

The Golden String

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AN EXPERIMENT IN CONTEMPLATIVE LIVING

Russill Paul D'Silva

In April 1991, Asha and I joined Wayne Teasdale at Hundred Acres Monastery in New Hampshire. During the six months we spent together at Hundred Acres, the three of us reflected deeply on the possibility of founding a lay community in the U.S.A. inspired by the life at Shantivanam and guided by Fr. Bede.

Bede had always wanted to establish such a community in which married couples and single people, as well as religious or monastics, could live together in simplicity, supporting themselves by their own labor and dedicated to the contemplative life. The lifestyle would be radically simple and numbers would be small, generally not more than six or seven in a community. The hope was that this model would inspire a whole network of similar communities around the world, for we all strongly felt that this was the only hope to find meaning in a world that was out of touch with its spiritual roots. These communities would be independent, free from any ties or outside authority, but might be linked to a monastery for guidance.

When we had tried without success to find a place in which to experience this form of community, we entrusted our need to God in prayer. After a few days Harrison Hoblitzelle, a good friend of Father Bede, and his wife Olivia, offered us the use of their summer home in Vermont for the experiment. It was a beautiful home nestled in the Green Mountains of Sugarbush County with about a

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THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO WHOLENESS

Bro. John Martin (*Shantivanam*)

Humanity is created for wholeness. The essential nature of humanity is whole. This experience of being whole is described in the first chapters of the Book of Genesis in a symbolic way. God created humanity in his own image and likeness. What is the image of God? We know that God, the ultimate Reality, is beyond names and forms. No name or form can contain him/her. We can say that God is whole or Wholeness. He created humanity as whole.

It is said that they were naked and they were not ashamed. To be naked means to be empty, to be poor. They were spiritually poor in the sense that they had no ego of their own. They were like little children, or rather new-born babies. They were naked and not ashamed, which means that they had no conscience of good or bad. They lived their life unconsciously, innocently. They were in a state of unknowing (*agnosia*), as St. Dionysius calls it. They walked with God in the cool of the evening. To walk with God in the cool of the evening is to have an intimate relationship with God. God lived in them and they lived in God: a mutual indwelling. We can say that in that state they were naturally and spontaneously following the three archetypal vows of poverty, obedience and chastity. They were poor, naked, empty. They had no ego. Since they had no ego, they were obedient, in the sense that they saw everything in and through God. God was the subject of their life. Since they were obedient to God, their relationship to God was chaste. They were naked and not ashamed. They had no guilt feelings. They lived without knowing good or evil. They lived like little children. That is the experience of the Garden of Eden or the Kingdom of God. That is why Jesus says that unless you become like little children you cannot enter the Kingdom of God. At that level we can say that

God is whole.

Creation or Humanity is whole.

The wholeness of Creation comes from the wholeness of God.

If the wholeness of Creation is taken away from the wholeness of God, the wholeness of God remains.

Sin breaks this holistic relationship with God and Humanity falls from wholeness into fragmentation. The consciousness which we now have is fragmentary

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hundred acres of wooded land. There was a pond beside the house and a stream that flowed through the property, which was inhabited by deer and other wildlife. The house itself was fairly large, but simply constructed of wood and sparsely furnished with Shaker-style furniture. It has five bedrooms, a studio and a prayer room ideal for a small community. It was a dream come true!

When we arrived, Father Bede was absolutely thrilled with the place, and drew up a horarium right away. "This is wonderful", he kept exclaiming, "It is just what we need."

We woke up at 5:30 am and had tea together, crowding around him while he reclined on his bed in his room. These were special moments as we often shared and reflected on our dreams together, and he would tell about what he had been mulling over in his meditations during the early hours of the morning. He usually awoke at 4:00 AM and meditated in his characteristic reclining position on the bed. We would also have fun during these times, but generally our conversations were on serious subjects and gave us a lot to think about during the rest of the day.

At 6:15 we gathered in the prayer room for morning prayer. It began with the chanting of the sacred *Gayatri* mantra and other Sanskrit shlokas as was done in the ashram, although there the chant was accompanied with musical instruments. There followed a reading from the Indian scriptures (usually the *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Upanishads*), and then we played a piece of instrumental music that led into a half-hour of silent meditation. This period of meditation ended with another soft instrumental, and then Fr. Bede read from the Old Testament and commented on it. This was sometimes informal, as we asked questions or offered our own insights upon the reading. Prayer finally concluded as we all sang *Christa Jaya Jaya* or *Om namah Christayah*, while Asha did the arati and offered us sandal paste to place on our foreheads to remind us that we were consecrating our lives to God that day and needed to be aware of God's presence even in the midst of our activities.

