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Report of the Seminar on Brahmabandhab Upadhyay

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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2007

7:00-8:30 AM BOARD MEETING

(Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego, Room Mohsen B)

9:00-11:30 AM PANEL DISCUSSION: “(Re-)Constructing Advaita: Rambachan’s *The Advaita Worldview* and Thatamanil’s *The Immanent Divine* in Conversation”

(Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego, Room Mohsen B)

Michael McLaughlin, Presiding

Panelists:

Michelle Voss Roberts, Rhodes College

Michael McLaughlin, St. Leo University

Joseph Prabhu, California State University

Respondents:

Anantanand Rambachan, St. Olaf College

John J. Thatamanil, Vanderbilt University

11:30 AM BUSINESS MEETING

Corinne Dempsey, Presiding

Report of the Seminar on Brahmabandhab Upadhyay

THE Seminar, held at the Vidyajyoti Faculty of Theology in Delhi on January 22, 2007 and attended by about two hundred participants, was organized to commemorate the centenary of the death of an important Indian freedom fighter and Christian theologian Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (né Bhavanicharan Bandyopadhyay, anglicized as Banerji), 1861-1907, an important figure who was a disciple of Keshab Chandra Sen, a youthful friend of Naren Dutta, better known as Swami Vivekananda, and a mature friend of Rabindranath Tagore and his colleague in the educational enterprise of Shanti Niketan. He had an important part in creating an anti-colonial mood in Bengal in the early years of the twentieth century. In 1891 he had converted to the Christian faith and was admitted into the Catholic Church. He wrote much for Catholic apologetics and explanation of the faith, started what may be the earliest models of journals devoted to Indian Christian theology and to interreligious dialogue (especially the monthly

Sophia), and died as a prisoner of the British charged with the crime of conspiracy against the (colonial) Government.

The Seminar was opened with a half-hour projection of a Documentary Film prepared by the students of the Vidyajyoti College on the life of Upadhyay. The inaugural lecture was chaired by the Vice-Chancellor of the Vidyajyoti College, Dr. Hector D’Souza, S.J. and was delivered by Professor Julius J. Lipner of the School of Divinity, University of Cambridge, U.K., who dealt on “Brahmabandhab Upadhyay’s Significance for the Twenty-first Century.” The lecture has been published in the *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 71 (2007):165-184. He took up three issues, what he called the “nativisation” of (the Christian) faith, the issue of Patriotism, and the challenge that the Dalit movement and theology presents to his Sanskrit form of Indian theology. In all three areas the speaker pointed out the limitations of the work of Upadhyay, yet he

thought that the issues raised in the concrete theological and political atmosphere of the end of the nineteenth century were very relevant for the twenty-first century that has to face them with a different perspective. The indigenization of the Church and its theology is a burning issue, the question of patriotism seen from the perspectives of the Hindu and Brahminical identity has not disappeared in secular free India, and if we would not now speak of a "Hindu-Christian" because the Hindutva movement has changed the terms of reference, and the implications of the word 'Hindu', still the role of 'Indianness' in the Christian believer in the country has to be faced. And the Dalit culture, for all its claims to represent a different stream of the Indian reality, cannot deny its historical links with the Sanskritic tradition or the impact it has had on the Indian identity.

The second paper by Professor Amiya P. Sen of Jamia Milia, Delhi, was chaired by Dr. Rabindra Roy of the Delhi School of Economics of the University of Delhi. The paper dealt with the links of the thought of Upadhyay with the Bengali culture, stressing parallelisms with Vivekananda's thought. In the afternoon Dr. Anand Amaladass, of Satya Nilaym, University of Madras, presented a paper on the question of inculturation of the faith in the work of Upadhyay, a lecture that was chaired by Dr. Roma Chatterjee of the Delhi School of Economics. Dr. Leonard Fernando, then Principal of the Vidyajyoti Faculty, presented a paper on the understanding of the Church by Upadhyay and his contribution to an Indian

ecclesiology. Dr. Meenakshi Khanna of the Indraprastha College, University of Delhi, chaired that session. It was followed by the paper of Dr. Sebastian Vazhapilly, S.J., of the Gujarat Vidya Deep, Varodara, on the theology of religions implied in the theological work of Upadhyay, a session chaired by Dr. Susan Visvanathan of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Finally Dr. George Gispert-Sauch of the Vidyajyoti Faculty presented a paper on the patriotism of Bhavani/Upadhyay, showing how it preceded and accompanied his Christian vocation, a session chaired by Dr. Julius Lipner, who concluded the seminar with a reflection on the day's work.

There was another important paper that formed part of the Seminar and was given in written form to all the participants, "Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, Tripersonalising the *Parabrahman*," by Bryan Lobo, S.J., a doctoral student at the Universita Gregoriana, Rome. It dealt in detail with the specific Trinitarian theology of Upadhyay especially evident in his celebrated Sanskrit hymn to the Trinity, *Vande Saccidānandam*.

Though many issues remained inconclusive the seminar did throw a lot of light on the theological contribution of Upadhyay. For more information on the Seminar consult www.vidyajyoti.in. The papers of the Seminar and other material are likely to be published before the end of this year.

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