

The Golden String

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BEDE GRIFFITHS AND THOMAS MERTON

Robert Hale

Bede Griffiths and Thomas Merton were two of the most significant spiritual voices of the last century. They were contemporaries, and met and knew each other's work. It is interesting to ponder Merton's brief description of their meeting at Gethsemani in a journal entry of August 26, 1963:

Dom Bede Griffiths was here—very good, ascetic, thin, quiet man. His ashram [Kurisumala in Kerala, India] sounds very genuine and very good. The Syro-Malabar rite (he said a Mass in Chapter for the Brothers) seemed to me to be a magnificent liturgy. What must the real Mass be, with all the responses and bells! The texts were superb. Most serious and eschatological¹.

That is it; nothing about a private dialogue, nothing about a commitment to mutual support or friendship or even to correspond as a consequence of the meeting. Only the indication that Bede had spoken about Kurisumala Ashram, and had celebrated the Eucharist, with Merton's positive appreciations of both. In terms of age there wasn't that great of a difference: Merton was 48, Griffiths was 57. But in terms of published works and fame, Merton was already renowned, with such Works as *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1948), *Seeds of Contemplation* (1949), *Ascent to Truth* (1951), *The Sign of Jonas* (1953), *Bread in the Wilderness* (1953), *No Man is An Island* (1955), *Disputed Questions* (1960), and *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1962) already in print. Bede, on the other hand, had only published *The Golden String* (1954). But Bede was actually *living* something that Merton very much admired. From this we can sketch some of the more obvious similarities and differences between the two.

Regarding similarities, both were evidently men of deep interiority, both were on a contemplative search, and this to the last day of their lives. Both were English speaking, both had had a kind of Anglican background, gone through a non-Christian period, with a love of poetry and literature. Bede had a splendid Oxford education, Merton a tumultuous period at Cambridge, to finish his studies at Columbia. Both, with a real struggle, had become Catholic—Bede in 1931, Merton in 1938. Both, rather early on after their conversion, had become monks in the

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THE DIVINE AS MATRIX OF DEPENDENT ARISING

Wayne Teasdale

Arnold Toynbee once observed that the most important event of our period of history was the meeting of Christianity and Buddhism. In this observation, Toynbee asserted more than he fully grasped. Undoubtedly he had in mind the unique opportunities for mutual understanding of two completely different traditions that such an encounter would make possible. But there is much more, I believe, and of this *much more*, Toynbee had no idea at all. In my recent book, *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions*, I discussed briefly this encounter of these two venerable traditions. What I pointed out in this context is that the relationship of Buddhism and Christianity in a deep, rich, and meaningful conversation over a long period of time will produce a radically new understanding of reality, life, and Ultimate Reality, though in the *Mystic Heart* I stopped short of characterizing the nature of this new vision. I saw it as having a process quality to it as can be seen in the works of Alfred North Whitehead, particularly his brilliant *Process and Reality*

Even though I leaned heavily in this direction, I was hesitant to speculate on the nature of the new view of reality, or what can be regarded as a synthesis, a discovery of a higher common ground between the Christian faith and the Buddhist dharma. While *The Mystic Heart* was at press, I was in Dharamsala for the Synthesis Dialogues, or as they came to be called, the Dharamsala Dialogues, a five day

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Griffiths and Merton (Continued from page 1)

Benedictine tradition. . Both were fine writers, and attracted particular attention with their autobiographies written soon after entering the monastery, Merton's published in 1948, Bede's in 1954. Both, within the monastery, became particularly interested in the inter-religious dialogue. The encounter with the East radically impacted their contemplative spiritualities, and came to inform their Christian experience and their writings ever more, and from an ever greater depth.

Both sought to encourage a more widespread appreciation of the universal call to contemplation, and wrote powerfully about the contemplative experience. Both also had a keen social sensitivity from their younger years, and became more and more "prophetic" in attacking a hedonistic, consumeristic, distracted world. This "prophetic outreach" flowed from a profoundly centered and contemplative spirituality in the case of both. Indeed, each came to enjoy a whole range of interests—art, music, literature, poetry, but from a deeply centered prayer. Both found the theme of the feminine ever more powerful. Both discovered, in their later years, their humanity and strong affective needs, and these discoveries had a very disruptive, but also enriching impact on them.

Both explored very similar spiritual themes in all of this, such as that of radical conversion. Thus in Merton's conferences to the novices at Gethsemani during the 60's, he quotes Griffiths regarding the need of an authentic turning from alienation to authentic closeness to God². And the theme of true Self/false self was a favorite of each. This passage from Bede could just as well have been written by Merton:

The whole question is, what is the true Self? What is the true Center of man's being? Is it the ego, making itself independent, seeking to be master of the world, or is there an 'I' beyond this, a deeper Center of being which is grounded in the Truth, which is one with the universal Self³.

