



# The Golden String

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## **BEYOND THE DARKNESS: THE LIVING BEDE Bruno Barnhart**

The vision of Bede Griffiths (1906-1993) is eloquently set forth in the dozen books that he left us. Now the story of his life, with its colorful and dynamic context, has appeared in a book which is worthy to stand alongside Bede's own works: Shirley Du Boulay's *Beyond the Darkness*.<sup>1</sup> This is the first full biography of Bede, and gives us an opportunity to see his life as a whole in its fluid historical matrix. Du Boulay has succeeded in conveying the dynamism of Bede's life, a never-ending search for that ultimate truth which gives life to the whole person.

The book moves quickly through Alan Griffiths' "Edwardian childhood" to the new horizons and enduring friendships which opened for him at Oxford. Then, after a period of inner turmoil, Bede embarked upon the experiment of a quasi-monastic life with two friends, in 1930, which preceded his conversion to Christianity and, almost immediately, his initiation into Benedictine monastic life at Prinknash.

The two further turning points which were to shape Bede's life, after this fundamental awakening to Christian faith, stand out clearly in the biography. When Bede went to India in 1955, it was as if he had slammed the door behind him upon the industrialized modern West, its culture and drying religious world. When, eight years later, he made his first visit to America, his reintegration of the West, "the other half of the world," was symbolically inaugurated. For the remainder of Bede's long life, as his journey brought him face to face with one challenge after another, he would continue to reintegrate into his vision and his person what had been left behind in his decisive earlier steps: into the Church, into monastic life, into the spirituality of the Vedanta with its contra-historical "return to the center."

Within this simple overall pattern, Bede's life appears as a continuous series of discoveries, of fresh awakenings. Introduced to the life of the mind by a charismatic headmaster, the young Alan awoke at the same time to the political world with its compelling issues of justice and peace. His first epiphanic experience of the Divine in nature (with which Bede initiated his autobiography, *The Golden String* (1954)) would remain the touchstone of truth and spiritual reality throughout his life. Two further doors,

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## **MYSTICISM AS THE CROSSING OF ULTIMATE BOUNDARIES: A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION Wayne Teasdale**

It is inevitably and invariably difficult to write about mystical experience and the whole inner process of contact with the Divine, or Ultimate Reality, which is completely surrounded by mystery. This difficulty is compounded when we try to speak about mysticism theologically. Theologically, this quality of ineffability is the result of two related factors: the limitations of the human subject/knower and the experiential nature of mysticism as directly engaging the person within the depths of his/her subjectivity. The Divine Reality is infinite actuality and eternal being, while the human person has an infinite potential but only a finite experience. The ontological gap between the Divine and the human is unbridgeable from our side. Left to our own intellectual devices, we can never catch up with God. When we bring to this situation the experience of other traditions, things become very interesting - and the potential for confusion is very high. I would like to explore what I call *interspirituality*: a crossing-over boundaries that mysticism makes possible and concrete. The spiritual common ground which exists among the world's religions will be identified, and its theological implications suggested.

### **The Origin and Nature of Mysticism**

Every authentic religion derives from the primary spiritual realizations of its founders. Hinduism, or the *Sanatana Dharma*, or Eternal Religion, as it is called, can be traced back to the rishis, the forest sages or mystics of

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poetry (through the English Romantics) and friendship, would soon open to this eager young spirit. After the dramatic conversion to Christ and the Church, his continuing further awakenings would occur along the path of an explicitly spiritual journey.

***Beyond the Darkness*** admits us to phases of Bede's life which had remained largely in the dark in his better known writings, such as the period of the first bold monastic experiment at Kurisumula (1956-63) with Fr. Francis Mahieu. We learn much about the personal relationships which were so important in Bede's life: the lifelong friendship with two Oxford companions, Martyn Skinner and Hugh Waterman, the critical late friendship with Russill D'Silva, and Bede's close relationships with several Americans at Shantivanam.

Already in the 1930s Bede had grasped the profundity of the Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist Scriptures and their importance for the future development of Christianity. During his early years in India, however, Bede was much concerned with the uniqueness of Christianity, insisting repeatedly on the essential differences between the great religions. In dialectic with this position was his conviction of the ultimate unity of religions, and one experiences a continual movement between these two points in Bede's writings. This mobility is characteristic of the alternating current of Bede's thought, capable of following the logic of each principle through to its implications, without immediate confrontation with the contrasting, perspectives.

By the 1950s, the 'Perennial Philosophy' was emerging at the center of Bede's thought as the common core of all religions. In the following decades this 'universal tradition' would be more and more clearly identified with nonduality, the advaitan reality. Closely related to this first principle, in the 'Vedic Revelation' in which Bede immersed himself, emerged a second: the 'search for the Self', or the Atman.

Our knowledge of Bede would be incomplete without an awareness of his passion for humanity. Strongly influenced by the work of Vinoba Bhave, Bede began early to initiate projects to build up the rural village life and its economy. These efforts would continue later on behalf of the poorer villagers living around Shantivanam.

