

The Golden String

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BULLETIN OF THE BEDE GRIFFITHS TRUST

Winter 1994

FATHER BEDE'S MYSTICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: AN ADVENTURE IN GRACE

Br. Wayne Teasdale

Father Bede rarely talked about his inner experience during his long life, except in the last four years after his stroke in 1990 and in a few other instances such as the recollection of his awakening to the divine Presence in the natural world. Anyone familiar with the major events and turning-points of his life, however, cannot but discern the workings of grace in those extraordinary moments of his earthly existence. It was grace that led him to take that eventful walk on the last day of school before he went up to Oxford, and revealed to him the Divine in and surrounding nature; it was grace that inspired him to realize that God worked in and through history as well as the cosmos. Grace compelled him to return to Christianity, to become a Catholic and to enter a monastery after his conversion. It was grace also that guided his studies of oriental mysticism and planted in his heart the desire to go to India in 1955. It was grace that gave him the capacity to persevere there through many trials even to the hour of his death.

Bede's mysticism is accessible, however - particularly in his later correspondence - in hundreds of letters to close friends and disciples. Sifting through the vast details of his experience, from his school days to his final illness, three distinct but interrelated types of mystical awareness are evident. They constitute the *golden string* of his inner being, the rich unfolding of grace in his unique history.

The first type, natural contemplation, has already been alluded to above. This kind of contemplation - that is, the ability to perceive the divine Presence in nature -

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THE ESSENCE OF ASHRAM LIFE

Swami Sahajananda

(Br. John Martin)

One day as I was teaching Indian Philosophy to the students at the Rosarian Philosophate in Trichy, one of the students asked me, "Brother, what is the literal meaning of ashram life?". "I don't want to tell you the literal meaning of ashram life," I replied. "Why?" the brother asked curiously. "If I tell you the literal meaning of ashram life then you will all come and join ashrams." I said. There was a burst of laughter.

The essence of ashram life consists in the word "Ashram" itself. The word ashram can be divided into A - *Shram*. Shram means hard work, struggle and conflict. A Shram means no hard work, no struggle, no conflict, no burden and no labouring. This is the literal meaning of ashram life.

Ashram life is a life where there is no effort to achieve something. It is a life of inner freedom, spontaneity and effortless life. It is a life of freedom in the sense that there is no desire to get anything more nor fear of losing something.

THE GARDEN OF EDEN AND ASHRAM LIFE

Humanity is created for ashram life. The garden of Eden is the first ashram that God created for humanity. To live an ashram life is the natural state (*sahaja*) of human beings. The ashram life of the first human beings is very beautifully described in the book of Genesis. God created humanity in his/her own image and likeness. God is Holy and Whole so also he created human beings as holy and whole. God is beyond time and space so also he created human beings in his/her own image, in the sense that there is something in the human beings which transcends time and space. In God there is no conflict, there is no effort to achieve anything. There is no struggle (shram). There is no fear of losing something and there is no greediness to get something more. By creating God does not get anything more, by not creating God does not lose anything. The true self of human beings is like that: a state of freedom and creativity.

In the garden of Eden human beings were naked and not ashamed. Physically it means they had no clothes on

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Father Bede's Mysticism (Continued from page 1)

became the basis of his understanding of and appreciation for the Cosmic Revelation, especially in its Hindu form.

A further type of mystical awareness in Bede can be called simply supernatural contemplation, even infused contemplation or grace. We have an instance of this in his early life when he prayed all night on his knees, losing all sense of time and all sense of self-awareness. Essentially this was an apophatic experience, a mystical grace of dark contemplation that took him beyond any awareness of what was going on, very similar to the understanding of contemplation in the desert tradition which is summed up in the dictum: "If you know you're praying, you're not really praying." Preceding and following this experience, Bede did have an intense sense of the presence of God in people, just as earlier he had perceived the Presence in the created order. India deepened this awareness of the Divine in nature, people, events and in the situations of life. He came to realize more profoundly the unity in terms of which everything subsists, and encountered the depth, ultimacy and challenge of *advaita*, the mystery of unity or nonduality. For Bede, this advaitic insight can only properly be understood in the light of Christ's relationship to his Father, the mystery of oneness and distinction simultaneously: the inner reality of the Trinity. The more the Persons are distinct, the more they realize their unique intimacy in the unicity of their common ground of identity. Similarly, Bede clearly saw that our relationship with God is mirrored in the relations of the divine Persons to their common nature.

Bede's experience was thoroughly advaitic, and he came to realize that all genuine mysticism is fundamentally advaitic. What distinguishes Christian advaita from a purely monistic Hindu form is its inner dynamic of love. Love is the energy of inner distinctions within the ground of the divine nature and identity. The Incarnation is a revelation of this love, this inner dynamic quality of nonduality. It is this experiential insistence of Bede that further distinguishes him from Abhishiktananda, who seemed to lapse into a purely monistic advaita.

