

The Golden String

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BULLETIN OF THE BEDE GRIFFITHS TRUST

Spring 1994

Passing on the Prophetic Witness: the Bede Griffiths Trust

Robert Hale

Fr. Bede Griffiths (1906-1993), a saint and mystic strongly rooted in the Christian tradition, attained deep insight regarding the ultimate love revealed in his own faith, as well as in Hinduism, Buddhism, and the other great world religions. He consequently was able to open the hearts and minds of countless persons to spiritual and contemplative renewal, through his teaching and his profound books, such as The Marriage of East and West, Return to the Center, Universal Wisdom, and The Golden String. His contemplative wisdom and gentle presence brought very many throughout the world to a sense of the fundamental complementarity of the great religions, and the possibility of real personal union with Divine Compassion. He also explored in his later years the dialogue between religion, in this more universal sense, and modern science, as well as other dimensions of contemporary culture such as the women's movement and the ecological movement. And all with a view to the deeper integration of the modern experience into contemplative union with God.

Before his death Fr. Bede founded a Trust, to oversee and have care for his publications, manuscripts and tapes, and to further disseminate to the world his spiritual vision, and especially to encourage and support the renewal of contemplative life throughout the world. The Trust has est- ablished on various continents study and meditation centers, where his books are available, to consult or purchase, along with his articles and tapes, as well as

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Second World Parliament of Religions Meets in Chicago

James R. Anderson

Had one entered the Palmer House hotel during the week of August 28 through Sept 4, 1993, one would not have been able to determine that the hotel is located in the middle of downtown Chicago. The Parliament of the World's Religions, held at the hotel during that week last year, displaced the suit-and-tie businessmen and shorts-and-polo-shirt tourists who normally occupy the facility with adherents to and spiritual leaders of a number of religions, many of them rarely observed in Chicago.

The Parliament has become a once-a-century event. The first one, convened at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1893, coincided with the Columbian Exposition. "Catholicism and Judaism were recognized as mainstream American religions at the first parliament", said the Rev. Julian von Duerbeck, a Benedictine monk who helped organize last year's event. "This parliament gave recognition to the Eastern religions in the United States, and to the earth religions."

Parties who had not been invited to participate a century earlier were pleased to participate on this occasion. "When the first Parliament was held, Native Americans were not part of that", said Jennie Joe, a Native American and a professor at the University of Arizona. "It is encouraging to know that you recognize that we do indeed have a religion."

The Eastern religions, followed for centuries in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and parts of Europe, have begun to grow in the United States. For example, Islam has an estimated 860 million followers worldwide, more than 6 million in the U.S., and 300,000 in the Chicago area (1988 figures). Of the world's 665 million Hindus 220,000 live in the Chicago area, as do an estimated 350,000 of the world's 310 million Buddhists, according to research commissioned by the Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions.

"As the Parliament unfolded, the realignment of spiritual forces that has occurred over the last hundred years was conspicuous at every turn," Richard Hughes Seager reported in the January, 1994 Shambala Sun. "Morning meditation was alternately led by Buddhists, Zoroastrians, Sufis, Sikhs, the Earth Spirit Community, the Fellowship of

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The Bede Griffiths Trust

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documentaries and studies on his life work. And above all where his commitment to contemplative prayer can be experienced. The four centers established in the U.S.A., all within the context of contemplative monastic communities, are:

- Osage Monastery, c/o Sr. Pascaline Coff, OSB, 18701 W. Monastery Road, Sand Springs, OK 74063, 918 245 2734, 918 245 9360 (fax)
- New Camaldoli Hermitage, c/o Fr. Robert Hale, OSB Cam, Big Sur CA 93920, 408 667 2456, 408 667 0209 (fax)
- Incarnation Monastery, c/o Br. Cassian Hardie, OSB Cam, 1369 La Loma Ave, Berkeley CA 94708, 510 548 0965, 510 845 0601 (fax)
- Epiphany Monastery, c/o Fr. Romuald Duscher, OSB Cam, 96 Scobie Rd, New Boston, NH 03070, 603 487 3700, 603 487 3020 (fax)

Fr. Bede's books can be purchased at any of the above centers, also by mail, phone or FAX order. The Trust archives are housed at Incarnation Monastery, Berkeley. Other centers of the Trust throughout the world include:

- in India: Saccidananda Ashram, c/o Br John Martin, OSB Cam, Tannirpalli 639107, Kulittalai - Trichi Dist. Tamil Nadu, South India 011 91 4323 3060
- in Italy: Monastero di San Gregorio, c/o Fr. Bernardino Cozzarini, OSB Cam, Piazza di San Gregorio al Celio, Rome, Italy 00184, 011 396 700 8227, 011 396 700 9357 (fax)
- in Germany: Shantigiri/Mount of Peace, c/o Roland Ropers, Obl OSB, D-83707 Kreuth/Tegernsee, Germany, 011 49 8029 8235, 011 49 8029 8888 (fax)
- in Australia: Christ by the River Hermitage, c/o Fr. Douglas Conlon, Obl OSB, PO Box 35, Pinjarra 6208, W. Australia, 011 09 5311 227, 011 09 5312 4 8 0 (fax)

Several doctoral and masters theses have already been written on Fr Bede's teaching and life; and the Trust seeks to promote much further study in this very rich area.