Bede's criticisms of the Church appear again and again: always in the direction of vitality and an openness to the whole world and its spiritual experience. His perspective on the function of the institutional Church - as 'nest rather than cage' - was a faithful expression of that combination of marginality, depth and vitality which characterizes monastic life at its best. If we do not hear Bede speaking often of the Church as other than institution, this is one of the limitations which he inherited from the tradition of Tridentine Catholicism into which he had been initiated. Bede's view of monasticism was also prophetic. The monastic community's withdrawal from the world should enable it to

"become a new creative centre of life in the world," and he came to see the future of the monastic tradition more and more in terms of the development of lay contemplative communities.

Around 1980, Bede's rediscovery of the West was taking an important further step: an encounter with the "new science" articulated by Fritjof Capra, David Bohm and Rupert Sheldrake. This fresh horizon would call forth Bede's comprehensive "New Vision of Reality." (1989)

Bede's first stroke in 1990 was the occasion of his 'discovery of the feminine', and woven together with this came a new realization of the 'dark side': emptiness, chaos, body and earth. In this interior experience of Bede's final years, one cannot well distinguish elements of personal integration - on the level of the 'psyche', as Bede would say - from the awakenings in the realm of 'spirit' which would claim a directly theological import. Here we seem to observe a collapse of the classical spiritual ladder: spiritual wisdom coming to its fulfillment in the descending movement of incarnation. Then finally, as the crystal lamp of Bede's mind is shattered, we watch the seed falling into the ground.

Throughout the story, the affective side of Bede's life emerges with new clarity: the struggles and joys that rarely broke through his exterior composure.. Bede's monastic *persona* was so integral and radiant that one easily believed him to have been lifted beyond the common passions and conflicts. ***Beyond the Darkness*** rounds this image into the three-dimensional fullness of flesh and blood. Her deep admiration for Bede has not led the author to expurgate those shadows which sculpt his living figure. We hear about his unsuccessful term as superior at Farnborough, his persistent emotional repression and long struggles toward personal integration. We hear the critical reflections of his lifelong friends, the accusations of his passionate enemies and the misgivings of dispassionate (usually too dispassionate) theologians.

Remarks by those friends who knew Bede well may confirm some of our own hesitant intuitions, helping us to move past the myth to the man.

Seized of an idea every circumstance of life had to be slotted into his theory, squeezed in sometimes, and doubts were swept up like leaves... Usually most inspiring, it could also be most infuriating to a mind that likes to see both sides before making itself up... (Hugh Waterman)

One of the things about Father Bede was that he would see his life in chapters...The chapter comes to an end and you turn the page and the past is forgotten and everything is all coloured with roses again. (Father Fabian of Prinknash)

We learn again and again how risky it is to attempt to confine Bede within a category, a single judgment; a bold assertion will be complemented - not cancelled but

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**Beyond the Darkness** (Continued from page 2)

balanced - at some point by a counterstatement. If, as reported by his friends and disciples, Bede's views sometimes sound one-sided, tilted too far outward and Eastward, one suspects that the theological counterpoint of his own thought has not come through - and particularly the balancing weight of his rootedness in Christ and the Church. But it was certainly not easy to be close to the man and to remain 'objective'; the very medium of his teaching was enthusiasm. .

Bede's own words confirm our impression of a spirit which retained the keenness of youth throughout his progression into old age. At around 70, he would say, "I always feel about 21, just beginning to explore life and always finding new things."

*Beyond the Darkness* is written with great skill; the reader is continually drawn into the story, drawn forward by its movement. The wealth of concrete information, of situational detail, brings one really close to Bede's life. The author has a good sense of Bede's spirit. She is aware that his importance lies more in this expansive spiritual energy, and in the overall vision that it projects, than in the tentative formulations of 'the marriage' which Bede achieved.

Bede's vision was for all humankind, but it is of special importance to Christians. Through his own great longing to reach the reality beyond the opposites, the mystical union that he was convinced lay at the heart of every religion, he helped today's Christians to realise that it is possible to follow a mystical path and remain within the institutional church. In his humility and in his confidence of the truth of his experience he challenged the Church and left an image of an inclusive Christian for the future, once more his own example, his own courage, inspiring others to follow their instincts. (p. 269)

Shirley Du Boulay's biography is a feast, faithfully reflecting the eucharistic presence and spirit of Bede Griffiths. I am grateful that we have been given such a generous, perceptive portrait of Bede - full of color, vibrant with his passionate gospel of spirit and life, rich in crisp detail - before his immediate memory and its witnesses have begun to fade.

1. Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness: A Biography of Bede Griffiths* (London, Random House (UK), New York, Doubleday (US) , 308 pp., cloth \$24.95)

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Indian antiquity. The Buddhist Dharma had its beginnings in the enlightenment of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. His life is paradigmatic of the inner spiritual process for every true Buddhist. Jainism arises out of the inner realizations of Mahavira and his twenty-three predecessors, while Judaism was born out of a process of revelation from God to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and the Prophets. Revelation is itself a mystical process with a corporate goal: to educate a people and then the whole of humankind in divine matters. In each of these instances, mysticism was the heart of their understanding. It is the same with Christianity and Islam. The Christian tradition rests on Jesus' inner awareness of his relationship with the Father, and Mohammed encountered Allah through the mediation of the Archangel Gabriel. All these religious traditions emerge out of mystical experience, and mystical experience means a direct knowledge of and relationship with the Divine, God, or boundless consciousness. One can almost say that the real religion of humankind isn't religion at all, but rather it is mystical spirituality, the bosom out of which the religions themselves have been born.