Supernatural contemplation, or mystical awareness, also expressed itself through Bede. Bede's eyes, his movements and gestures, his simple being and presence revealed the divine mystery. I remember on numerous occasions experiencing the presence of God through his eyes, and these moments have made a deep and lasting impression on me.

The third kind of contemplation discernible in Bede's experience occurred late in his life, after his stroke in 1990. He went through months of an inner process of



transformation in which he became conscious of the workings of the Divine as the Mother, the maternal aspect of God, the *Providentia* that cares for us, that mothers us, that holds and loves us. He felt himself being constantly loved by the divine Reality. He passed through a dark-night phase, thrown as he was into the Void, but in a letter he mentions that though he is in the Void, it is totally saturated with Love. He felt the divine Love coming to him in waves of bliss. Bede then allowed himself to surrender to the divine Mother, to the Holy Spirit, to the total, all-encompassing Love of the Trinity. His spiritual journey, therefore, uncovers for us the goal of human life: assent to be loved by God, to be transformed in and into divine Love, and then to become the sacrament of this Love and this mystery for others. Bede's third stage of mystical consciousness is thus in continuity with the preceding two, but reveals itself as both the presence of divine Love and the nonduality of its subsistence, hence "the Void saturated with Love." Bede's *golden string* is also ours, the Love that Dante tells us moves the universe — and the return to which is the very purpose of our brief earthly pilgrimage.



Ashram Life

(Continued from page 1)

their body. Spiritually it means they were empty, in an egoless state. They were empty in each moment of their life. They lived their life without creating an ego in themselves. They lived their life without creating an ego in themselves. They lived the life of eternity, which is wholeness of life where horizontal and vertical are united. They had no sense of psychological time (it is because they were unfolding and not becoming) but had only biological and chronological time. They walked with God in the cool of the evening, which means they had very intimate relationship with God, God living in them and they living in God. God was their subject, God was their Ego, they saw everything in and through God, they did everything in and through God. They had no ego, no centre in them. They were naked and not ashamed. They had no guilt feelings. They had chaste relationship with God. They were innocent in the sense that they did not know good and evil.

In the garden of Eden they did not make any effort to achieve something. They lived according to their created nature or given nature. They had nothing to achieve - only to live. They had no conflict and psychological suffering because they had no psychological time. Psychological time belongs to the fallen state and is the source of psychological misery and suffering. They lived their life naturally, spontaneously and freely. They were following the natural

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Ashram Life

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path (*Sahaja Marga*). Their journey can be described as:

- from eternity to eternity;*
- from wholeness to wholeness;*
- from holiness to holiness;*
- from one unfolding to another unfolding.*

We can say that they were living an ashram life which was intended by God when God created them.

FALL AND SHRAM LIFE

But sin makes humanity to fall from *ashram* life into *shram* life. The serpent which was on the tree was cursed by God to crawl on its belly and dust shall be its food. A snake raising its head (hood) represents wholistic consciousness where vertical and horizontal dimensions are united. A snake crawling on the ground represents horizontal consciousness separated from the wholeness, which is the consciousness of time: past, present and future. Eternity falls into time. Through human beings the creation participated in wholistic relationship with God. When humanity fell, creation also fell from wholistic relationship into horizontal consciousness of time.

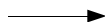
Humanity has been cursed to live the life of *shrama*, suffering, hard work. Woman has to suffer pains and the equality of the sexes has been lost and the woman becomes dependent on man. Man has to toil and eat in the sweat of his brow all the days of his life. The land will bring forth thorns and thistles. Man has to live by the sweat of his brow. And cursed is the ground because of the human beings' fall.

- The life of wholeness falls into a life of fragmentation;*
- The life of holiness falls into a life of unholiness;*
- The life of being falls into a life of becoming;*
- The effortless life (ashram) falls into a life of effort (shram).*

By the sweat of his face man has to live. Our spiritual journey has become the life of becoming, life of conflict, life of struggle, life of good and evil. The more we try to become good, the more thorns and thistles are found in us. Our spiritual life is the life of *shram*, struggle and conflict. And this life of *shrama* has been passed on from generation to generation. This is the burden which humanity is carrying from generation to generation.