His



The Golden String:

**Bede Griffiths' Legacy
Bruno Barnhart**

I give you the end of a golden string;
Only wind it into a ball,
It will lead you in at heaven's gate,
Built in Jerusalem's wall.

This is the verse from William Blake with which Father Bede began the Prologue of his autobiographical work, The Golden String. The phrase has been adopted as title for the newsletter of the Trust because it condenses so beautifully the meaning of Bede's life and work. His life was a quest of the ultimate Reality which has become, in the course of the centuries, so difficult of access in our western world. *The Golden String* is the inner continuity and meaning of Bede's quest and his teaching; it signifies also, more widely, that *philosophia perennis*, or wisdom, which the West must recover - and develop - if our history itself is to have any ultimate meaning. The *String* is a personal quest and its legacy, it is the search of our contemporary Christianity for its own soul and center, and it is the image of a consciousness and life which will plunge its roots in the depths both of the divine Word and of the immanent Spirit - and will recognize and participate in the movements of the Spirit in our own time. The *Golden String* is a life of wisdom.

As Bede followed the path of the golden string through his life, the expression's meaning evolved for him. The tip of the string and the beginning of his pilgrimage was *spiritual experience*, and his realization that this is the heart of true religion. In the same Prologue, he proceeds to tell us what he means by the golden string - characteristically, not by a conceptual definition but by recounting for us an event of his boyhood - his first awakening to the fullness of

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His many books and articles offer abundant possibilities for further scholarly study.

The Trust also promotes local and national conferences on Fr. Bede's teachings, and on East/West and ecological themes. It publishes a worldwide newsletter, *The Golden String*. And it sponsors and helps Fr. Bede's Ashram community in South India, Shantivanam, and the village projects for the poor supported by the Ashram. And in a special way it seeks to promote the renewal of contemplative life, a central concern of Fr. Bede.

Whoever desires further information, or desires to be on the Trust mailing list and receive the newsletter, is invited to write to the closest center. The fledgling Trust has no endowment, and welcomes any and all gifts, and asks the support of prayer. □

Parliament Meeting in Chicago

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Isis and other groups. Evening ceremonies served as explorations of the ways in which different traditions - Evangelical Lutheran, the Reform churches, Unitarianism, Baha'i, African-American Protestantism, the Self Realization Fellowship and others - approach the often sensitive question of interfaith worship."

The Parliament last year attracted Christians, Baha'is, Jains, Muslims, Jews, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Taoists - and, though religions, especially ones from different cultures, have historically battled one another, the delegates at the conference primarily came in peace.

"Over 50 wars are going on now which are based in part on religion," said Rabbi James Rudin, the director of National Interreligious Affairs for the American Jewish Committee. "But we live in a time of unprecedented opportunities to build human bridges of understanding among all of us who are peoples of faith."

The general attitude of peace and understanding did not make the Parliament a giant love-in. The diversity of groups attending the Parliament, in fact, led to the withdrawal of the Greek-Orthodox Diocese of Chicago. Although the Orthodox communique did not specify who was objectionable, its concerns seemed to be directed at participants such as witches and neo-pagans, the Chicago Tribune reported. Two days later, four Jewish organizations withdrew as co-sponsors, objecting to the presence of Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam.

Another controversy at the Parliament involved the *Declaration of a Global Ethic*, a statement decrying environmental destruction, sexual abuse and discrimination, "the insane death of children from violence" and "aggression and hatred in the name of religion."

The statement declares, "Time and again we see leaders and members of religions incite aggression, fanaticism, hate and xenophobia - even inspire and legitimate bloody conflicts. We are filled with disgust."

The declaration was written over a two-year period by a group led by Roman Catholic theologian Hans Kung of Switzerland, who has often been at odds with the Vatican. "Our earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individuals is changed," Kung said. "Alone we are often unable to shift a single stone, but together we can move mountains. Therefore, let us commit ourselves, dear friends, to a common global ethic, to better mutual understanding, as well as socially beneficial peace-fostering and natural, friendly ways of life. Let us invite all men

and women, whether religious or not, to do the same as we shall do."