Breakfast was taken around 7:30 in silence. Fr. Bede insisted on helping with the dishes after the meals, so we allowed him to wipe a few dishes dry. He would sit down or sometimes stand close to the dishrack, and we would talk and enjoy light humour during this time. He wanted to share as much as possible with us, and it was a real joy to experience him in so many different ways.

After breakfast there were chores assigned to each of us except Fr. Bede, who would spend the morning on the deck outside his room, if the day was sunny. This deck overlooked a field beyond which the forest began to climb up the hill. With the leaves in their autumnal splendour, it was like living in a picture book. The rest of us would clean the house, run errands or cook the meals. Asha usually cooked, but for her occasional day off, which she

welcomed.

At 10 am we joined Fr. Bede on the deck for a cup of tea and then continued our work or study. Wayne did his writing and Asha pursued her studies in comparative religion. The studio in the basement was set up with a lot of recording equipment, and quite a few interesting productions were realized there. *The Experience of Shantivanam* was one of them.

Father often spent the whole morning reading or going over Judson Trapnell's recent dissertation on the development of his symbolic theology; he was quite absorbed in and impressed by this work. "This fellow really knows my mind better than I do", he would say from time to time.

Meals and prayer times were announced by the ringing of a small melodious bell that could be heard everywhere throughout the house. We would gather in the prayer room at noon to sing *Om Jagadishwara*, read briefly from the *Dhammapada* and have an arati with which kumkum was passed around.

Lunch was eaten in silence, while someone read to us. We read from *The Golden String* and it was really special to watch Father's many different expressions as he listened intently to his own words as though they were written by somebody else. Often his eyes would fill with tears and he would have that wonderful sagelike appearance that is unique to him. The mid-day meal was simple fare with brown rice and vegetables, lentils or beans, yogurt, salad fresh from the garden and fruit. Everyone helped with washing up after the meal.

Father retired to his bedroom, read his correspondence for awhile and then rested for an hour or more. When he awakened, he would continue his reading until we joined him for tea in his room around 3:15 pm. After this we would go for a short walk together, so that he got some exercise. We took turns accompanying him on his walks, and also gave him massages at times. He was very keen on his daily walk; it was a ritual. Often he would like to walk alone,

Evening prayer was at 5:30 pm. We began with the *Vande Saccidananda* and then Father read a poem of Kabir in that unmistakable style of his. A soft piece of instrumental music led us in and out of meditation. Then we had a reading from the New Testament and Father commented on it in his typical method of relating the scriptural text to the world situation and to our lives at that moment. After this we sang a bhajan together with all the musical instruments; Father tapped on a little something that resembled the hand drum that he normally used at the ashram.

We talked during supper, which was usually around 7 pm. This was a gourmet meal; we sometimes collaborated in its preparation. Now we really relaxed and had fun

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Experiment (Continued from page 2)

teasing each other, and sharing jokes or funny stories. Wayne was never at a loss to say something enlivening; we got to hear his complete repertoire of jokes and humorous situations. Fr. Bede enjoyed this very much and would often come out with some really good ones himself. After he had told the joke, he would blush with embarrassment. At times he would chant an old English limerick that none of us had heard, and he delivered it with such poise and dignity that it was often a joke in itself.

From 8 to 9 pm was time for satsangh, sharing in the sacred community. We would sit in the living room - which commanded a magnificent view of the hills and fields that stretched out into the distance - and we would watch the sun set together as we talked about our vision of community. Day after day this vision grew. We encountered disagreements and different points of view, but we became bound more closely together as we continued to try and give birth to this vision as one body. There was much to learn from this great and holy soul, especially his humility and patience in the face of opposition of any kind. He had a way of laying aside all personal issues and simply communicating with his mind and heart, communing intimately on a deeper level as he do so, and awakening in us a sense of the presence of God. He never forgot to employ his gentle touch in whatever he did.

We retired to bed after singing namajapa together in his room or in the prayer room. One of the most touching parts of the day was when he gave us each a good-night hug, something he would never do in India but that was an integral part of the American lifestyle that he had adopted while in this country.

We celebrated the Eucharist only on Sundays and special occasions. Our ritual was an elaborate affair, as is

generally the case with anything that comes out of India. We spent a great deal of time preparing the music, which was a combination of Eastern and Western pieces - vocal and instrumental, solo and ensemble - distributed at strategic points during the service. It was the one day in the week when we allowed local residents to join us for prayer and for the meal which followed. People generally brought some kind of food to contribute to the table, or helped us with the cooking when the Mass was over. There were other occasions when we accepted people to attend the morning or evening meditations, but this happened in only a few special situations. Our idea was to focus on a withdrawn life of contemplation that did not require us to be responsible for a public service of any kind.

What we experienced with Father Bede during our three months together in Vermont would be the basis of our lives in the future. He had showed us a way of realizing spiritual community in the West, based on the life and Shantivanam and centered on contemplation, the practice of the presence of God.