THE CALL OF JESUS

Jesus is calling humanity to free itself from this



spiritual life of burden or *shram*, and enter into the life of lightness or *ashram*. "Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened (*shram*) of heart. I will give you rest (*ashram*). Learn from me, I am meek and humble of heart...for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Mt 11:28-30

Jesus himself might have gone through this life of *shram*-labour and discovered the life of *ashram* or rest, which is the real nature of all human beings. He might have seen how humanity has been carrying this burden. Religion, which is supposed to relieve people from this burden, has itself become the agent of burdening people. He had compassion on the people, so he is asking people to come to him because he is living the life of rest, *ashram*. He is the living *ashram*, so that he can free them from this burden and give them rest and peace. "I am meek and humble of heart", he says. He is meek and humble because he has no ego, his Ego is God. He is empty and naked. For his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

It does not mean that Jesus takes away one type of yoke and places another, lighter yoke. What he means is that

in the garden of Eden humanity was meek and humble without ego. The desire to become like God started an ego in them which culminated in their fall. The ego is like a bull on whose neck a yoke has to be placed. And this yoke becomes a burden. But Jesus says, "I am meek and humble," I have no ego, I have no yoke on me. I want to purify your ego, make you meek and humble so that there is no need of placing a yoke and there is no possibility of

placing a yoke, either light or burdensome. Where there is no ego there is no need of a yoke. So Jesus came to free humanity from the ego; then he liberates humanity from all the yokes and burdens. He makes it possible for humanity to live the natural life of the garden of Eden, which is the life of egolessness and thus *ashram* life.

God created humanity for *ashram* life. But sin brought down humanity from *ashram* life to *shram* life. Jesus is calling humanity to come back to this *ashram* life which is the garden of Eden, the first *ashram* created by God.



The *Golden String's* new logo, and the drawings that appear in this issue, are the work of Brother Lawrence Mahoney, of New Camaldoli.

BEDE GRIFFITHS TRUST HOLDS ITS SECOND ANNUAL MEETING AT OSAGE

From the Secretary's Minutes

Members of the Bede Griffiths International Trust gathered at Osage Monastery in Oklahoma for their second meeting, on August 25-28, 1994. All the trustees were present with the exception of Fr. Bernardino Cozzarini, of Camaldoli. After a silent meditation, those present related their activities since the last meeting (see the summary of Fr. Douglas Conlon which follows).

Fr. Robert Hale reported on the progress of the Trust Archives in Berkeley, with Br. Cassian Hardie responsible as Archivist. Steps were taken to expedite the gathering of materials at this central Archive from Shantivanam and other places. Persons possessing Father Bede materials - letters, manuscripts or original tapes - are invited to share them, or good copies, with the Berkeley Archives.

The state of Fr. Bede's publications, and negotiations with various publishers, were discussed.

Fr. Douglas Conlon reported on continuing Bede Griffiths activities in Australia, and in particular the growth of the *Friends of Father Bede*: prayer and study groups in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

Roland Ropers reported on his extensive activities in Europe, spreading to England, Spain, Scandinavia and France. Two Abbeys — one in Germany and one in England — have commenced Bede Griffiths programs. Roland mentioned that he receives 40 to 50 letters daily related to BG matters.

At the beginning of the meeting Fr. Robert Hale's resignation as Chairperson had been accepted; Sr. Pascaline Coff and Fr. Douglas Conlon were elected as Co-chairpersons for the meeting, and Fr. Robert as Secretary. Later the Trust members decided to formalize the principle of equality among them by electing no officers but establishing with minimal structure a ministry of co-ordination and service, to include a Co-ordinator, a Vice-Coordinator and a Secretary. The duties of these three ministries were outlined. At the end of the meeting, Sr. Pascaline Coff, Fr. Douglas Conlon and Fr. Robert Hale, respectively, were elected to these three ministries.

Several standing committees were either instituted or confirmed: a Literary Committee (with Sr. Pascaline Coff as Permissions Agent), a Committee for Assistance to the Poor, a Theological Committee (with Wayne Teasdale as contact person and spokesperson). An *ad hoc* Conference Committee was also appointed, and plans for annual Bede Griffiths Conferences for 1995, 1996 and 1997 were discussed, including possible locations and the structuring of the gatherings.

An official biography of Father Bede is not yet to be sponsored, although the Trust is willing to help persons who approach it for assistance in such a project.

The Trustees will recognize and promote Shantivanam as the official Centre of Father Bede, and have appointed specific annual financial subsidies for Shantivanam. Fr. Christudas and Br. John Martin were given recognition for their continuing work at the Ashram.

Finally, Fr. Douglas Conlon summed up and evaluated the meeting.

The next meeting of the Trust will be held at New Camaldoli, in Big Sur, California, from August 9-13, 1995.

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WHERE WE HAVE BEEN AND WHERE WE ARE: ACTIVITIES OF TRUST MEMBERS

Douglas Conlon

Sr. Pascaline Coff OSB, as Chairperson, opened the meeting with her presentation. Sr. Pascaline is also Prioress of the Osage Monastery, hosts of the meeting. Russill and Asha Paul then told of their ministry of retreats and workshops across the United States, together with Wayne Teasdale and Fr. John Kilian. Their activities included a retreat for clergy at Mundelein Retreat House and ministry to a large group from Contemplative Outreach.

Fr. Robert Hale, Prior of New Camaldoli in Big Sur, spoke especially of the talks, retreats and writings that have originated both at the Hermitage and Incarnation Monastery in Berkeley, and of the distribution of Fr. Bede's books through the Hermitage Bookstore.