Perhaps the brightest luminary at the Parliament was the Dalai Lama of Tibet, a Buddhist monk who is his country's spiritual leader, as well as the leader of Tibet's

Father Bede in Australia

Douglas Conlon

Since Father Bede's visit to Australia in 1985, his televised eucharist has been repeated several times, generating a widely sympathetic response across the country. In a three week tour, he had spoken to about 5,000 people in three capitals. He addressed over 300,000 throughout Australia during his mass - in the Shantivanam style - on National ABC Television.

Father Bede's second visit to Australia in 1992 coincided with the visit of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and together they were present to audiences of 20,000 in Perth. They met several times; on the day of the Dalai Lama's arrival, Fr. Bede inquired about Tibetan Dzogchen meditation, in which he had become increasingly interested. This must have whetted the Dalai Lama's appetite, as we received an invitation to meet with him privately the day of his departure. For nearly two hours Fr. Bede, His Holiness and myself were lost in discussing the Christian apophatic tradition of contemplative prayer, as taught by the medieval mystics, and going back to the Desert Fathers. Father Bede was able to bring considerable light on the matter of what exactly Christians believed and didn't believe. His Holiness was both surprised at these clarifications and delighted that Christianity presented a much deeper and richer tradition than many Buddhists give it credit for.

Fr. Bede, accompanied by Fr. Christudas of Shantivanam, spoke to about 7,000 in other parts of Australia during his month-long visit. ©

government-in-exile since leaving Tibet in 1959. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. The Dalai Lama spoke for 10 minutes at the Parliament's Christian-Buddhist Monastic Dialogue, culminating 12 years of dialogue and exchange of monks and nuns between India and the United States. He also spoke to a large audience on the evening of Sept. 4 at Chicago's Grant Park.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, publisher of *Hinduism Today*, summarized the Parliament during closing ceremonies: "We've come a long way at this conference," he said. "It wasn't easy for many to sign the Global Ethic, but it was signed, and it's like the past has gone away and a few problems remain but they're going to be solved and we're going ahead into a wonderful future, all of us." □

Father Bede Remembered at Parliament Service

Paramahansa Krishna Swami
(City of God, West Virginia)

*Better than a hundred years of worship,
Better than a thousand offerings...
Is one moment's reverence
For the man who has conquered himself.
To revere such a man,
A master old in virtue and holiness,
is to have victory over life itself,
And beauty, strength and happiness.
-The Dhammapada*

Reflecting back on the ceremony honoring Father Bede at the parliament, my strongest memory is that of a thousand eyes, full of reverence, filling with tears as Russill Paul sang his beautiful eulogy to our beloved "Bedeji." The five hundred souls who were drawn together at that place to honor Father Bede's passing experienced the high point of the world's greatest interfaith gathering. Better than a thousand speeches, better than a thousand casual exchanges, was that "one moment's reverence" for a man whom everyone there, in one way or another, considered their guru.

Some of Father Bede's closest disciples and friends were on hand to celebrate his life in poetry and song, personal tributes, stories, memories, prayers and their loving presence. These friends included Sister Pascaline Coff, Raimondo Panikkar, Russil and Asha Paul D'Silva, Father Thomas Matus, Brother Wayne Teasdale, Father John Killian, Arlo Guthrie and Roland Ropers. Each of them contributed in one or more of the above ways.

For the dozen or so Vaishnava devotees of Krishna from the City of God in West Virginia who came to bid farewell to Father Bede at the Parliament ceremony, this "master old in virtue and holiness" was a special Friend. In 1986, when the Krishna devotees in West Virginia separated from the more fundamentalist-oriented International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Father Bede became our first non-Hindu teacher.

Swami Bhaktipada, founder of the City of God, had met Father Bede in Shantivanam in 1987. They were instant friends, recognizing a common vision of a world spiritual community bound by ties of mutual appreciation for the various, beautiful paths to Divinity.

Swami Bhaktipada returned from India with pictures of Father Bede's statue of Jesus sitting in the lotus posture. One of our sculptors created our own murti of the blessed Lord Jesus in this same lotus-sitting form, which has since intrigued and elicited reverence from thousands of

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Father Bede's Desire for New Styles of Religious Community

- and An Ongoing Experience

Beatrice Bruteau

Father Bede composed a brief document entitled *Oblates of Shantivanam*, consisting of five points (here abbreviated still further): 1) The Oblates are men and women, married and single, who offer their lives to God as Supreme Reality beyond name and form. 2) This Reality manifests itself under various names in Earth's traditions; Christian Oblates respond to it through Jesus, the New Testament, and the Church. 3) Oblates recognize and revere traditions other than their own and respect all who seek God. 4) As monastics, Oblates claim kinship with monastics of all traditions. 5) Oblates of Shantivanam build on the foundation of prayer/study/work that characterizes Shantivanam in its Benedictine/Camaldolese tradition as their way of realizing the Divine Mystery as love uniting the world.