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Fingers Pointing toward the Sacred: A Twentieth Century Pilgrimage on the Eastern and Western Way, by Frederick Franck, Beacon Point Press (P.O. Box 460, Junction City, Oregon 97448), 1994, \$14.95.

This latest book of the prolific artist-writer is a delightful journey with a mind-opening companion. Full of zest for life, moving between Hindu - Buddhist East and Catholic West, it is a good prescription for Christians who are ready to widen their spiritual horizons and who feel the clear light of inner consciousness stirring within. ■ |

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The Call to Wholeness *(Continued from page 1)*

consciousness. We see reality in a fragmentary way and not holistically.

The Vedic sages had intuition into the primordial state of human nature. They described it in this poetic way:

Om That is full (The Divine is full)

This is full (the Creation is also full)

The fullness arises out of fullness (the created fullness comes out of divine fullness). If the created fullness is removed from the divine fullness, the divine fullness remains.

In their search for truth or reality, these Vedic seers realized that God is full, or whole, and that the same fullness or wholeness is reflected in each part of the universe. Wherever they looked, they saw fullness or wholeness. Enlightenment is to see the whole in the part and the part in the whole. And this experience is common to all religious traditions. "What is here is there and what is there is here", says the *Katha Upanishad*.

We also find, in the Buddhist tradition, "Samsara is Nirvana and Nirvana is Samsara." *Samsara* is the world of duality and separation, the world of pain and suffering. *Nirvana* is the world of peace, redemption and freedom. But in ultimate experience Nirvana is Samsara and Samsara is Nirvana. As we know, the ultimate reality in Buddhism is called *Sunyata* (or emptiness), and the ultimate nature of all things is also *Sunyata*. So a Buddhist might say,

The ultimate reality is empty.

The creation is also empty.

The emptiness of the creation comes from the emptiness

of the ultimate reality.

If the emptiness of creation is removed from the ultimate emptiness,
the ultimate emptiness remains.

In the Sufi tradition of Islam, we find the same experience expressed in a story about the legendary Mulla Nasrudin.

One day Mulla Nasrudin was standing in the centre of four roads and chanting like this: "O my beloved, I am full of you. Wherever I look, I see only you." Somebody was passing that way and heard Mulla chanting his song. He called Mulla, and said, "What happens, Mulla, if a fool passes that way?". Mulla went on singing, "It shall be you."

The story means that if a person is filled with God - that is, with wholeness or fullness or emptiness - that person sees God or wholeness or fullness or emptiness everywhere. But if a person is a fool, that person sees only fools, or fragmentation, everywhere. If we live in the holistic consciousness, we see wholeness everywhere. If we live in the fragmentary or divisive consciousness, we see only a fragmentary or divisive world. What we see outside is the projection of our state of consciousness. →

According to the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*, one day Jesus was walking along with the disciples. He came across little children being suckled. He told the disciples: "Unless you become like these little children, you cannot enter the Kingdom of God." The disciples thought that they were already like little children, and so asked Jesus, "Since we are little children, shall we enter the Kingdom?" Jesus replied, "Unless you make the two one, outside as inside, inside as outside, below as above. Unless you make male and female into a single one, so that male is not equal to Male and female is not equal to Female. When you make Eye in the place of the eye, when you make Hand in the place of the hand, when you make Foot in the place of the foot, when you make Image in the place of the image, then shall you enter this Kingdom." This supposed saying of Jesus reveals to us what wholeness is. Jesus has himself realized this wholeness, and is communicating it to his disciples. Jesus experienced the Kingdom of God, the holistic consciousness at his baptism, and wherever he looked, he saw only one thing - that is, the Kingdom of God. He saw a woman putting yeast into flour and he said, the Kingdom of God is like that; he saw a man who found a treasure in a field and he said, the Kingdom of God is like that. He saw a man who found a pearl of great value, and he said the Kingdom of God is like that; he saw fishermen throwing nets into the sea and he said, the Kingdom of God is like that. He saw a shepherd in search of his lost sheep and he said, the Kingdom of God is like that; he saw farmers sowing seeds and he said, the Kingdom of God is like that. He saw little children being suckled and he said, the Kingdom of God is like that. Wherever he went, he saw only one thing: that is, the Kingdom of God.