Both Merton and Griffiths explicitly tie this true Self/false self dialectic into the *Genesis* story of the garden of Paradise (the true Self in contemplative intimacy with God), then the fall (into the false self), and now the laborious journey of redemption (back to the true Self).

Again, the following by Bede could, with a slightly less Indian color, easily be vintage Merton:

The Fall of Man is the fall from this Ground, this Center of freedom and immortality, into subjection to the senses and this material world, and Reason is the serpent...How then to recover from the Fall, how to return to the Centre? This is the problem of the modern world⁴.

Where are we journeying back to? "A Centre...a point where heaven and earth converge, where human life is open to the infinite Transcendence."⁵

Bede's words here sketch in prose what Merton powerfully illumines in poetry, in his famous "point vierge" passage:

At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God...⁶

These, then, are just a few parallels between the two great spiritual teachers. And some differences? Well, the obvious ones: Bede was always the English, Oxford gentleman. Merton was a lively, American guy who in later years was able to admit that he really enjoyed beer and football. Bede entered the English Benedictines, ended up in a small ashram in India and in 1980 became Camaldolese. Merton entered a huge American Trappist abbey, and though he wanted to become Camaldolese in the early '50s, in fact remained a Trappist and is buried at the abbey he entered, Gethsemani.

If both were ever more interested in the East, Merton's focus was particularly with Zen, Bede's with Hinduism. Merton wrote about the East and finally was able to visit it, Bede moved to the East and lived there, as a sannyasi for the last decades of his life. Bede became more interested in the "new physics" and more appalled by the institutional church as the years passed. Merton was more fascinated by contemporary poets and writers, and more troubled by the power structures in his immediate institution, his abbey. Bede was a superior, Merton not. Bede had an aura of loving holiness; Merton was appreciated for his gruff humanity.

If both were ever more attracted to the feminine dimension, Bede's experience was mystical and his image that of the Mother. Merton's was quite more human, and almost in fact became, with his relationship with the nurse, spousal. Bede lived to a golden age (86) and died in bed, surrounded by his loving disciples. Merton's life was tragically cut off by a bizarre accident when he was alone, far from his abbey, and only 53.

Given their more lively prophetic writings and activities, neither will be beatified in our lifetimes. Both continue to be deeply appreciated by very many around the world, as they appreciated and revered each other.

Notes

1. Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage* (S.F.: Harper San Francisco, 1977), p. 13.

2. Thomas Merton, "The Merton Tapes" (Kansas City: Credence Cassettes, 1988), AA2229, Side A.

3. Bede Griffiths, *Return to the Center* (Springfield: Templegate, 1976), p. 16.

4. For a good exploration of Merton's extensive elaboration of this theme, see James Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere: A Search for God through Awareness of The True Self* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1978).

5. Griffiths, op. cit.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

7. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (N.Y.: Image, 1968), 158. ■

Dependent Arising (Continued from page 1)

conference with the Dalai Lama and thirty-five synthesizers from around the world, and representing all the major disciplines of knowledge: quantum physics, mathematics, astronomy, evolutionary biology, ecology, economics, law and government, sociology, spirituality, theology, as well as social activists. It was during this time that the present insight occurred to me, and I shared it with the group in attendance. Here is how it goes.

Dependent Arising as the Essential Principle of Buddhist Metaphysics

The Buddhist view of reality, life, being and the human—the *right view* of their Eight-Fold Path—conceives everything in terms of a net of interdependent relationships of sentient beings, each being conditioning every other being. It must also be said that the Buddhist analysis of human existence, indeed of all existents in this world of becoming, finitude, or impermanence, is an analysis that has its focus on conditioned existence, or this existence here and now in its facticity, a facticity and existential quality of impermanent being. This conditioned being, the reality of our daily life in this world of constant change, is an impermanent realm, a transitory state of existence on its way—inevitably so—to the Unconditioned Reality, the infinite and eternal being of Nirvana.

The fundamental interconnectedness of all sentient beings—not just us human beings—means that reality is not at all about individual being and happiness, as we see in the American cultural fixation, but about the happiness of all sentient beings, the overarching cosmic and mystical community to which we all belong absolutely. Human happiness is really only possible, in Buddhist understanding, if it involves the happiness of everyone else.

In Him We Live, and Move and Have Our Being: The Christian Version of “Dependent Arising”

This view is very similar to the Christian understanding articulated in the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ in which the source of intrconnectedness is the eternal being of the Logos, or the incarnate reality of Divine Love as a Person. He is the “Vine”, and we “are the branches”, in the words of John’s Gospel and as attributed to Jesus himself.