Mysticism is the awakening to and cultivation of transcendental consciousness. It is unitive awareness. All forms of mystical wisdom are unitive, that is, non-dual. This is a significant point of convergence among the religions themselves.<sup>1</sup> To say that mystical consciousness is unitive, non-dual, or integrative, is to identify it with a state of awareness in which the person is united with God or Ultimate Reality. In Buddhist terms, the person achieves absolute realization, an inner awakening to non-dual consciousness in which a changeless wisdom is activated.<sup>2</sup>

In mystical consciousness, the transcendent is touched, and it touches and embraces us. Mystical consciousness means integration with it, and knowing it directly and certainly, though it remains beyond description. It can be experienced but not comprehended. Encountering the transcendent reality confers on us a degree of knowledge, the knowledge that it *is*, and a kind of wisdom that has a practical utility for our spiritual life. While mystical experience is fleeting, its fruits are lasting. Some of the effects include wisdom, deep peace, joy, compassion, patience, gentleness, selflessness and simplicity.

**Interspirituality**

Interspirituality<sup>3</sup> is a term to describe the breaking down of the barriers that have separated the religions for millenia. It is also the crossing-over and sharing in the spiritual, aesthetic, moral and psychological treasures that exist in the spiritualities of the world religions. The deepest level of sharing is in and through one another's mystical wisdom,

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and their fruits. The mystical life, in its maturity, is naturally interspiritual because of the inner freedom that is



**Mysticism**

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whether teachings, insights, methods of spiritual practice and ignited in the depths of the person on the mystical journey. This path frees us from the obstacles within us that would hold us back from that generosity and willingness to partake from the mystical springs of other traditions. To drink this precious nectar requires openness and a capacity to assimilate the depth experience of these venerable traditions. More and more it is becoming common for individuals to cross over the frontiers of their own faith into the land of another or others. We can, indeed, speak of this new millennial period as the *Interspiritual Age*. This development is momentous news for the human family, for until now humankind has been segregated into spiritual ghettos. Out of this separation has come so much misunderstanding, and thousands of wars sparked by mutual suspicion, isolation, competition and hostility.

The Interspiritual Age promises to melt away the old barriers and, with them, the old antagonisms. This is one reason why it should be nurtured and encouraged. Interspirituality opens the way to friendship<sup>4</sup> among members of differing faiths. Friendship creates bonds of community between the religions through their members, and community<sup>5</sup> represents a shift from the old competitive, antagonistic model to a new paradigm of relationship that seeks to meet on common ground. Community makes interspirituality possible, and the crossover substantial. Transcendental experience awakens us to the possibility of radical spiritual change by allowing us to see beyond the boundaries that have kept us all separate from one another and isolated within our systems.

The common ground that interspirituality reveals is both in the reality of mystical experience itself and in the practical elements of the spiritual life in each tradition. In the mystical, transcendental sphere the basis of entering this realm of depth, height and breadth is consciousness itself. All traditions emphasize the deep interiority of the contemplative vision. This vision, or rather direction, is a *sine qua non* for breakthroughs and for real progress on our own journey. All mystical experience requires consciousness as medium and as perceived reality of the Ultimate. The Divine modifies our consciousness so that we can be aware of it. Without consciousness there would be no mysticism.

On the mystical level there is an option between an intimate, personal, loving God, with whom we can enter into a profound relationship of love and knowledge in the embrace of divine union initiated by God, or the transpersonal, impersonal realization of the ultimate condition of mind or consciousness, of the Buddhist tradition. Both these trajectories of mystical perception are available to us. Perhaps it is necessary for us to experience both of these ways, and that is what interspirituality challenges us to do. By so doing, we share in a much larger understanding of the Absolute, knowing both the personal

Divine and the transpersonal Source.

The practical dimension of interspirituality reveals to us the common ground among the traditions in those elements that are part of the mature expression of each tradition of spirituality in the lives of practitioners. If you take an example of an individual in each tradition of spirituality who has achieved a degree of genuine depth and transformation, the elements in each instance will be the same. These include an actualized capacity to live a moral life, a deep commitment to nonviolence, a simplicity of lifestyle, a sense of one's interconnectedness with all living beings and with the earth itself, a spiritual practice like prayer, meditation, contemplation, along with liturgical participation, self-knowledge, compassionate service, and a commitment to justice, or to prophetic witness and action. Even a cursory glance around the traditions will demonstrate this.