I think that Fr. Bede felt that we are entering a new age in many senses, that one of these is the form that religious life will take, and that something along these broadened and more flexible lines would be a move in the right direction. He hoped to see a variety of small communities started in different places, each with its own charism, open and available to all people who shared its generous ideals.

In Winston-Salem, NC, we have made such a community. We call it The Fellowship of the Holy Trinity and base it on the general outlook of the Benedictine tradition, although we have a Rule of our own. This Rule is very similar to Fr. Bede's ideas. The deepest mysteries probed by the most "professional" of cloistered monastics are to be sought out and taught to these "lay people." The dedication to the Reality beyond name and form, the reverence for all traditions, the openness to all people, are the same as in Fr. Bede's document. Our Fellowship, which is a year old, is explicitly ecumenical and at present represents three Christian denominations among its one professed, eight novices, one postulant, and one aspirant (seven women, four men; seven married, three formerly married, one single).

In addition, we stress some further points that Fr. Bede felt strongly about: the relation between science and the spiritual quest, the appreciation of the beauty of the world, the recognition of and work to strengthen planetary consciousness and the sense of the complex and organic unity of the world.

Individual practice consists of seeing all life activities as prayer, worship, and manifestation of God's creative goodness. This is strengthened by various spirituality styles

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The Golden String

Parliament Memorial Service

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Americans and Hindus who visit our Hindu temple in West Virginia each year. In the dedication ceremony for the Jesus murti, Father Bede gave his eloquent blessings via a video tape from Shantivanam.

Over the years, through personal meetings with Father Bede and his disciples, and through his books, the interfaith devotees of Krishna increased their respect and affection for this sadhu in the dress of an eastern saint. But with Father Bede, of course, the dress was truly indicative of his real spiritual stature. In his presence, we felt his humility, his simplicity, his love.

A few months before his passing, I had the great privilege of a private darshan with Father Bede at Vivekenanda Monastery in Ganges, Michigan. As always, he inquired about Swami Bhaktipada and our community. We had been experiencing some incredible media and legal problems for over five years. And, although it did not always put him in good stead with his brothers in the Church, Father Bede never for one instant shied away from publicly supporting our teacher and our community.

After I had responded to Father Bede's inquiries, he - with the naturalness and honesty of a child - began to inquire about my personal spiritual and material affairs. The sages have stated that a man who lives in the present, who has conquered the distractions of space and time, considers whomever they are with at the moment to be the most important person in the world. This is how Father Bede made me feel that day.

A man may have a very noble bearing, which Father Bede did; a man may be a great scholar and author, which he was. A man may be honored far and wide, which was also the case with Father Bede. But true sainthood is recognized in the close encounters - person to person - between the enlightened being and those who are struggling on the path. The great faith and gentle grace of a holy person is what can - in that "one moment's reverence" - propel the spiritual aspirant up the path of realization.

That special day at the Parliament, when five hundred minds came together as one to honor Father Bede, the Lord's grace was manifest to each and all. For the Vaishnava devotees, sitting among our sisters and brothers of other faiths, we felt a special kinship with this extraordinary Benedictine monk who loved and imbibed in his life the magic, mystery and holiness of India - the land of Krishna.



New Styles of Religious Community

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(*margas*) in consultation with a spiritual guide. Eucharistic celebration, the Divine Office, meditation, and scripture study are stressed.

The Fellowship sings the Divine Office in choir (Gregorian music), has monthly Chapter meetings, shares meals, social fellowship, frequent retreats of one to three days, and has recently begun special study sessions for the novices. The one "fully professed" member, who received *diksha* from Fr. Bede, acts as Guide and teacher, assisted by a Minister, who supervises all temporal affairs.

As an autocephalous and ecumenical community, we have a treasured freedom to develop and adapt as suits us best, supported (morally, not financially) by our respective churches, but not legally bound to any of them. At present St. Timothy's Episcopal Church generously lets us use parlor, kitchen, choir and organ, classroom, garden, copier.

The line of descent of our Fellowship from Father Bede shows in the *kavi* scapular of the habit of the professed. Novices wear a white scapular over the basic white tunic (alb), and postulants are given a lapel pin of the Jerusalem Cross, which we all wear with our ordinary clothes. The habits are worn when the Fellowship meets.

Congeniality to Father Bede also shows in the Vedantic inspiration that colors much of the teaching (the present Guide was taught by the Ramakrishna Monastic Order). Later, during the Juniorate (which follows one year of Novitiate and lasts three years), we plan to study several of the great traditions more explicitly, and also to explore the arts and sciences.