There are two kinds of consciousness. One is the holistic consciousness - or unitary, or non-dualistic consciousness. The other kind is dualistic or fragmentary consciousness. The holistic consciousness includes dualistic consciousness and integrates it. The dualistic consciousness does not include the holistic consciousness. The dualistic consciousness is divided. It has a beginning and an end. It has the present, the past and the future. The dualistic consciousness can also be called lineal consciousness or horizontal consciousness. In the lineal consciousness, the past enters into the present and the present into the future. In it, the present is seen through the eyes of the past, and the future is understood with the eyes of the present. This means that past, present and future are the same, though there may be some changes. The present and the future are projections of the past. In this sense, the past contaminates the present and the present contaminates the future. We cannot see the present as it is, but we see it through the conditioning of the past. Lineal consciousness has its place in scientific knowledge and in technological growth, but if it enters into the religious sphere it is inadequate because it cannot grasp

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**BEDE GRIFFITHS SPEAKING
ON THE RELIGIOUS VOWS
at Osage Monastery and Waitsfield, VT.**

The problem of human existence is that every person has a self-centered personality. The aim of the religious vows is to set the person free from this self-centeredness and open it to the presence of God.

The vow of poverty is intended to set us free from the desire of possessions. The ego-centered person needs possessions to affirm its importance: the vow of poverty consists in the renunciation of all possessions. A religious may not possess anything, not even a tooth-brush, clothes, furniture, house, books, radio, television, means of transport - everything has to be accepted as a gift of God, for which no claim of possession can be made. This demands total detachment from all material things.

The vow of chastity is intended to set us free from the desire of the senses. The ego seeks to affirm itself by fulfilling the desire of the senses, of touch, taste, smell, hearing and seeing. The vow of chastity is intended to set us free from all selfish desires, whether for food or drink or sex or cinema or television or simply for human companionship. It demands total detachment from the desire of the senses, particularly sex, and the acceptance of love for everyone and everything as the free gift of God.

The vow of obedience is intended to set us free from the root of all self-centeredness, the desire to be a separate self. The ego needs above all to affirm itself as the center of its existence: the vow of obedience is intended to set us free from our self-center and open us to the presence of God as the center of our being. It demands detachment from one's own will and surrender to the will of God in every situation, but especially to the will of God as revealed in the community to which one belongs. It is a call to total freedom from one's ego and openness to God.

Conversion is turning to God in the heart, going beyond names and forms and realizing the presence of the divine mystery at every moment and in every place. The actual turning to God in conversion has to be renewed, of course, every day - and in a sense at every hour.

Stability would be the stabilizing of this attitude of mind, as a contemplative state, to which all prayer and study and work must lead us. Stability implies a settled way of life, a constancy in prayer and meditation, so that contemplation in the sense of union with God becomes habitual. I would say that it need not necessarily mean stability of place. The 'place' of contemplation is the 'cave of the heart', which we can take with us wherever we go, just as conversion is not a particular moment of time but a continuous process. Contemplation is really going beyond the limits of space and time, though a constant space and regular time may assist the process.



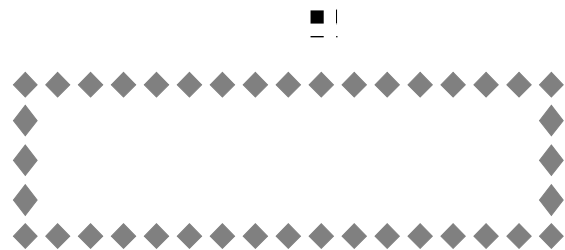
The Call to Wholeness (Continued from page 4)

the truth, which is whole. The truth is one whole, while lineal consciousness is fragmentary. How can a fragmentary instrument grasp the truth? How many years could equal eternity? We cannot measure eternity in time. The fall of humanity is a fall from unitary or holistic consciousness into dualistic or fragmentary consciousness. It is a fall from vertical consciousness into horizontal consciousness. It is a fall from eternity into time.

The call of Jesus to humanity is the call to rise from horizontal consciousness to vertical consciousness, from time to eternity, from dualistic to non-dualistic consciousness, from fragmentary to unitary consciousness. We should not think that these two types oppose one another, however. Holistic consciousness includes the fragmentary and integrates it. Only when the fragmentary consciousness assumes an independent role does it separate itself from the other. It is like the Unreal assuming the role of the Real. The Real includes the Unreal, but the Unreal does not include the Real.

This movement is not a reformation of consciousness, but a revolution in consciousness. Jesus is not a reformer but a revolutionary. Reformation still belongs to lineal consciousness, reforming the past and allowing it to go into the future. Revolution is freedom from the past. This freedom from the past is not achieved by rejecting the past or suppressing the past but by understanding the nature of the past. The past is not bad, it is not false. It is manifested truth, revealed truth - but the truth is always present; it is here and now. It is ever new. God is. Truth is. It is eternal Now.

Jesus calls everyone to this revolution in the perception of Truth, this revolution in consciousness: to pass into holistic consciousness, which is to live in the present. The essence of Jesus' message can be reduced to one thing: TO LIVE IN THE PRESENT.



PARLIAMENT UPDATE

Wayne Teasdale

Some exciting new developments have been unfolding in the continuing life of the Parliament of the World's Religions. In the last issue of *The Golden String*, this writer reported on the consultation of the Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders called by the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, or CPWR. One of the results of that two-day event in September 1994 was the appointment of an *ad hoc* committee by the chair of CPWR, Dr. Howard Sulkin. This committee was itself drawn mostly from the membership of the Assembly.