**Theological Implications of Mysticism**

If the mystical experience of other traditions is genuine, and if it is on the same level as Christian contemplation in its fullness of transforming union (the spiritual marriage between God and the soul), one implication is that Christianity does not have a monopoly on wisdom as it relates to the nature of the Divine. Christian theological formulations do not exhaust the infinite reality and subtlety of the divine nature. This means that we can learn from the inner experience of other forms of spirituality. As Christianity's understanding of God is not complete, neither is the experience and understanding of the other traditions complete without the Christian contribution. Complementarity is thus the direction toward which the mystical leads us. In this way, humankind can cross the boundaries and reach the further shore of our eternal homeland.

**Notes:**

1. Thomas Keating, an American Trappist, founded the Snowmass Conference, an interfaith group with fifteen members. Each member represents a world religion, and is a spiritual teacher in it. Over the years, the Snowmass Conference has discovered points of agreement, and these have been formulated in a document called *Guidelines for Interreligious Understanding*; they relate primarily to the Ultimate Mystery. See *Speaking of Silence: Christians and Buddhists on the Contemplative Way*, ed. Susan Walker (New York, Paulist Press, 1987, pp. 126-129).
2. The Tibetan tradition calls this *Dzogchen*, the perfected condition of the mind.
3. See my article, "The Interspiritual Age: Practical Mysticism for the Third Millennium," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 34, 1, Winter 1997.
4. The Dalai Lama has often remarked that interreligious dialogue must be based on friendship between those who engage in this work.
5. See *The Community of Religions: Voices and Images of the Parliament of the World's Religions*, ed. George Cairns and Wayne Teasdale, New York, Continuum, 1996.

**THE BEDE GRIFFITHS SANGHA  
(ENGLAND) Adrian Rance**

*The Bede Griffiths Sangha* describes itself as a loose community of men and women whose lives have been inspired by the life and work of Father Bede.

During the summer of 1994, Ria Weyens, then at the Christian Meditation Centre in London, gathered together about 15 people for a weekend retreat at the Rowan Tree Centre, a delightful retreat house in Wales. Ria's idea was to see whether there was enough interest to establish a Sangha (Sanskrit for community) dedicated to the vision of Father Bede.

So it was that this small group came together for mutual contact and support and to integrate this experience into their lives. The weekend was spent mostly in silence with meditation, chanting bhajans and structuring the day around the rhythm of life at Shantivanam. Out of this sharing came the vision of the Shantivanam Sangham as a broad contemplative community, seeking to live the experience of Shantivanam and Father Bede's wisdom and compassion, and to support the renewal of contemplative inter-faith life in the United Kingdom.

Out of the discussions came the idea that there should be regular meetings and that the energy of the Sangha would be sustained by regular contact. We realised from the beginning that we were to be a group dedicated to coming together on retreat rather than a group dedicated to publication, debate and scholarship - although we do not turn our back on these very important activities. We had in mind weekend and week retreats and a programme of one day gatherings which would be developed by members of the Sangha in their own localities.

Father Bede not only brought the gift of the Indian spiritual insights and traditions to enrich and deepen the Western Christian tradition. He also had a vision of the renewal of contemplative life in which he saw the prayer of Shantivanam with its Sanskrit chanting in the Indian tradition, and its custom of reading from the different scriptures of the world, as a model. The Sangha sees itself as one way in which the contemplative life can be fostered - a network, sustained by regular contact and occasional coming together in silence and meditation.

In 1996 the Sangham renamed itself *The Bede Griffiths Sangha*. The Sangha is not dedicated to the preservation of one man's name, but it is dedicated to taking forward Father Bede's vision of contemplative renewal based on finding the one reality beyond all duality. However, it was felt that his name, rather than the name of his ashram, would make it easier to draw people into the community. Many people have been attracted to the Sangha through their personal encounter with Father Bede or Shantivanam, but we are aware that as time goes on

there are more people attracted to the Sangha through Father Bede's books, and for whom his name is more

familiar than that of Shantivanam.

The Sangha now has about 300 people on its mailing list. Our pattern over the past three years has been to have two weekend retreats and one week long retreat, supplemented by occasional meetings and one day retreats in London or other centres around the country. The summer retreat is held at Park Place Pastoral Centre in Hampshire, where the Indian order of sisters is delighted at the celebration of their Indian spirituality to enrich their vocation as Christian nuns. Our winter retreat has tended to be an Advent retreat and has been held at St. Peter's Grange, Prinknash Abbey. St. Peter's Grange is the original abbey building where Father Bede started his monastic career. The support of the Abbot and community of Prinknash in our endeavours is much valued. For the week retreat the Sangha returns to the Rowan Tree Centre, our spiritual birth place.

When the Sangha comes together, we follow a pattern based on the day at Shantivanam: meditation three times a day followed by prayers in the shrine room in the morning, midday and evening. Greeting the sun in the morning with the Gayatri Mantra and closing the day with namajapa, chanting *Jesu, Jesu, Jay Jay Namon*. In a mysterious way, the silence of meditation, the singing of Sanskrit chants and bhajans and the readings from different scriptural traditions bring one in immediate contact with the spirit from which the Sangha flows and grows.

The mornings are dedicated to a period of work (karma yoga), food preparation, and to an activity such as yoga. Following Father Bede's habit of teaching in the afternoon, a period is dedicated to teachings, often from a Father Bede tape, which can then be the subject of some contemplative sharing. As at Shantivanam, the evening prayers are followed by an evening meal and then, at 9:00, the chanting of namajapa.