The metaphor of the Vine and branches, or shall we say, archetype, requires and expresses a unitive understanding, a whole system of inner connection among all of us in Jesus, in the Godhead, and in the Trinity. All relations in this view are internal, much as in the Buddhist approach. There is no outside to this reality of connectivity, for the connection is Spirit itself, and Spirit is consciousness, infinite awareness as the Source itself. In Spirit the Divine indwells in us, and more importantly, we indwell in it. But this indwelling existence is a very intimate kind of dependence, a radical, totally encompassing state of being. Our existence and life

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are only possible in this radical sense. There is no real autonomy except insofar as the will is concerned, since it is undetermined, or free.

“In Him we live, and move, and have our being”, as we read in Acts, is a statement of radical, metaphysical dependence. It is an insight of the same order as the Buddhist view, but more properly grounded in the horizon of its origin and Source. It suggests a horizon of boundary and containment, and yet not in the sense of limitation. Rather, it is the containing function of the Ultimate that frees us to be who and what we are in this world, and in eternity. Insofar as the Divine Mystery contains us, it also defines us, and defines us in terms of itself, for we are made in its incomparable and ineffable image and likeness, again, in that of consciousness or Spirit. This Spirit is not a cold, analytical intelligence. It possesses unlimited intelligence, but it is at the service of infinite Love and Compassion, totally undetermined.

The Divine Reality, Spirit as the Matrix of Dependent Arising

A matrix both contains and provides space for the development of that which it contains. It is a mothering, or paternal principle, but this principle is an infinitely aware Person, or Persons. The Divine Awareness as Spirit is the Matrix, and the Matrix is the principle of connectivity in the interconnectedness of all sentient beings. The interdependence of all sentient beings is happening “somewhere”. It is not in nothingness, or a complete negation of being. There is no such thing as nothingness. The term “nothingness” is precisely no-thing-ness, or the non-manifestation of being. To say nothing thus ultimately means non-manifest, not non-being. The Divine Matrix provides the “glue” of inner connection that draws all things into itself, and allows them to be interrelated in it, and to each other. The “glue” of this interdependence is love, or compassion. It is also kindness, or in the Catholic tradition, charity.

To say that the Divine Presence and Reality is the Matrix of dependent arising, or interdependence is really to suggest a synthesis between the Christian and Buddhist traditions. Synthesis, however represents common ground between two views. It is the discovery of a higher, or more subtle insight into their relationship. The synthesis presented here is offered as a way to envision a creative holding of the two together in such a manner that the truth of both is preserved in the more adequate explanation, an explanation that honors the genius of both, while propelling our understanding forward. That is the nature of reality, history, human understanding, Spirit, and knowledge. The Christian/Buddhist dialogue is finally in service to human knowledge and self-understanding. In this way we move into a future committed to dialogue and finding deeper levels of community. ■

***Journey to Find the Other Half of the Soul:
A MILLENNIAL PILGRIMAGE IN
SOUTH INDIA Russill Paul***

On a cool and mildly damp tarmac, in the wee hours of the morning, our plane landed at Madras International Airport, a rather grandiose caption for the unassuming, two-gate affair that greeted us. Despite warnings about terrorism from the Federal Government and all the hype on aviation disasters likely from Y2K non-compliant computers, eighteen brave souls took off from Los Angeles. We were not tourists off on a millennium bash. We were pilgrims in search of the other half of our souls and willing to journey half way around the world. Perhaps this made all the difference.

The soul, for those of us who believe in it, is undeniably the most intimate part of our being. Why then should we need to travel 15,000 miles to find one half of it? The answer lies in the clearly apparent dichotomy between body and soul prevalent in the infrastructures of our business and administrative systems, and blatantly advertised in all forms of media. Workshops and seminars with this title draw large numbers today. It is obvious that the social, economic, and technological structures of modern life do not support wholeness, and it may not be surprising if soon we need to travel to the moon and back to recover harmony, depth and balance in our lives.

What is it about life in the West that places so much pressure upon us? "It is the insanity of psychological time," claims brilliant spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle in his book, *The Power of Now*. He explains, "In the normal, mind-identified or unenlightened state of consciousness, the power and infinite creative potential that lie concealed in the 'Now' are completely obscured by psychological time. Your life then loses its vibrancy, its freshness, its sense of wonder."

