereotypes have been and are being quite simply removed. Our claims of superiority and uniqueness do not hold water and collapse in front of our eyes. This is *not* our activity, in fact it is an amazement, an almost embarrassing amazement, for those of us who are orthodox and scriptural believers.

When Dom Le Saux (Swami Abhishiktananda) wrote in his journal (the spiritual diary found after his *mahasamadi*)

“Pentecost ushers in a stage which is beyond ‘religion’. It is in the Spirit that Christ lives, not in the pope or in the formulas of the Credo”, he was speaking, I believe, beyond his own “seeing”, speaking as a prophet of the twenty-first century, a forerunner of what is already visible on the horizon. Because of the experience of *advaita* that he, a Christian monk and priest, underwent – an experience intimately related to that of Ramana Maharshi and Arunachala – he began to know that “the Church is a transitory entity, between the descent of the Spirit and the realisation by human beings of the Mystery of the Spirit/Atman”.

Have not all our spiritual paths and Ways too often become hardened into “religion”, whereas – however useful they may have been in the past – that time is now over? All our religious institutions have failed to live by the high and lofty claims that too easily come from our lips. In the opinion of vast numbers of our fellow human beings, we have failed beyond redemption. Could it be that the full birth of this new world consciousness of interrelatedness or mutuality awaits a humble acceptance of our failure, each of us speaking for our own religious institution? It should hardly surprise us Christians or our Hindu brothers and sisters that resurrection is on the far side of dying, as institutions, structural, mental, and theological. If we are to “practice resurrection”, to use a phrase of Wendell Berry, are we not invited to cross to the further shore of our cerebral framework and encrusted spiritual habits?

I ask myself, as Swami Abhishiktananda did, whether the message of the Gospel and of Advaita and of every fundamental spiritual way is confined to any one *dharma* whatever. As he told us, the message of the Upanishads and of the Gospel has inevitably to be shared in the framework of the roots

of each, for the one the Vedic-Brahmanic roots, for the other the Jewish/Mediterranean world outlook. The deep and enduring value of each for the whole of humanity goes beyond those “worlds”. To use his words again:

It [each fundamental message] echoes the very depths of the human heart; the message of love, of mutual giving, of relationship, the message that mankind’s condition is divine. The Upanishadic message has moulded the Indian mind, and the Gospel message that of the West, though passing through channels that are further and further removed from the Source, and with waters more and more adulterated.

The Swami’s work continues “elsewhere” while ours is clear, as we recognize this major turning point in religious consciousness, approaching as we are a new century. We must rediscover the Source, awaken to our own depth and dare to move forward beyond all the scaffolding of religious and mental structures upon which we have depended for so long. As the Chandogya Upanishad so truly tells us: “Each person is a living sacrifice”. At each hour of the day and of our life, morning, noon, and night, we are called to offer ourselves:

With the help of the Adityas, the powers of my life, let my evening offering last until the end of a long life; and may not my sacrifice perish whilst the gods of light are the powers of my life. (Chandogya 3:16)

As the Kali Yug draws towards its end, how good it is to celebrate this new evolution of the planet and of humankind!

Who could live and who could breathe if the joy of the Atman/Spirit filled not the Universe? (Taittiriya Up. 2.7.)