The *ad hoc* committee was given the task of formulating a proposal on future Parliaments and the role of the Assembly itself. Having met in November, the committee submitted its proposal, called the **International Interreligious Initiative**, to the full membership of the CPWR board in early December 1994. After some discussion and clarifications, the entire package was approved, and Dr. Hamid Hai was elected chair of the **International Interreligious Task Force** formed to develop and implement the decisions of the CPWR and the III, while James Kenney was appointed director of the **Task Force** itself.

The **International Interreligious Initiative** has a tripartite purpose: to create new Parliaments every five years, to disseminate and encourage study of the Parliament's declaration, *Towards A Global Ethic*, and co-sponsorship of *Projects 2000* with the Millenium Institute of Washington, D.C.

The *ad hoc* committee had recommended a dynamic model of the Parliament rather than a static, institutional approach such as the *UN of Religions* concept. Given the needs of the age, the resources and personnel available, and the goals envisioned, the CPWR adopted the *Olympic* model - meaning that every five years the Parliament will be organized and meet in one of the major cities of the world. The IIT is discussing possible sites, and there is general consensus that the 1999 Parliament should be held somewhere in the southern hemisphere of the planet.

The Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders will convene three years before and during each Parliament, and is now scheduled to gather in 1996 to set the agenda for 1999, and choose the site for 2004. One of the important responsibilities of the IIT is the Assembly itself: its role, scope of tasks, membership, and the development of criteria for membership. An essential commitment of the CPWR is the ideal of inclusiveness both in the Parliament at large and in the Assembly in particular. The Assembly, in time, should evolve into a transcendent moral voice for the Earth Community.

The second focus of the IIT is the promotion of the document *Towards a Global Ethic*. The point of

FROM GOD-FATHER TO FATHER BEDE

John P. Martin (Maryknoll)

It was my privilege to spend a month and a half with Fr. Bede Griffiths just prior to his death on May 13, 1993. My relationship with him had begun in 1979, when I first spent a month at Shantivanam, coming from Bangladesh, where I was then living.

The irony of it all is that I was then committed to living - with a group of fellow Maryknollers - among our Muslim brothers and sisters, while Fr. Bede was an eloquent exponent of the integration or inculturation of elements of the Hindu religious tradition into Christian contemplative life. By a paradoxical but providential set of circumstances, a friend sent me a copy of his book, *Return to the Centre*, which had a very favorable impact on me and helped me to overcome my great reluctance to go to a

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Christian - "Hindu" ashram, as it was called. I had originally

disseminating the declaration is to stimulate discussion in order to advance a moral consensus among the religions, etc. At this point, some ten books have been published on the *Global Ethic*, two by Hans Kung alone, and his books have been translated into some forty languages! There are literally hundreds of forums around the world studying the implications of the Parliament's seminal declaration. This author himself, both as a member of CPWR/IIT and of a seminar directed by the Chicago Center for Global Ministries, is part of a process of reflection on this statement. Often in tandem with these discussions, informal "chapters" of the Parliament are springing up in many cities around the world. The Parliament has thus become a mass idea!

The third component of the IIT's efforts is the *Projects 2000* campaign conceived by Dr. Gerald Barney, executive director of the Millenium Institute, and also a trustee of the CPWR. We are fast approaching a *millennial moment*, i.e., 1999-2001, and this presents us with a unique opportunity to do something substantial for the Earth. *Projects 2000* invites all the religions of the world to make some significant contributions or gifts (not financial!) towards the well-being of the whole planet. The Millenium Institute is organizing a unique Global Event to occur in the year 2000 at Tingvellir, Iceland, in which the political and spiritual leaders of the world will participate, and together announce the gifts of the various cultures, states and religions to our planet. Needless to say, we are living in fascinating and hopeful times!

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God-Father to Father Bede (Continued from page 6)

experienced some repugnance for the Hindu religious tradition as it was manifest to me. But go I did, and have never been the same since then!

The spirit of Father Bede and his ashram community gifted me with the seeds of an integration process that I sorely needed between the masculine and feminine dimensions of my life. That spirit also planted the seed of a vision of myself as a Christian and as a missionary that I see myself trying to nurture into full growth to this day. Instead of a focus mainly on the Muslim people, I was to try to live as brother and friend, pilgrim and God-seeker, among peoples of various religious traditions: Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Native Americans.