Of course the pattern varies, but an idea of how it feels to be on retreat with the Sangha can be had from this extract of a letter written by Mary Lewis, who is the inspiration behind the Rowan Tree Centre.

The timetable based on Shantivanam contained very little teaching. It really was a monastic timetable, giving priority to meditation and devotion and silence. The day started with greeting the sun, then 30 minutes' meditation, then 30 minutes' walking meditation, then morning prayer. By the end of this I felt bathed in prayer...I think the retreat achieved a wonderful balance between silence and celebration, between community and time apart, and because of this it worked and actually offered to people, perhaps, the things they most long to find - a group of seekers who genuinely want to worship God but in a new, yet ancient way.

The Sangha now publishes a newsletter that contains articles of news and views and carries information about upcoming events.

If you would like further information or would like to

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## WHAT IS MAN THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM?

I would like to share with you some thoughts on the theme, "What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" (Ps 8:4) This is the week of prayer for Christian Unity (*the occasion for this talk, at the monastery of San Gregorio al Celio in Rome*). You know well that ecumenism is limited to the Christian churches. For us in India, the problem is not so much ecumenism but interreligious dialogue, particularly between Hinduism and Christianity. My reflection will be as a Christian and as an Indian. How does a person who has grown in the vision of man according to the Christian tradition confront the vision of man according to the Indian tradition, see the experience of Jesus in the light of that confrontation, and review the experience of the Indian tradition?

The biblical tradition teaches us that "God created humanity in his own image and likeness." (Gen 1:27) Psalm 8 says, "What is man that you should be mindful of him, and the son of man that you should care for him? Yet you have made him little less than God and have crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet." (Ps 8:4-8) This was applied to Jesus: "But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." (Heb 2:6-9)

There are two important things that the spiritual tradition of India has taught me: one is an infinite liberty in the search for truth. The second is that this search must begin with the question, 'Who am I?', and that we must not be satisfied by the answers given by the others. The spiritual tradition of India does not put the question, 'Who is God?' or 'Where is God?' or 'Does God exist?' but puts the question, 'Who am I?' This is the question of my true reality or true self. We can say that the predominant (though not

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exclusive) tendency of the Indian spiritual tradition is this search of a human being for its truth. The sages retired into the forest to know their true self. This search of a human person for his or her self came to an end in the spiritual experience of the Upanishads. The Upanishads are called 'Vedanta'. *Veda* means knowledge, *anta* means the end. So Vedanta means the end of knowledge. The Upanishadic experience gives us the ultimate experience of man's search for the truth. This discovery was a spiritual revolution.

This experience is very simple. I would like to quote from the Mandukya, shortest of the Upanishads.

The syllable OM is the whole Universe. This is the explanation: the past, the present and the future, all is this syllable OM. And also that which is beyond time is the syllable OM. Everything is Brahman; Atman is Brahman. This Atman has four levels of consciousness. The first level of consciousness is called waking consciousness; the second level is called dreaming consciousness; the third level is called deep sleep consciousness; and the fourth state is called the state of Atman which is invisible, unreachable, imperceptible, unnamable, undefinable, unthinkable, indescribable. It is serenity and benevolence and absolutely non-dual; this is Atman, this must be known.

The language of the Upanishads is symbolic language, poetic language. One has to decode the symbolic language in order to find the message. Jesus used the symbolic language of parables. Symbolic language is not a definition but a description. A definition is like a tomb or a cage. To define the truth is to kill the truth and put into a tomb like a dead body. But a description is like a nest which has no door, which protects one from the immensity of the sky but at the same time always points to the sky as one's destiny - rather than to remain in the nest until one's death.

The syllable OM is God, who has two aspects: the immanent aspect, the manifestation which is the whole creation, and the transcendent aspect which is beyond time and space. The relation between the Transcendent and the Immanent is not explained, as in our Judaeo-Christian tradition, by saying that God created the universe from nothing and created humanity in his own image and likeness.

This latter theory appears to be a solution to the origin of creation and the relationship between God and creation; it is not liberating, however, but oppressive. It creates a gulf between God and humanity so that humanity and creatures always remain outside God without the possibility of uniting with God in a non-dualistic experience. Human beings can come only to the level of having a beatific vision of God, or union with God, in such a way that God is in the person and the person is in God but always remains outside God. The theory of creation only shows the mysterious act of God in relation to the creation and the incapacity of the human mind to understand this act of God.

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**What is Man?** (Continued from page 6)

This syllable OM is identified with *Brahman*. Brahman is God who is the foundation of the universe and also the universe as its manifestation. Brahman is also identified with *Atman*. Atman is the foundation of human consciousness at the microcosmic level just as Brahman is the foundation of the universe at the macrocosmic level. But ultimately Brahman is Atman and Atman is Brahman. They are one and the same. Thus the three words: OM, the eternal word, Brahman, the foundation of the universe, and Atman, the foundation of human consciousness, are identical.