John Douglas, Treasurer and legal advisor, spoke of the network of contacts which he has been making on behalf of the Trust, including the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. and the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii - both of which are interested in the Bede Griffiths archival material.

Br. John Martin of Shantivanam spoke of the pain and difficulties which had followed the death of Fr. Bede for those who belong to the Ashram. As Father Bede had wished, Br. Martin and Fr. Christudas - for whom, particularly, Bede's death was a deep shock - have together taken in hand the direction of Shantivanam. Through days of reflection and retreats, they are continuing to make Fr. Bede's work available to those who come. Many of these guests have experienced a very strong continuing spiritual presence of Father Bede in the Ashram.

While Fr. Bede's books - either out of print or not

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Activities of Trust Members (Continued from page 4)

available in India - cannot be bought at the Ashram at present, the video films of Fr. Bede - chiefly *A Human Search* and his lectures in Perth, are shown almost every day to groups of foreign pilgrims.

Brother Martin expressed the need he felt to concentrate on spiritual guidance at Shantivanam, and his reluctance, therefore, to accept invitations that would take him away from the Ashram.

Fr. John Kilian spoke of his own experience in his work at the huge Attica State Prison in New York, where the teachings of Father Bede find their way quietly into his ministry to the inmates.

Roland Ropers spoke of the various programs which he had organized in Europe, on the anniversary of Fr. Bede's death. Roland is presently developing a project to launch a Bede Griffiths Contemplation Centre at Prinknash, Bede's old Abbey, where he introduced *The Universal Wisdom* (see review article on p. 7). He reported that 30,000 copies of this book had been sold in Europe in the first five weeks after its publication; a German translation is expected in May 1995. Roland is working on some further Bede Griffiths : *Pathways of the Supreme*, and a selected edition of the *Psalms*. He is negotiating with Harper Collins for a less expensive publication of Bede's books in India, through their new Indian office; this may begin by mid-1995. Roland is helping two doctoral students who are writing their dissertations on Father Bede.

Fr. Douglas Conlon continues his work of organizing retreats and reflection days based on the works of Father Bede across Australia: mainly in West Australia, Victoria and Adelaide. Some 300 people have attended these retreats this year, during which they have seen *A Human Search* and *Discovery of the Feminine*.

The *Friends of Father Bede*, a network of small study and prayer groups, hold celebrations and days of prayer in his honor. Some 1500 copies of the first issue of *The Golden String* (the Trust newsletter) have been sent out, and the mailing list has grown to 3000. Prayer/study days and Masses for Fr. Bede's birthday and the anniversary of his death were attended by about 300 persons each time. ■ |

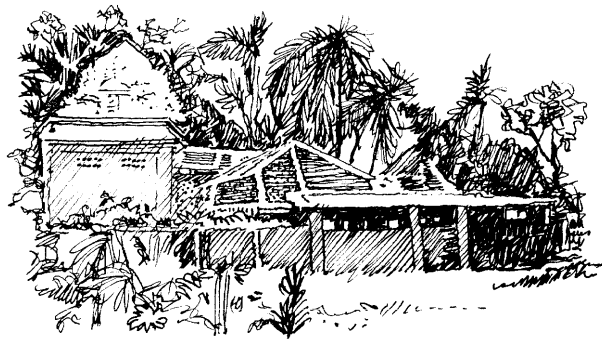
PARLIAMENT UPDATE:

A SIGNIFICANT MEETING OF THE ASSEMBLY Wayne Teasdale

The Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions called a special session of the *Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders* on September 25-26 in Chicago's Palmer House. It was attended by some eighty members of the Assembly, or about a third of the membership. This convocation was an informal consultation with the trustees of the Parliament, many of whom are also Assembly members. The focus of the consultation was the issue of the future status of the Assembly itself, the model of its governance, and its composition (i.e., how it acquires new members - and how to maintain a continuing balance between the need for official representation and the desire to be more inclusive of charismatic spiritual leaders, thinkers, activists, etc.) The Assembly considered a number of models, but in the end opted for one that maintains this balance and has a strong relationship to the grassroots. Both of these elements were characteristic of the historic 1993 Parliament.

The Assembly displayed throughout this meeting the same spirit that had characterized the great event of the preceding year. The discussions were profound, creative, comprehensive, substantive and decisive in giving the Parliament a strong direction. Paulos Mar Gregorios, Metropolitan of Delhi, was on hand for the deliberations, and made some important interventions. Maha Gosananda, the Buddhist Patriarch of Cambodia, was also present, winning everyone's heart by his transparent simplicity and joy. The whole meeting was enormously useful for the Council and for the Parliament as it moves ahead.