I believe this sort of religious life has a good chance of succeeding. It attracts a mature, well-balanced type of person, intelligent and talented, ready to take responsibility for making a creative contribution. At present we are beginning contact with a group of six or more people in another North Carolina city, who are interested in exploring the possibility of starting a similar community in their vicinity and in sharing retreat times with us. We will be enjoying a joint retreat March 6 at St Timothy's, at which time we will have the benefit of conferences - by Sr. Sheila Long, OSB, of the Abbaye Ste. Marie de Maumont in France - about new forms of monastic life today and about the effect of chant on the soul.

Father Bede has set loose a timely creative energy in the world, well adjusted to our present needs and visions of reality. We are working with it here. Anyone desiring further information may write to Mr. James Clinard (the present Minister) at 306-B Park Ridge Circle, Winston-Salem, NC, 27104, U.S.A. □

Coming Events

The first anniversary of Father Bede's death, May 13, 1994, will be the occasion of a number of commemorative events; related happenings will continue throughout the year. (See page 2 for addresses and phone numbers.)

- There will be solemn celebrations at Shantivanam and at Prinknash Abbey, England.
- The anniversary celebrations in Perth, West Australia, organized by Fr. Doug Conlon, will include a concelebrated ashram-style Eucharist on May 13 and a Day of Reflection on the following day, including spiritual conferences, meditation, prayer in the Shantivanam tradition and films. There will also be anniversary celebrations on May 13 in Sydney. At the end of May, Fr. Conlon will lead a weekend retreat in Perth, and in October, again in Perth, he and Amiya Ghose, a Hindu sage and friend of Fr. Bede, will lead a week of ashram living, in the tradition of Shantivanam. A similar week's retreat will be offered in Dardanup, West Australia, in July.
- Roland Ropers will give lectures on Bede Griffiths' Universal Wisdom at London and Oxford in May 1994, and in Dresden, Munich, Salzburg in June 1994. Rupert Sheldrake gave the first Bede Griffiths Lecture in London on March 22 of this year.
- Wayne Teasdale and Russill and Asha Paul are leading a week-long experiential retreat (April 18-24) for priests at Cardinal Stritch Retreat House in Mundelein, Illinois, developing the theme of the contribution of India to Christian spirituality.
- At New Camaldoli in Big Sur, California, July 22-24, Father Robert Hale, together with Brothers Ezekiel and Cyprian, will conduct a weekend retreat, *The Marriage of East and West: The Challenge of the Vision of Dom Bede Griffiths*.
- In England some friends of Shantivanam have launched the idea of a network of friendship around Father Bede's vision, accenting the practice of silent meditation. A weekend will be organized at the "Rowan Tree Centre" in Wales, July 28-30, to explore this idea: the *Shantivanam Sangham Project*. Those interested in the project or/and the meeting can contact: Ria Weyens, Christian meditation centre, 29 Campden Hill Road, LONDON W8 7DX, U.K. tel 071 9370014. ■

Book Reviews

Wayne Teasdale

- ♦ **Bede Griffiths' Theory of Religious Symbol and Practice of Dialogue**, unpublished dissertation by Judson B. Trapnell, Catholic University, 1993.

Judson Trapnell's massive work (627 pages!) explores Father Bede's rich theology from the point of view of Bede as a "culture bearer". A culture bearer is a link or bridge between two selves or two dimensions of the same self; in Bede's case, between the East and the West. Such a figure connects two ages as well as two different cultures, and sums up in himself or herself this new cultural and psychological identity of being really two "worlds" of experience. Bede was able to do this within his own inner life, and he achieved an integration, a "marriage", if you like, of oriental interiority and occidental rationality and "extroversion".

Judson elaborates on the vocation of culture bearer: "It is a significant attribute of culture bearers like Augustine and Griffiths that they maintain a continuity between their old self and their converted self in order to facilitate the transition between paradigms and ages" (p.600). Both Augustine and Bede implemented in themselves the complementarity of two cultures. They became living *bridges*. Judson Trapnell's dissertation is well put together; it flows beautifully. Seeing Bede's life through Judson's writing is like watching a friend (Bede) develop. His work is a definitive examination of this extraordinary life and how Bede's unique spirituality and vision unfolded both in Britain and later in India. Judson came to know Bede through a number of encounters in India and America, and he eloquently answers the question: *who is Bede Griffiths?*

- ♦ **Jules Monchanin: Pioneer in Christian-Hindu Dialogue**, by Sten Rodhe (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), xvi + 76 pp.

This slim volume on the life of one of the founders of Shantivanam has a foreword by Bede Griffiths in which Fr. Bede extols the prophetic role of the saintly Monchanin and the triumph of his ideal of inculturation, and the meeting of the Indian philosophical tradition with the Christian faith in a truly Indian community rooted in India's rich and profound culture.