When an Indian Christian reads this Upanishad he or she immediately remembers the Prologue of St. John, "In the beginning was the Word (OM?) and the Word was with God..." To be with God means to be outside God, to be separate from God. It is a state of differentiation, of duality. "And the Word was God", identical with God. The Word is identical with God and at the same time different from God. The nature of Reality is nonduality and duality. Nonduality belongs to the ontological state of Reality while duality belongs to the functional or manifested state of Reality. This is the mystery of the relationship between God and creation: identical and different.

For our question, "Who is man?", the upanishadic tradition put the question in this way: Which is my real 'I' where I can repose, where I can be at rest? The answer is clear and direct. My real 'I' is God, Brahman, Atman or OM. This experience is communicated with the famous declaration, "I am Brahman," "I am God." To us Christians this expression appears to be a proud and presumptuous one. For the Upanishadic sage, however, this is a statement of great humility, in which a person dies within himself to all that is not God so that finally God only remains. To affirm one's existence is to create a reality outside God, and thus to create a duality. One recalls the words of Jesus, "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life (for my sake) will find it." (Mt 10:39) In order to find our true self who is God, we have to renounce our unreal self.

But to realize one's true self, one must pass through various levels of experience. This Upanishad speaks of four levels. The first level is the waking consciousness in which a person identifies with his or her body and lives in satisfying the physical desires and personal desires and the personal projects related to the external world. The second level, dreaming consciousness, is not the physical dreaming that occurs during sleep, but dreams as ideas, as an ideal to which the person dedicates his life. This ideal can be a material ideal, a political ideal, a scientific ideal, a philosophical or theological or religious ideal, or it may be a person. This state is called 'luminous' because within it one is attracted by an ideal or a charismatic person.

All of us have some ideals or models for our life. But from where did one choose these ideals or dreams? Naturally from the past, from the memory. We adopt an

ideal which someone has left in the past, someone who has inspired people in the past. Thus in the waking consciousness one is conditioned by the personal memory and personal ideals, and in the dreaming consciousness one is conditioned by the collective memory.

The third level of consciousness is called deep sleep consciousness. Again this is not physical sleep but psychological and spiritual. Here a person, realizing that his life is conditioned by the personal and collective memory, that he is not living his own life but trying to reproduce the memory that someone has left in the past, stops this movement of dreams. In this deep sleep consciousness one is without dreams, without ideal, without visions, without any movement of the memory, only a profound silence. On this level the human consciousness become a pure mirror where Brahman or Atman or OM, the eternal Word, reflects with all its splendor. In this experience the human consciousness discovers its true foundation which is Brahman or Atman, and declares joyously that "I am Brahman, I am Atman, I am OM" or "My real 'I' is Brahman, Atman or OM." This realization is described as *Samdhya* which means 'dawn', where the darkness disappears and the sun rises. This is the movement of illumination, where the God of the past, the God of memory, is renounced and the God of eternity is encountered face to face for the first time in one's life.

With the background of this Indian experience, when I read the experience of Jesus, I found a very profound and liberating message. In the life of Jesus, as a human being, we can see various important moments. We can say that there are four important moments in his life. The first is his conception in the womb of his physical mother, where Jesus receives his physical body. This physical mother conceives and gives birth. The second moment of Jesus is his conception by his spiritual mother, which is his Hebrew spiritual tradition. This mother nourishes Jesus with her experience of the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, the God of Moses and the God of David. In this way Jesus is not only a man but also a Hebrew, a Jew.

The predominant tendency of Hebrew tradition is the search of God for human beings. The Hebrew tradition did not search for God. It was God who called them and created them as his people. The predominant tendency of the Upanishadic tradition is the search of humanity for God. In the Upanishads God does not speak as he does in the Old Testament.

*(to be concluded)*

**AN INDIAN CHRISTOLOGY:  
THE SHANTIVANAM SCHOOL  
(PART III) Chacko Valiaveetil, S.J.**

**B. The Psychological-Mystical Dimension**

To understand this dimension it will help us to see Bede's anthropological scheme, how he understands the human being. Traditionally we speak of humans as constituted of body and soul. Bede, however, prefers a tripartite relationship based on 1 Thes 5:23, where St. Paul speaks of the human person as constituted of body (soma), soul (psyche) and spirit (pneuma). In body and soul we are all different and distinct, but on the level of the spirit we are one, sharing in the one Spirit of God.