Since 1979 I had been with Father Bede on six other occasions, in India and the U.S.A. I have used for him the Hindu term *guru* (that is, teacher) in a loose sense only, because I did not spend long periods of formation with him - getting specific teachings for my spiritual development - as a *guru* traditionally trains his disciples. If I may borrow a phrase from my experience in Mexico, he was more of a God-Father to me. He was *Father*, because he was always "Father Bede", and because he belonged to a long line of mature holy men who have served me as guides, friends and teachers throughout my life. He was *God-Father* because he always seemed to embody for me in a supreme manner the divine gifts of wisdom and holiness. His very presence, his easy intuitive manner of responding to me in our many brief encounters, his words of wisdom that drove like an arrow to the heart of the matter, his rootedness in tradition, his gentleness in being critical, his courage in challenging you to go beyond, his ability to affirm one and all with a positive word, the teachings that poured from his brilliant mind - all these succeeded in making me enshrine Father Bede above ordinary, mortal, human beings - that is, until this last visit to Shantivanam, to be at his side for the last six weeks of his life!

Father Bede had a last major stroke in January 1993 that effectively ended his normal life as we had known it. The severe brain damage that he suffered severely limited his memory and left him partly paralyzed. His mind and his communicative ability were largely gone.

It was now to this needy, semi-paralyzed and vulnerable human being that I was invited to lend my services of daily nursing care. And it was then that I got to know Father Bede as the ordinary person that we all are, up close.

In my daily turn to care for him, I found that he would distinguish me from day to day as Father John Martin, from Brother John Martin, one of his monk disciples. We talked about similarities in our relationship with our own fathers. How I relished my father's gift of a sense of humor - and we had a few good belly laughs together, one of the most

**SHIRLEY DU BOULAY TO
WRITE LIFE OF FATHER BEDE**

An experienced English biographer, Shirley du Boulay, is preparing to write a life of Father Bede Griffiths. She will have full access to the archival material, and her work is expected to be a major biography. Ms. du Boulay, after spending over twenty years as manager and producer with the BBC, has written seven books, which include biographies of Dame Cicely Saunders, founder of the Hospice movement, of Bishop Desmond Tutu and of St. Teresa of Avila. She lives and works in Oxford, England, and has been in India earlier this year, engaged in interviews and other research for her biography of Bede. ■ |

endearing human experiences that I know of. I spoke of my hope to carry Bede's message and spirit wherever I would live and work, but he would correct me: "not *my* spirit but *the* Spirit." And ah, the joy of learning to please him with a good drink of orange juice in that broiling South Indian weather!

Stripped of those mental and verbal skills that he had so brilliantly developed, he was nevertheless communicating to those around him from the deep inner treasures of his heart, where his spirit was united with the Spirit of God. Some of those messages went without deciphering; some were "vintage Father Bede", simple, powerful and clear. Some, for me and for others too, were eminently personal and clairvoyant.

As he let me care for him, he taught me how to care for the sick and the dying as a future pastoral skill. As he struggled and suffered with his own demons, he taught me never to underestimate the power of my own. He would address himself to me from what seemed an intuitive store of knowledge about my life that I had not shared with him. And it seemed that he was more in touch with my inner life than I was. The last time I saw him, he gave me two personal "messages" about my future that were clearly from the Beyond, where he was mostly living during those days.

So my dying Father Bede gifted me with a more realistic and ordinary experience of him as a fellow human being. In so doing, he opened up my heart and mind, my body and spirit to new possibilities, to greater hope, and to the challenge to see and experience the Extraordinary in my ordinary life and work, in my relationships and faith experience - as brother and friend, Christian and priest, missionary and pilgrim.

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Book Review **Br. Wayne Teasdale**
The Crucified Guru: An Experiment in Cross-
Cultural Christology, by M. Thomas Thangaraj
Nashville TN, Abingdon Press, 1994, ix + 165 pp.

Thomas Thangaraj, a Tamil nurtured in the bosom of the Church of South India, is a professor of World Christianity at Chandler School of Theology, Emory University. In this little volume the author presents a novel approach to Christology, in the Indian context, by appealing to the time-honored category of the *guru* which has graced Hindu spirituality and culture for thousands of years. Indeed, it continues to play a prominent role. Prof. Thangaraj draws on the guru notion in a particular tradition of Hinduism, namely, *Saiva Siddhanta*, a Hindu sect indigenous to Tamil Nadu in South India.

After spending a chapter elaborating an understanding of the guru as it exists in Saiva Siddhanta, he then gives an historical overview of the christological use of the guru concept in India. These applications of the guru to Christ have been made by both Hindu and Christian thinkers alike. He then goes on to develop his own view in a chapter on the *Crucified Guru*. This is the heart of the book.

In unfolding this vision of Christ, the author rejects those doctrines that he regards as eurocentric christological models; i.e., the Incarnate Son of God and the Logos. He feels that these formulations are too western, too Greek, and thus much too culturally conditioned to be intelligible to other cultures in a more universal theology. The Gospel and Christian theology can be and *must* be expressed through the genius of other cultures. He is convinced - and he may be right - that in this way their appeal will be truly universal, rather than simply the products of a particular western cultural and religious experience; i.e., the ancient Graeco-Roman world. In discussing and defending his perspective and approach, he has taken much from the philosophical literature of Saiva Siddhanta.