Sten Rodhe, a Swedish comparative religionist grounded in the Christian tradition, devoted the better part of his adult life to studying the oriental traditions, notably the Hindu tradition, and has worked to build understanding

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Book Reviews (Continued from page 6)

and reconciliation between the Christian and Hindu traditions. He has found in Monchanin a thinker and figure with whom he resonates profoundly. Monchanin was a man of paradox and tension, and it is in this quality of tension that Dr. Rodhe sees his significance. He observes:

The life of Monchanin may be characterized by tension: tension between West and East, Europe and India, tension between intellectualism and mysticism, tension between continuity and change, tension between his great vision and the difficulties of realizing it (p.70).

Monchanin always kept before himself the words of his great friend Henri de Lubac (1886-1991) who had written to him these instructions as he set off for India in 1938: "The task is to rethink everything in the light of theology, and then to rethink theology in terms of mysticism". The idea was to give theology a sounder foundation in the truth. Always Monchanin attempted to follow these wise instructions, while cautiously exploring Hindu spirituality in the light of his Christian faith. He was not as daring as Abhishiktananda, but his views were influential. Rodhe points out that "Monchanin was a pioneer in the Catholic Church of an inclusive view of the relation between Christianity and Hinduism. The Indian tradition should not be rejected in the Church. This view became, after the death of Monchanin, the official view of the Catholic Church, as documented in the writings of the Second Vatican Council" (p.73).

Monchanin died in 1957 in France, far away from his beloved Shantivanam - which he never saw in its later flowering under Bede Griffiths. He and Abhishiktananda were given the task of planting the seed, while Bede's became the watering and harvesting of the community.

- ◆ **Christian Ashrams: A Movement with a Future?**, ed. Vandana Mataji (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), 162pp.

This precious little book contains the papers deriving from two meetings or satsangs of ashram leaders. One was the unofficial gathering of the Ashramvasis' Satsang at Jaiharikhal, Garhwal Hills, Northern India, May 3-8, 1991. The second meeting was an official convocation of the fellowship of Catholic ashrams called Ashram Aikiya which was held at Anjali Ashram, Mysore, November 11-17, 1991. Participants at these two satsangs included Fr. Bede, Vandana Mataji, Eeshipriya Mataji, Sadu Asteya, Swami Iswar Prasad, Brother Arul, Sr. Sara Grant, Swami Amalraj,

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Film Review

Beatrice Bruteau

- ◆ **A Human Search: The Life of Father Bede Griffiths**, directed and produced by John Swindells, Sydney, Australia, More Than Illusion Films, 1993. VHS, 59 min. (See page 9 for source, and for other films)

This beautiful video tape/film celebrates the life of Father Bede Griffiths as a living marriage of East and West, androgynous parent of a new religious consciousness. Apart from a few words from intimate friends and Western visitors to Shantivanam, the narration is by Father Bede himself, answering questions put to him by the interviewer. He tells about his family in England, his early life and schooling, religious quest through nature, poetry and philosophy, his friendship with C.S. Lewis, conversion, and life at Prinknash Abbey. All this portion is accompanied by archival footage so that one can see what the youthful Bede saw. First experiments in India are passed over quickly and we come to Shantivanam. There are wonderful views of the Indian environment, the buildings, the forest, the river, the people. Present-day Bede, narrating, alternates with former Bede in photos and some movies. The blend of Christian and Hindu is displayed in architecture, music, ceremony, dress, meals. We see the Shantivanam community at prayer, at dinner, at work. If you have never been there, you get to see a lot of what you want to see, although Father Bede's own hut was not pointed out. You do see him bumping along the road in an ox-cart, lying on his bed correcting proofs, blessing children, submitting to having "the dust of his feet taken," and other local shots of daily life.

The persistent theme throughout is of the union of opposites: East and West, Christianity and Hinduism (and other religions), right brain/left brain, masculine/feminine, rational/intuitive. A great turning-point occurred during Bede's recovery from his first stroke when at a critical moment he heard the words, "Surrender to the Mother." When he had done this, he felt overwhelmed by love, received and nurtured by the Feminine at last. In the two years after this, he said, he had grown more than in the previous eighty-four. Christianity has been too rigid, Bede continued, too narrow and life-excluding. All of life needs to be consecrated and included in the divine banquet, just as all the religious traditions of humanity are invited to go deeply into themselves, past their particular forms of belief or cult, and discover their convergence at the mystical center of That which is beyond all forms.

I believe it is a well-made film. I especially commend the music, which is not only beautiful in itself -

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both European (some Gregorian) and Indian - but very satisfyingly used to enhance the visuals, and which never

The Golden String

Book Reviews

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Dr. Paul Knitter, and Jyoti Sahi.