By the incarnation, God assumes our fallen nature to redeem it from sin and restore it to unity in the divine life. In Jesus, both the divine and the human meet. Bede explains:

The Christian doctrine is expressed by saying that in Christ the divine and the human nature were united in one person. In his Person, that is in his Self, the ultimate ground of his being, he was God. He knew himself as the Word of God, the expression of the mind of the Father. But at the same time he was conscious of himself as man, having a human soul and a human body, sharing the limitations of human nature.<sup>21</sup>

Jesus expresses his awareness of his intimate relationship with the Father saying "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10:30). This is sometimes interpreted as an experience of pure identity. But what Jesus experiences here is not a pure identity, but an identity in relationship. Bede elaborates:

He (Jesus) does not say, I am the Father - that he could never say - but 'I and the Father are one.' It is a unity in duality by which he can say, 'I am in the Father and the Father in me' (Jn 14:10), which is yet based on an identity of being, by which he can say, 'He who sees me sees the Father' (Jn 14:9). It is an experience of the Absolute in personal relationship, and that would seem to be the distinctive character of the Christian experience of God.<sup>22</sup>

Jesus not only reveals himself as the Son of God; he communicates this experience of sonship to his disciples - "to as many as believed in him, he gave the power to become sons of God" (Jn 1:12). How does our sonship differ from that of Jesus? Bede considers this issue from the perspective of Christ's openness to God which he understands as his "capacity to receive the Spirit from God."<sup>23</sup>

All of us have this capacity but in us it is limited by a finite personality and the tendency to sin. In Jesus there was no such limitation on the level of the Spirit. 'In him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily' (Col 2:9).

He was totally open to the Spirit in the centre of his being →

Because of this the Spirit led him into a perfect knowledge of his identity and relationship with the Father. Bede explains:

...in Jesus that capacity to receive the Spirit of God was without limit; he received the fullness of the gift of the Spirit. In this experience of the Spirit he was able to know himself as the Son of God, as sharing in the divine nature, as expressing the very Word of God...In this knowledge of himself as Son, he was able to know the Father, not in part but in fullness. He knew himself as the "only Son," the One who alone knows and expresses in fullness the mind of the Father. It is in this sense that we can speak of Jesus as God.<sup>24</sup>

In his Christology Bede prefers to reserve the term God for the transcendent Godhead, the Father. Christ is the Son of God. He is concrete and present to his disciples. In him we see God as far as God can be seen. In his human nature we see man as he has achieved perfection in God, or what man is meant to be. Bede describes Christ in these terms:

Jesus is the manifestation, the self-revelation of this incomprehensible mystery, the man who makes known what the ineffable God is like. He 'reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature' (Heb 1:3). He is the Word of God, who expresses in human terms what God is...He is not 'simply' God; he is *God in Man* and *Man in God*.<sup>25</sup>

**C. The Cosmic Dimension**

This concerns the ultimate destiny of the human being and of the whole creation. This dimension of Christology is intimately related to the Cosmic Covenant as its culmination and is corroborated by the insights from modern sciences, especially the new physics.

The Cosmic Covenant is God's covenant with human beings from the dawn of history. Bede sees the world as the 'becoming' of God. God who is infinite and unchanging expresses himself in the finite, changing world through the Word in the Spirit. The 'archetypes' of all created beings exist eternally in the Word, Cosmic Person, Purusha. "The Spirit immanent in nature from the beginning receives these 'seeds of the Word' into her womb and brings them forth in creation."<sup>26</sup> In the evolutionary process we have the upward movement of nature from matter through life and consciousness to eternal life in the Spirit. With the awakening of consciousness in man, nature becomes conscious of her destiny. Here Bede sees the Church in her cosmic, universal aspect.

The Church is Man become conscious of his destiny as a son of God...Wherever man wakes to consciousness and knows himself in his basic intuitive consciousness as open to the transcendent mystery of existence, the power of the Spirit is in him, drawing him to eternal life. The presence of the Spirit in this sense can be traced in all religions of mankind.<sup>27</sup>

(Continued on page 9)

***The Shantivanam School*** (Continued from page 8)

In the biblical perspective the Cosmic Covenant is symbolized in the life in Paradise where the first human being, Adam (*Adam* in Hebrew simply means man) is in harmony with himself, with nature and with God. Original sin is the loss of this harmony by man's turning away from God to the ego. We experience this loss of harmony in our conflict within ourselves, conflict with one another in wars and crimes and conflict with nature clearly manifested in the problems of ecology. The biblical revelation looks forward to the restoration of the lost harmony in a new creation in Christ, the Second Adam.

Bede's cosmic Christology depends in large measure on the insights of the *new physics* which sees nature as a "complicated web of relations between the various parts of a unified whole."<sup>28</sup> Every event in time and history has an effect on the whole universe, since all the parts are interdependent. Some of the events in the evolutionary history of the world, like the origin of life and the dawn of consciousness in the human being, were seminal events affecting the history of the cosmos. The Incarnation, God assuming human nature, was an event of this magnitude. The Incarnation and the death and resurrection of Christ have their effects on the material world and on the historical process for all time. Bede explains:

Jesus therefore was a man, in whom body and soul were pure instruments of the indwelling Spirit. In him the destiny of man has been fulfilled. But this inevitably has an effect on the whole cosmos. The universe is a psychosomatic unity, a space-time continuum in which each part depends on every other part as an integrated whole. Whereas in this universe, as we know it, there is conflict at every level and body and soul are in conflict with one another, in Jesus, this conflict has been overcome, body and soul have been restored to unity with the Spirit, and a power of unification has been released in the world. In this sense we can say that the death of Jesus, the free surrender of his life on the cross to his Father, was a cosmic event.<sup>29</sup>

The whole creation is an organic unity. At the resurrection Jesus becomes the 'head' of this cosmic whole. Redeemed from the forces of sin and division, creation becomes his Body which constitutes the Church. The Church is the Pleroma, the fullness to which the whole evolutionary process is moving. The whole creation, as St. Paul says, is "groaning in travail" (Rom 8:19). Humans have a pivotal role to play in bringing about this final consummation. The Spirit is at work from the beginning among all people. Hence the people of all cultures and all religions, including the primitive and tribal religions, have their contribution to make towards our growth into this Pleroma of Christ.