This particular Indian tradition has a richness of personalist thought and experience. It is clearly theistic in a way similar to Christianity, and of all the Hindu schools it comes the closest to the Christian experience of the Divine as involving *personal* relationship with God. This personalism is animated by love and affectivity. Consider this one instance, which is so characteristic of the whole tradition. It identifies Siva (God) with love, as appears in the Tamil work *Tirumantiram*: "The ignorant think that love and Siva are two (different things). They do not know that love is God (Siva)." Father Bede himself was fond of quoting this important passage.

The personalist thrust of Saiva Siddhanta experience also emphasizes the role of *grace* in spiritual growth much as we do in Christian theology and practice. This grace is often associated with the guru, and they will speak of the *grace of the guru*. The property of grace attached to the guru

has to do with his task of assisting others to reach salvation.

Saiva Siddhanta, unlike other forms of Hinduism, does not accept the notion of *avatar*. It does regard the guru as a function or a communication of the presence of God. Although the guru *functions as* God for his or her disciples, such a spiritual master is *not* God in the same sense in which Christ is said to be God in the Christian understanding. There is thus no ontological - and hence theological - parity between the guru model of Christ and the more traditional models offered to the Church from the various councils in which the vision of Jesus Christ was profoundly clarified for the ages to come. While the notion of the guru can certainly elucidate Christ's teaching role, it is not in itself sufficient to replace the older christology that has guided our appreciation of Christ's identity from the early centuries of the Gospel.



Book Review **Bruno Barnhart**
What We Can Learn From the East, by Beatrice
Bruteau, New York, Crossroad, 1995, 126 pp.,
paper \$11.95.

This book is a popular introduction to the Asian spiritual traditions, which are presented as providing a series of perspectives for personal interpretation and appropriation of Christian scripture and tradition. The book offers a twofold contribution, therefore: both an acquaintance with the essential Eastern perspectives on the spiritual quest and a consistent re-interpretation of Christianity from a unitive viewpoint.

Dr. Bruteau writes first, in her seven chapters, of religion as experience ("The first thing we can learn about religion from the East is that it is a matter of direct experience." (p.5)), and then of the four classical spiritual paths of action (*karma yoga*), of knowledge (*jnana yoga*), of mind control (*raja yoga*), of devotion (*bhakti yoga*). Then are discussed, in turn, the quest for the Absolute through a progressive interiorizing of the sense of the Self; the central mystery of nonduality, Enlightenment and the stages of practice, spiritual practice in the New Testament, and finally the nondual "original face" of the East as it is reflected in the Christian dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

The author finds in John's gospel - and particularly in the johannine "I Am" affirmations of Jesus - the deepest and richest resonances with the Hindu and Buddhist traditions of nondual reality and of enlightenment. The affirmations of Gospel and tradition are consistently opened both to their universality and immediacy (that which is said of Jesus - or of the Immaculate Conception - is to be understood of each of us) and to their unitive depths.

(Continued on page 9)

RECENT EVENTS;

The second annual Bede Griffiths Memorial Retreat was held at New Camaldoli from May 19-21, 1995, with the title, "The Universal Call to Contemplation." The retreat conferences were given by monks of the Hermitage. Br. Cyprian Consiglio introduced the retreat and presented a contemplative approach to anthropology and psychology. Fr. Bruno Barnhart spoke on the East-West dialogue and its implications. Fr. John Powell presented a practical approach to Christian meditation.

Roland Ropers' extensive Bede Griffiths - related activities in Europe have included co-organizing two conferences on interreligious dialogue at the Benedictine Archabbey of St. Ottilien (Germany) in October 1994 and April 1995, based on the works of Father Bede. He promoted "Universal Wisdom" at the International Book Fair in Frankfurt in October 1994, and has been negotiating for the publication of the book with Dutch, Swedish, French, Brazilian, Italian, Spanish and German publishers. Two further books of Bede Griffiths have been prepared for publication (see next column).

Negotiations have been completed with Rupa publishers, New Delhi, to publish 1,000 copies each of *Universal Wisdom*, *Return to the Centre*, *The Golden String* and *A New Vision of Reality*. The books have not been available at modest prices for readers in India and visitors to Shantivanam.

Roland Ropers has given extensive support to two scholars who have written dissertations on Bede Griffiths: Thomas Menzel (Muenster) and Father Lourdu Anandam (Freiburg), who wrote on the Christology of Bede Griffiths. In addition, Roland has directed the typing of 144 hand-written letters of Father Bede for future publication, as well as the restoration and cataloging of 140 cassette tapes of Bede's conferences for the Archives.