Vandana sets the tone of the book by raising four questions these two meetings attempted to address:

- Are ashrams, especially Christian ashrams, relevant today?
- Will the movement, if it be a movement, have a future?
- If it does, how should we prepare for it in the last few years of this century?
- Are ashrams more relevant in the West than in India? If so, why? (p.4).

The participants went at these questions from various sides: interreligious dialogue, historical considerations, the elements of ashram life, Christology and other traditions, social, economic and political needs and the ashrams, Abhishiktananda's view of ashramic life, Protestant ashrams, spiritual life in ashrams, the issue of professionalism, the ultimate purpose of the ashram way of life, and the role of the guru.

Father Bede, a founder and enthusiastic leader in Ashram Aikiya, gave a brief but inspiring talk at Jaiharikhal entitled, "The Ashram as a Way of Transcendence", while Sr. Sara Grant offered a similar address in Ashram Aikiya Satsang at Mysore. Her presentation is entitled, "Rootedness in the Eternal: the Principle and Foundation of Ashram Life". Bede emphasizes the contemplative nature of ashrams, and defines their purpose in terms of the quest for the Divine. He observes:

The ashram in India (Jain, Buddhist, Hindu, Sufi, Christian) is a community called to bear witness to the Transcendent. It is to go beyond organized religion, and this is its reason for being. At the same time, we must see our lives in the context of the institutional Church, and of organized religion as a whole (p.30).

This transcendent Reality that reveals itself to us during the course of the spiritual journey, the great human adventure of the quest for the Absolute, for God, Bede came to identify with advaitic experience. In a unique statement, Bede shares with us his own inner appropriation of India's mystical treasure, that occurred in the last few years of his life. His understanding is rich and profoundly Christian. Bede declares:

Nonduality is the ultimate truth in all religions.

Everything is seen in God and God in everything. In my advaitin experience I was overwhelmed and deluged with love. The feminine in me opened up

Bede Griffiths' Legacy (Continued from page 2)

Presence in nature:

Now I was suddenly made aware of another world of beauty and mystery such as I had never imagined to exist, except in poetry. It was as though I had begun to see and smell and hear for the first time (p.10)

And a little later,

This, as I understand it, is the "golden string" of Blake's poem. It is the grace which is given to every soul, hidden under the circumstances of our daily life, and easily lost if we choose not to attend to it. To follow up the vision which we have seen, to keep it in mind when we are thrown back again on the world, to live in its light and to shape our lives by its law, is to wind the string into a ball, and to find our way out of the labyrinth of life. (pp.11-12)

The exhilaration felt by many westerners - accustomed to
(Continued on page 10)

a highly institutionalized Christianity - on first encountering Bede's writings, derives largely from his vision of an *open*

and a whole new vision opened. I saw love as the basic principle of the whole universe. I saw God in the earth, in trees, in mountains. It led me to the conviction that there is no absolute good or evil in this world. We have to let go of all concepts which divide the world into good and evil, right and wrong, and learn to see the complementarity of opposites, which Nicholas of Cusa called the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the coincidence of opposites. At the crucifixion, Jesus gave up all - life, reputation, everything. Only God remained, and he had to give up his image of God too: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" We too have to go beyond all images and concepts of God, without rejecting them - that is, to see them always as signs, pointing beyond themselves to the non-dual reality (p.33).

Bede did this with his life, and always he called the Church, the monastic institution of the West and society to follow the same path to renewal. The West - and the Western Church - radically attached to structures, needs to see them in a more tentative way.



Bede Griffiths Trust

On September 9-11, 1993, a few days after the conclusion of the Parliament, the first annual meeting of the Bede Griffiths Trust was held at Epiphany Monastery, in New Boston, New Hampshire. Present were designated trustees Sr. Pascaline Coff, Fr. John Kilian, Roland Ropers, Fr. Douglas Conlon, Bro. Wayne Teasdale, Asha Paul and Russill Paul, Fr. Robert Hale and John Douglas. Also present were Fr. Thomas Matus, Cynthia Bourgeault and Fr. Bruno Barnhart.

Fr. Robert Hale was elected as Chairperson, Russill Paul as Secretary, and John Douglas as Treasurer. John Douglas presented a draft of the *Trust Agreement* (the basic legal document of the Trust) to those present, and then presented the financial report to date. It was decided to change the original name of the organization - *the Dayananda Foundation* - to *The Bede Griffiths Trust* - a title more meaningful to people in the West.

It was decided that Bede Griffiths libraries or archives be established where his books and other writings can be consulted (See article on the Trust on p.1-2). Measures for preservation of the original manuscripts of Fr. Bede's works were discussed, as well as the need to see to the publication of these books in India, where they are largely unobtainable.