The chairman of the Council has appointed an *ad hoc* committee for the Assembly, at the request of the Assembly itself. The committee is composed of Assembly members, trustees, experts and staff. Its mandate is to develop and refine the model of the Assembly for its consideration next year when it will sit in formal session. This whole consultation process concerned the empowering of the Assembly, and clearly the members want to pursue that direction. ■ |



TWO RETREAT EXPERIENCES

- *Celebrating the Life and Teaching of Father Bede Griffiths* was the theme of a six-day Christian contemplative meditation retreat held May 27-June 2, 1994, in the quiet setting of Glenairley, a summer retreat centre on the shore of Sooke Basin, located some 25 km outside the city of Victoria on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada.

Fr. Charles Brandt, a hermit priest living on Vancouver Island and an oblate of Shantivanam, was present for part of the time with the 14 retreatants to celebrate Mass and to share the personal experiences of his meetings with Fr. Bede during a two-month stay in India.

The retreat theme was chosen in response to interest generated by videos and tapes of Fr. Bede. Though the retreat was primarily for meditation practice in the spirit of John Main (with nine meditation periods each day), the inclusion of two conferences each day allowed for a good selection of audio and video material by Fr. Bede in addition to Fr. Brandt's personal reflections. When the time for discussion came at the end of the retreat, Fr. Bede's video film, *Discovering the Feminine* got rave reviews. His wholesome and sensitive treatment of sexuality was a revelation to some.

Sister Marguerite Lalonde, SSA, is the moving spirit behind these retreats, which are now held twice a year - once in the Spring at Glenairley, and once in the Fall at Queenswood, an ecumenical centre in Victoria. She started them five years ago to help meditators deepen their practice of silent contemplative prayer. A firm believer in lay participation, Sr. Marguerite has a team of four meditators to help plan and run the retreats, including preparation of prayer services and conferences. Retreat themes vary from year to year.

Shirley Embra

- The first *Bede Griffiths Retreat* was presented at New Camaldoli from July 22-24 by Fr. Robert Hale and Brothers Ezekiel Lotz and Cyprian Consiglio. Entitled *The Marriage of East and West: The Challenge of the Spiritual Vision of Dom Bede Griffiths*, the weekend included three conferences and a viewing of "A Human Search", in the context of the monastic community's daily liturgical prayer. Fr. Robert spoke on *The Marriage of East and West*. Br. Cyprian's talk dealt with Father Bede's contemplative anthropology, and Br. Ezekiel spoke on Fr. Bede as a Benedictine and Camaldolese. The Bede Griffiths Retreat will become a regular annual event at the Hermitage.

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Letter of the Camaldolese Prior General to the Community of Shantivanam on the first Anniversary of Father Bede's Death

Dear Fr. Christudas, Br. Martin,

Brothers and Sisters of Shantivanam,

Warmest greetings in the communion of the Holy Spirit for the first anniversary of the Mahasamadhi of our dear Father and Teacher in Christ, Dom Bede.

We know how deeply you still feel his passing away as a loss. But we invite you to join us in earnest prayer to the Holy Trinity, that we who have been nourished by Father Bede's teaching and example may now accept the new phase of discipleship that falls like Elijah's mantle upon our shoulders - ours, as the community of Camaldolese monks and nuns, but especially yours, whom dear Guruji personally formed until the day of his passing (May 13) and even until the very day his mortal remains touched the soil of Shantivanam (May 15 - remember the cosmic sign of that moment, the great wind that signaled your personal Pentecost).

Here in Italy, Father Bede will be commemorated by us on three occasions: on May 8, at the Centro Henri Le Saux in Milan, where Fr. Thomas Matus will represent the community; on May 13, at San Gregorio in Rome and at Camaldoli, with all our monks and nuns in attendance; and on May 15 in Ravenna, at a round-table conference on Ecumenism, with Fr. Benedetto Calati and Fr. Thomas as representatives of Camaldoli and Shantivanam.

We rejoice in the gifts God has given us through the ministry of our "trinity of founders," especially through Father Bede. At the same time, we acknowledge that every gift is also a task, and we commit ourselves to accept the burden that we must bear, sharing its weight in the love of Christ ("Carry each other's burdens; that is how to keep the law of Christ": Galatians 6:2).

With this letter, we desire to embrace you all, to take your hand, and to walk in the way of love with you. The journey may be long, and our weariness at times great, but the "Holy Spirit, Our Mother" shall renew our strength and make us "run with unspeakable sweetness of love," as Saint Benedict promises.

Be of good cheer, take heart, feel us near, and convey our loving welcome to all guests who will take part in the First Anniversary Celebration at Shantivanam.

Your brother in Christ,

D. Emanuele Bargellini

Camaldoli May 4, 1994

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Review Article:

Bede Griffiths: The Perennial Philosophy Today

Bruno Barnhart

THE UNIVERSAL WISDOM: A Journey Through the Sacred Wisdom of the World, selected and introduced by Bede Griffiths, London and San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1994, 560 pp., USA \$22.00

Posthumously published with the aid of Roland Ropers, Obl OSB, this is a collection of spiritual texts from the major religious traditions of the world. Father Bede himself has contributed a 36 page general introduction, and short introductions to the successive sections from each tradition. In an appendix, Roland Ropers briefly recounts the story of Bede's life, including several moving stories from his final months.