**Conclusion**

The Indian Christology developed by the Shantivanam School is rooted in the deepest God-experience of the Hindu and Christian traditions. Both experiences are *advaitic*, but the Trinitarian experience is deeper as it is a communion in love. It also accounts for the reality of the world as it is: not a simple unity, but a unity in distinction; the Son/Word being the principle of distinction.

We know Jesus Christ as a real human being who lived at a particular time and place in history. His intimate experience of communion with the Father reveals his unique relationship as 'the only Son' of the Father. His body and soul were completely surrendered to the indwelling Spirit. In him we see man as he has achieved perfection in God, or what man is meant to be.

Bede's cosmic Christology has resonance with the findings of the *new physics* which sees the whole universe as an organic unity, a web of interdependent relationship. It also has similarity with the insights of mystics and scientist-theologians like Sri Aurobindo and Fr. Teilhard de Chardin. The evolutionary process is progressing toward its culmination in Christ, which Aurobindo calls *gnostic being* or *superman* and Teilhard calls the *Omega point*.

Jesus is the *jivanmukta* who is so intimately in communion with the Father that he can say "I and the Father are one." By his free surrender of his life on the cross he becomes the head of the whole creation which is his Body. Thus he liberates creation from bondage to sin and death and enables all humans to become children of God.

**Notes:**

21. Bede Griffiths, *Vedanta and Christian Faith*, p.54.
22. *ibid*, p.55.
23. "In what sense is Jesus called God?", an unpublished article, p. 13 as quoted in Teasdale, *Toward a Christian Vedanta*, p.141
24. *ibidem*.
25. *ibid*, p. 140.
26. Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, p.193.
27. *ibid*, pp. 193-4. For this cosmic, universal aspect of the Church, Fr. Bede refers to an early Christian document, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, where the Church appears as an old woman. When it was asked why she appears as an old woman, the answer given is: "Because she was created first of all. On this account is she old, and for her sake was the world made." (Shepherd of Hermas, 2:24, as quoted in *The Marriage of East and West*, p.8.)
28. Fritjof Capra, *The New Vision of Reality: A Synthesis of Eastern Wisdom and Western Science* (Bharatiya Vidya Ghavan, Bombay, 1983), p.8.
29. Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, pp.187-8.

## RECENT BEDE GRIFFITHS EVENTS

- **Chicago: Friends of Bede Griffiths offer Program**  
On Sunday, June 14, The *Friends of Bede Griffiths* held a special event honoring Father Bede at the Chicago Cenacle. We had a program in three parts that involved worship and a multi-media character. Brother Wayne Teasdale spoke on some of the implications of Bede's thought for the coming century. Russill and Asha Paul gave a concert of their music to a very enthusiastic reception. We finished our celebration with a vespers service patterned after the rite of Shantivanam, led by Brother Wayne, with accompaniment from Russill and Asha. There was a good group in attendance drawn from different parts of the city. Earlier, a small group of us held a retreat for a couple of days with Wayne and Russill and Asha at a member's house, graciously given over to us for the weekend.

*Friends of Bede Griffiths* will be planning further events for the coming year. We are looking particularly at ways in which we might address the spiritual challenges of the coming century with the insights of Father Bede, and encouraging a global community to develop where the personal and the social, the spiritual and the economic are equally valued. Please contact us

either at: *Friends of Bede Griffiths*, c/o Mr. Nicholas Groves, 604 Judson Ave., Evanston, IL 60202, or at our new web page: <http://home.earthlink.net/bedegriffiths>.

- **Big Sur: The 5th Annual Bede Griffiths Memorial Retreat**, Nov 13-15, included three conferences, as well as videos on Bede Griffiths (*A Human Search*) and Abhishiktananda. Bro. Mark Mahoney introduced the Retreat, Fr. Robert Hale talked on "Bede and the Marriage of East and West," and Fr. Bruno Barnhart spoke on "Christianity in the Light of the East" and "The Path of Wisdom: Bede's Personal Discoveries," based on Shirley Du Boulay's new biography of Bede.
- **Victoria, Australia: A celebration of Bede's Birthday** in December, led by Fr. Michael Mifsud and Fr. Roger McGinley, was entitled *Bede Griffiths, Prophet for the 21st Century*. Eucharist was followed by a talk, "Shantivanam and Bede: Past, Present and Future." Participants meditated together, sang some Shantivanam chants and shared a meal. Further discussion followed a viewing of the Bede film, *Discovering the Feminine*.

Father Michael led other BG days during his October retreat-mission in Queensland, where he reports there is much interest in Bede, in his writings and in the way of life that he led.

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## The Golden String

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