Russill and Asha Paul D'Silva spent the last few months of 1994 in India, studying music, the Vedic scriptures and yoga. They were present at Shantivanam to participate in the birthday commemorations for Fr. Bede in December, and also witnessed the transfer of the remains of Abhishiktananda to a grave beside that of Father Bede. Russill is engaged in extensive teaching at the Institute in Culture and Creation Spirituality in Oakland, California. Russill and Asha are also helping to conduct a four-month program in Oakland for "artists in spiritual convergence", designed to help artists to re-connect their creative work with a sense of the sacred.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS: COMING EVENTS

- The 3rd annual meeting of the Bede Griffiths Trust will be held at New Camaldoli Hermitage, in Big Sur, California, from August 9-13, 1995. It is hoped that Trust members from Shantivanam, from Australia, from Germany and from Italy will be able to attend, in addition to those from the U.S.
- Two new books of Fr. Bede will be published by HarperCollins, London, in November 1995: *Pathwa*. ■ |
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Letter from a High School Teacher

...Last year, when *A Human Search* and *Discovering the Feminine* became available, I bought them for my course and have used them for a special unit on the life and teachings of Father Bede. My colleague, Christine Knudsen, teaches a unit on spirituality and draws from *Discovering the Feminine*. Chris reports that she has very positive responses from the students, who respond wonderfully to Father Bede. There is clearly an enormous hunger in young people for genuine spirituality and the students, girls in an all-girls' school, find a sympathetic voice in Father Bede and in his affirmation of the feminine. He is a figure with whom they can really identify because, as one young woman put it, "He's the real thing...not someone 'preaching at you', but a man who shares his heart and soul with you."...

...In my class I have shared, with students who thought that "Catholics didn't meditate", some of Father John Main's tapes. The consequence has been that some students have actually begun to meditate on a regular basis. Learning about the spiritual life from Father Bede has enabled students to have a real and enlarged vision of what spirituality means. Father Bede continues to lead us by the "golden string". *Terence van Vliet, Los Angeles.*

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What We Can Learn From the East

(Continued from page 8)

The book radiates that spiritual-intellectual zest which is characteristic of the author, and communicates a strong invitation to enter into the vibrant actualities of the spiritual quest - to be content with nothing less than a deepening personal experience of the Spirit. It will help Christians to grasp a new and more personal, experiential level of meaning in their own faith, as well as to enter the larger world of interrelating spiritual traditions in which Christianity must now live - and rediscover itself.

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The Golden String

FR. BEDE: RECENT PUBLICATIONS

The Ramakrishna Order (address: Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Calcutta 700 014, India) has published a centenary issue (January 1995) of its monthly journal, *Prabuddha Bharata (Awakened India)* with two articles on Hindu-Christian dialogue. "The Mental and Mystical Journey of Fr. Bede Griffiths", by his close friend Fr. Ignatius Hirudayam S.J. , recounts a history which will be largely familiar to readers of Bede's autobiography, *The Golden String*.

The second article, by Fr. John B. Chethimattam, CMI, is entitled "Hundred Years of Hindu-Christian Dialogue", and includes an account of the background of the Christian ashram movement, as follows.

The Christian outlook on Hinduism went through various stages of appreciation. The initial view was stated in J.N. Farquhar's *The Crown of Hinduism*, in which, acknowledging that religions like Hinduism and Buddhism had some basic truths, the author contended that these religions, based mostly on tradition rather than on rational thought, could not survive a crisis. The next position, which emerged after World War I, in which all rational systems failed, was that all religious systems including Hinduism and Christianity had to be evaluated in the light of the unique historical, divine

revelation in Jesus Christ. The missionary conference at Thambaram, 1938, stated that one had to die to Hinduism and other 'natural' religions in order to experience the 'supernatural' divine self-disclosure in Jesus Christ. But with the loss of faith in history in the trauma of the Second World War, emphasis shifted to an existential encounter with God in Jesus Christ, the incarnate divine Logos. There was much recognition of the Hindu emphasis that religious faith is basically an experience of the Divine in the cave of one's heart, and that it could not be exhausted by conceptual formulations and external structures of social control. An earnest effort was made by Christian theologians to discover their own ultimate concerns also in other religions and to look at them through the eyes of the respective followers of each religion.

A significant sign of this deep appreciation of the Indian religious ideals was the emergence of the Christian ashram movement, which saw a good number of prominent Europeans like Bede Griffiths, Monchanin and Le Saux introduce in Christianity the unique ideals of sannyasa practised in India first by the Jains and the Buddhists and later embraced by Hinduism as well (pp.393-394).

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The Golden String

Bede Griffiths Trust
New Camaldoli Hermitage
Big Sur, California 93920
U.S.A.