From the Hindu tradition, Fr. Bede has chosen the six *Upanishads* which he would frequently recommend to people from the West: the *Isha*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Mundaka*, *Mandukya* and *Svetasvatara*. The entire text of the *Bhagavad Gita* is included. The Buddhist selections are the *Dhammapada* and the "Awakening of Faith" (the *Mahayana Shraddhotpada Shastra*). The Chinese tradition is represented solely by the *Tao Te Ching*, in its entirety. Least known to western readers are likely to be the Sikh texts: *Morning Prayer*, *Evening Prayer* and *Bed-time Prayer*.

From the Islamic tradition there appears but a single Sura (24:35) from the *Quran*, together with a work of Al Ghazali entitled *The Deliverance from Error*, and a selection of the poems of Rumi. Selections from the Judaic scriptures are limited to the Wisdom tradition: Portions of the books of *Proverbs*, *Sirach* and the *Wisdom of Solomon*. For his Christian selections, Father Bede has drawn extensively from each of the four Gospels, and included the whole of the pauline *Letter to the Ephesians*. The *Gospel of John* is included in its entirety.

The broad range of translations - from Bede's favorite versions of the *Upanishads* by W.B. Yeats and Shree Purohit Swami and by Juan Mascaro, and the RSV biblical texts, to recent translations of the *Bhagavad Gita* by Kees W. Bolle and the *Tao Te Ching* by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English - remind us that this volume is several things at once. It is the first sketch of a sapiential "world Bible", a contemporary representation of the *perennial philosophy*, and a journey into the mind and heart of Bede, through the sacred texts that he loved not only for their depth but for their literary beauty.

Bede's general introduction to *The Universal Wisdom* is a distillation of the vision which he has developed over many years, and articulated in successive books, of the *perennial philosophy* which lies at the core of the various religious traditions of the world. Bede attempts in these few pages a synthesis which embraces both a history of the

human spiritual consciousness, and a new cosmology in the process of birth — the latter an offspring both of the ancient wisdom and of contemporary western science.

In a few bold strokes, Bede brings the two currents together — the old wisdom and contemporary science — as he sketches a new cosmology.

The universe appears as a vast ocean of energy organized by an intelligence, of which our human intelligence is a reflection. We are coming back to the ancient understanding of matter as energy - *dynamis* in Aristotle's terms - organized by intelligence (*nous*) in the shape of "forms" or "morphogenetic fields" as Rupert Sheldrake has called them, which structure the universe. (p.15)

When he turns to the earliest strata of the world's religious traditions, Bede finds the same "epistemology", the same dominant way of human knowing, that he first encountered in his beloved poets of the Romantic tradition: Coleridge and Wordsworth. He revindicates *imagination*, in its profound sense as a concrete intelligence, a participative knowing in which the whole person is the organ of cognition, and which generates the symbolic world of myth and ritual. Here, then, is the original soil of the religious traditions.

Bede's view of the *ultimate knowledge* begins to appear in his discussion of the *Vedas*:

They were also said to be *apauruseya* - without human authorship. This reminds us that all authentic knowledge comes not from the senses but from the mind, the intelligence, which reflects the divine intelligence, the source of creation. (p.17).

The quality of this knowledge at its deepest emerges in his discussion of the *Upanishads*.

...in the silence, in the emptiness of all thought, the knowledge of the spirit dawns, the pure consciousness from which all conscious knowledge comes, the source of the activity of the mind...It is the consciousness which transcends the opposites and all dualities that reaches the truth. (p.20)

He finds this transcendent wisdom in the "fourth state of consciousness" of the *Mandukya Upanishad*.

It is this which is the goal of human existence...This is a state which cannot be described. We have to experience it to know what it is. Yet it is present all the time in all human consciousness and every religion seeks to open the way to it. (p.21)

Bede's introduction to *Buddhism* is incisive.

Buddhism presents the greatest challenge to all religions, especially to those which believe in a personal, creator God...The great insight of Buddha was into the transitoriness of the world...The end of all things is nirvana, the "blowing out", the extinction of all being, the eradication of all desire. It might be said that this was the most radical philosophy ever propounded.

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The Universal Wisdom (Continued from page 7)

It strikes at the root of existence as we know it. (p.23)

It is when Bede writes of Chinese *Taoism* that he relates this ultimate reality to that *feminine* wisdom which he himself had experienced toward the end of his life.

...for centuries now the western world has been following the path of Yang — of the masculine, active, aggressive, rational, scientific mind — and has brought the world near to destruction. It is time now to recover the path of Yin, of the feminine, passive, patient, intuitive and poetic mind. This is the path which the Tao Te Ching sets before us. (p.27-28)

As we are reminded in Roland Ropers' brief biography, however, this is the same golden string which had led Bede to begin his journey into the wisdom of the East.