John Douglas was chosen also to work toward clarifying the situation with publishers, including the contracts for Fr. Bede's books in English. Roland Ropers is to do the same in Europe. The exploration of possibilities for marketing and promotion of Father Bede's writings in the U.S. and abroad was entrusted to Roland Ropers, Douglas Conlon and John Douglas.

Sr. Pascaline Coff was named as literary permissions officer for the works of Father Bede, to respond to requests from writers to quote from these works. A complete bibliography of Fr. Bede's writings is to be compiled.

One of the functions of the Trust is to supervise the disposition of royalties from Fr. Bede's books. The present need was recognized to send part of this income to the community of Shantivanam, which has been experiencing financial distress lately.

An international newsletter was decided upon, to be edited by Wayne Teasdale and Bruno Barnhart, with the assistance of Russill and Asha Paul. Fr. Thomas Matus is to be contributing editor for India and Italy, Roland Ropers and Douglas Conlon to serve as contributing editors for Germany and Australia respectively.

The problem of future funding for the operations of the Trust was discussed; appeals to interested people through certain media and requests for foundation grants are

(Continued on page 10)

Film Review: A Human Search *(Continued from page 7)*

interferes with our comfortably hearing the spoken word. For Bedeans it is worth owning; you will look at it again and again and show it to your friends as a special and inspiring experience. ©

The Bede Griffiths Films and Where They Can Be Obtained

Several videotapes were produced of Fr. Bede during the last year or so of his life. While *A Human Search: The Life of Father Bede Griffiths* (59 min), \$32.95, (reviewed above) is a portrait, two other films are talks by Father Bede which focus on more specific subjects. *Discovering the Feminine* (32 min), \$32.95, recounts his own new awakening to the feminine and to nonduality following his near fatal stroke in 1990. *The History and Interpretation of the Bible* (40 min), \$32.95, a lecture given in the meditation hall at Shantivanam shortly before his death, considers the development of a Christian understanding of the Bible in the context of changing history.

The Wisdom of a Prophet (136 min, \$32.95), includes two lectures of Father Bede during his visit to Perth, Australia, in 1992. In the first, *A New Vision of Reality in the Light of Modern Science*, he considers the relationship between modern science and the spiritual traditions. In the second, *A New Vision of Reality in the Light of Christian Mysticism and Hindu Advaita*, Fr. Bede continues to explore the reality that lies beneath religious dogmas and scientific rationalism. A question and answer session follows.

All of these films are available from *More Than Illusion Films*, P.O. Box 33, St. Marys NSW 2760, Australia. tel. 61 2 623 7266.

U.S. residents may order them from Susan Hurst, 1613 Chelsea Road #226, San Marino, California 91108. (818) 457 7189 (Prices above include U. S. shipping) .



The Golden String

Trust Meeting (Continued from page 9)

to be pursued. It was decided that the Trust, rather than setting up a separate nonprofit corporation for fund raising purposes, should itself become a nonprofit corporation. John Douglas was asked to draw up the legal formulation for this process.

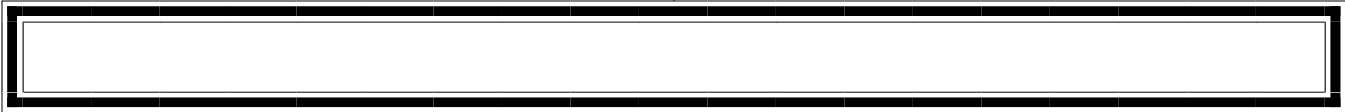
An Executive Committee was formed to conduct the business of the Trust between meetings, consisting of Robert Hale, Paul Russill and John Douglas. A theological committee, to respond to various possible inquiries and erroneous statements regarding Fr. Bede and his work was set up, to include Thomas Matus, Wayne Teasdale, Bruno Barnhart and John Kilian. Wayne Teasdale was designated as the coordinating person for these theological matters.

The possibilities of various future meetings were considered: including a large international conference and regional meetings, perhaps an annual seminar or conference. The next Trust meeting is scheduled for August 25-28, 1994, at Osage Monastery in Oklahoma.

Father Bede's Legacy (Continued from page 8)

Christianity, an open Church. In this vision Christianity is inclusive rather than exclusive, dialogal rather than monolithic, historical and developing rather than static and fixed once and for all. It is primarily personal and communal rather than institutional, primarily interior and spiritual rather than juridical, sapiential rather than literal, pluridimensional rather than univocally dogmatic.

The gift which he leaves us is his discovery of this seed of fire, this thread of gold, which is the divine Wisdom come into the world anew in Jesus Christ. At the threshold of their third millenium, Christians have been brought into a larger universe, and into the presence of the different spiritual worlds which share it, but have only begun to awaken to that which is within them - this unbounded divine Wisdom.



The Golden String

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