I had begun to realize...that there was something missing in the Western church; we only live out half of our soul; the conscious rational side. We still have to discover the other half, the unconscious, intuitive dimension. I wanted to experience during my own lifetime the marriage of these two dimensions of human existence, the rational and the intuitive, the masculine and feminine. (p.557)

In his very sympathetic treatment of the *Sikhism* of Guru Nanak - "the monotheism of India" - Bede sees "the principles of a universal monotheism" (p.29), "a complete philosophy for the world today"(p.30)

His treatment of *Judaism* is probably the least satisfactory feature of the book. Both here and in his treatment of Islam, Bede repeatedly expresses impatience at the violent heritage of the Semitic monotheistic traditions, and this is evident also in his very circumscribed choice of texts from these two traditions. Sufism and the Kabbala appear as the two epiphanies of the inner light in this dark and troubled history. He speaks warmly of Al Ghazali and then of Ibn al Arabi:

The dualism inherent in orthodox Islam was overcome and Islam learned to speak the language of the universal wisdom. This "Oneness of being", in which all opposites are reconciled, is the supreme insight of the perennial philosophy. (on Ibn al Arabi, p.32)

In treating the New Testament account of the beginning of *Christianity*, Fr. Bede gingerly treads through the teaching of Jesus in the synoptic gospels, where he finds the image of God still tainted by "an inheritance from a Semitic monotheism, which was unable to overcome the dualism inherent in this system of thought." (p.37) He quickly turns to the gospel of John, where he finds the perennial wisdom everywhere present in symbol. It is in Jesus' affirmations of his relation with God that the unitive core of this wisdom appears.

"I am in the Father and the Father in me", "He who

sees me sees the Father", "I and the Father are one." Here we have expressed in clearest terms the "non-duality" of Jesus and God... It is "non-dualism", the mystery revealed in the Hindu and Buddhist and Taoist scriptures and discovered in Judaism and Islam. Here we are at the heart of the cosmic revelation. (p.39)

Bede's personal initiation into the feminine divine Wisdom seems to find expression again when he interprets the Christian doctrine of the divine Trinity.

The Father, the Ground and Source of being, expresses himself eternally in the Son, the Word or Wisdom, which reveals the Godhead, and the Holy Spirit is the Energy of love, the feminine aspect of God, by which the Godhead eternally communicates itself in Love. (p.41).

Finally Bede brings together these sapiential streams of the different traditions into a single pattern: the trinity of divine principles, and a fourth principle which is human community.

There is first of all the supreme Principle...there is then the manifestation of the hidden Reality...Finally there is the Spirit...But in each religion this universal truth is embodied in a community, in which it receives a particular structure of ritual and doctrine, which separates the religions from one another. In Christianity the divine revelation in Christ was embodied in the Church... (p.42)

Despite a present situation in which the Christian Churches are cut off both from the other religious traditions of the world and from one another - and in which a divided humanity lives in the shadow of apocalyptic dangers - Bede sees today a new opportunity for the rediscovery of the perennial philosophy and thus of the unity of all religions. The invitation, however, confronts us all with an unprecedented challenge.

Each religion has to undergo a death and resurrection - a death to its historical and cultural limitations and a resurrection to a new life in the Spirit, which would embody the traditions of the Universal Wisdom in a way which responds to the need of humanity today. (p.43)

A collection of sacred texts such as *The Universal Wisdom* is necessarily retrospective, and yet Father Bede, through his introduction, directs our attention not simply backward (as in *Return to the Center*), but forward. We may wonder whether, in this dynamic vision of Bede, there is not something more than the *perennial philosophy*, profound as it is - something which Bede did not make quite explicit even in his final writings.

Father Bede identified the interior fire which animated his own quest with the perennial philosophy - this golden string of a universal wisdom centered in a unitive awareness of the absolute divine Reality. One wonders, however, whether - particularly during his last years - a

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The Universal Wisdom (Continued from page 8)

second principle was also asserting itself more and more powerfully. What was it that impelled him not only to return to the Center, but to move forward into that stream of historical development which is apparently driven by the western world with its accelerating mechanism of science and technology of - which Bede had been so critical?

This history of human spirituality which Fr. Bede offers to us raises a fundamental question about the perennial philosophy itself. Can we conceive of a universal spiritual wisdom which is *beyond history*? Or is the *perennial philosophy* itself the expression of a particular phase in the evolution of human consciousness - the "Axial" breakthrough into personal consciousness? Must *history itself* become a component of the new wisdom? And another question follows close upon this one: beneath the noisy madness of the West (which has sent so many of us on our journey of rediscovery of the perennial wisdom of the East) *what is the wisdom of the West*? Is there a peculiar treasure also under *our stove*?

Perhaps this secret of the West is *the energy at the heart of history* - which is the energy of *new creation*. If this is the invisible source of the madly accelerating curve of our western scientific and technological development, it is also the secret at the heart of Christianity, which has never until now fully emerged from the womb of our "Axial" spiritual world.

Today, from the standpoint of unitive consciousness and freedom which is offered us by the re-emerging perennial philosophy, it is this *dynamic* principle - of which Bede Griffiths is a leading prophet and example today - that we must learn to interpret. The very fire of participated divine creativity which Bede found in Coleridge and Wordsworth - and which gave birth within his mind to synthesis after synthesis - discovers itself in the heart of humanity. Our tradition has always recognized the consummation of wisdom in a fire of love; today we must recognize this also as a participation in that other fire of the Spirit which is the inner movement of history — a history which moves painfully towards a new and all-embracing unity: a unity in Being which will at last be capable of embracing the glorious diversity of beings.

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Book Review

Br. Wayne Teasdale

Theo-Monistic Mysticism: A Hindu-Christian Comparison, by Michael Stoeber; New York, St. Martin's Press, 1994, 135pp.

Prof. Michael Stoeber, who teaches comparative religion at Catholic University of America, has long been interested in what can be called *mystical hermeneutics* or, as he himself observes, "a framework for understanding mystical experiences" (p.1), and for interpreting them. He begins his exploration by considering two theories of mysticism, two epistemologies — i.e., *Constructivism* and *Experiential-Constructivism* — that have become part of the philosophical debate on the nature of mystical states, particularly through the work of Steven Katz (*Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, Oxford, 1983), John Hick and others. Constructivism is really a product of language philosophy, and fundamental to Katz' view is the assumption that mystical experience is determined by and dependent upon the cultural-linguistic conditions of the mystic. Constructivism is another form of the old reductionism. It would hold that the experience in question is merely subjective. The Experiential-Constructivist (Hick, for instance), on the other hand, would hold that, though the socio-cultural and linguistic environment is a factor in expressing the experience, the mystic is in contact with Ultimate, transcendent Reality or the Divine.

Stoeber goes on to distinguish three basic types of introvertive mystical experiences: *monistic*, *theistic* and what he calls *theo-monistic*. Before he elaborates on these distinctions, he first discusses the *essentialist* view. This position regards all mystical experiences as fundamentally of the same type, of the same realm of reality and consciousness, but filtered through - again - a cultural-linguistic background. Basically, Prof. Stoeber is trying to come to terms with *Advaita* or non-duality.

Advaita is static, impersonal and monistic, while theistic experiences are dualistic, dynamic and personal. He proposes *theo-monism* as the inner reconciliation of the two types, and proposes that a purely advaitic experience, if allowed to reach its fruition, would discover the theistic ground eventually - hence his theory of theo-monism, which he sees as the most mature view of mysticism's nature. He discerns in both Eckhart and Ruysbroeck pure advaita and theo-monistic experience, and proposes that theo-monism is the larger identity of mystical consciousness. Advaita, by itself, falls ultimately into solipsism, and may be regarded as more an experience of the Self than an experience of God, or an experience of the immanence of the Divine in the human self without access - at that point of the experience - to the

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ultimate Ground, the Divine in its transcendent and immanent fullness, the very *purnam* of Hindu spirituality and the *pleroma* of Christian theology and mysticism.

Stoeber thus advances a syncretic theory of mysticism, one that makes a very substantive contribution to the area, but I feel that he could have done more with Ramanuja's *visistadvaita* or qualified non-duality. This approach is actually what Stoeber is unknowingly proposing. It was already suggested by numerous mystics in the advaitic tradition, and this tradition itself has many other schools besides the monistic one. If Prof. Stoeber had read Father Bede's writings more carefully, he would have discovered this option and could have adopted it. According to qualified non-duality, the proper understanding of advaita is distinctions-within-unity; the unity is inwardly dynamic. That is the reality of the Trinity, and can be seen as a Christian form of advaita.

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Announcements and Coming Events

- **Shantivanam** will offer **seminars** on Fr. Bede's work, on Indian Christian spirituality and on interfaith dialogue from Dec. 9-17 this year and again in mid-May 1995.
- The **Camaldolese Institute for East-West Dialogue** has been founded to facilitate study of the Asian religious traditions and dialogue with their representatives, by members of the Camaldolese communities. Centers will be located at the Big Sur Hermitage, at Incarnation Monastery in Berkeley and at Epiphany Monastery in New Hampshire. Contact person for the Institute is Fr. Joseph Wong, New Camaldoli, Big Sur, CA 93920. ph (408) 667-2456.
- The Annual **BedeGriffiths Memorial Retreat** will be offered at New Camaldoli on May 19-21, 1995 by Brothers Randy Sweringen, Cyprian Consiglio and Laurence Mansfield. Theme for the 1995 retreat will be "The Universal Call to Contemplation." For reservations contact the Guestmaster at the Hermitage.



The Golden String

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