There are of course a number of powerful and sophisticated opportunities available in the West through food and entertainment that can conjure up a temporary sense of fulfillment for this lack of vibrancy. The mind is easily deluded into believing that it has found effective ways of dealing with its own inadequacy and can complacently maintain its illusion of separateness. Yet, we are all aware of the complete lack of depth or of a lasting state of fulfillment that comes from entertainment today. Most of all, we have absolutely no idea of the cost paid by our natural environment for these multi-million dollar extravaganzas. As a consequence, we have no knowledge of the long-reaching effects of our indulgences upon the poor living in other countries. It is, therefore, vitally important for us to occasionally extract ourselves from this artificial dream world encapsulated in technology and experience the naturalness of other cultures.

Experiencing the differences and embracing the contrasts that result from being in another cultural setting can

help us move towards a more mature perspective. Such a vision will influence our spiritual growth and deepen our sense of inner and outer reality. As a matter of fact, it will dissolve the boundaries of the inner and outer, giving us a taste of the Gnostic gospel which says, "When you make the two one, and when you make the inner as the outer, and the outer as the inner, and the above as the below, and when you make the male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male and the female will not be female..., then you shall enter the Kingdom." This was exactly what the Benedictine monk Bede Griffiths meant when he claimed that he went to India to seek "the other half of his soul."

India has always maintained a sense of time that is cyclic rather than linear, a philosophical approach which is 'both and' rather than 'either or,' a spiritual vision that is inclusive rather than exclusive. The freedom from psychological time, the ability to respect many paths simultaneously, and a sense of rootedness in 'being' rather than in 'doing,' has drawn spiritual seekers to her from all over the world in quest of an inner, more permanent reality.

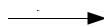
India is still the spiritual capital of the world, despite its dark side. Together with its complete unpredictability and overwhelming sensory detail, India forces us to remain constantly in the Now. In the West there are many spiritual programs geared toward helping people discard their projected identities and enter more deeply into the present moment in order to discover their true selves. In India, there is no need for techniques. One simply has to show up, to be there, and everything just 'happens' around you.

There are constant reminders everywhere that we are in a sacred world, that everything is animated by a living spirit. As you drive down a highway you see trees and stones consecrated with spiritual markings, sometimes with pieces of votive cloth tied around them, perhaps an oil lamp burning on the side. Little temples and shrines dedicated to innumerable deities garnish the sacred landscape and from time to time larger temples with many-walled precincts dominate the setting.

In the cities it is much the same. Despite the frenetic mishmash of traffic and the cacophony of multiple layers of discordant sound, you constantly see people engaged in devotional activities around shrines and temples that are on practically every street and street corner. A man and his son, holding their earlobes, bob up and down in front of a shrine to Ganesh, the elephant-headed god, while careening three-wheelers almost broadside them. They are asking atonement for their wrongdoings, hoping to receive the grace of God for a fresh start. Women and their daughters come out of temples, flowers adorning their hair, their foreheads colored with sacred markings. They have just attended worship and received the *darshan* of a deity

The Sufis believe that "God sees us through the same eye through which we see God." Every day millions of

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FROM LAW TO FREEDOM

a homily by Bede Griffiths at Osage Monastery

I suggest that we can think of religion in terms of three stages: first, when we are under the law, secondly, freedom from the law, and, thirdly, freedom when we are in that consummate place. We might also add another, at the beginning. St. Paul speaks of a stage before the law was given, before the awareness of conscience. That is the condition of human beings in this world when, like the Native Americans, they were children of nature, not under the law. That had their own customs, traditions and rituals, and they lived in that harmony, but it couldn't last. That stage has to go. The law comes, conscience awakens and you begin to distinguish right from wrong and truth from error. The conscious mind divides the world. You begin to separate the good from the wicked, the righteous from the unrighteous, and you get all these commandments: don't kill, don't steal, don't commit adultery.



Pilgrimage

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Hindus partake of *darshan*. It is the grace of 'being able to see and simultaneously be seen' by the Divine and it is done by visiting a holy person, worshipping the family deity enshrined in the *puja* room of their home, or going to the temple or shrine on the street. But ever so often a special journey is undertaken: a pilgrimage.

A pilgrimage involves foresight and preparation. Intentions are scrutinized and clarified and a special time is set apart for the purpose so that worldly affairs will not be a concern during that period. One detaches oneself from loved ones, from one's occupation, one's living quarters, from everything that is routine and familiar. A pilgrimage is not planned in detail. One remains totally present in the moment with no remorse for the past or anxiety for the future. One is established in *Brahman*, in Reality.

In the Hindu way of life, *Brahmacharya* is an important stage during which abstinence from sexual activity is observed for the purpose of studying sacred texts and purifying the senses. The same is done during pilgrimage. It is a time devoted to rediscovering our relationship with Spirit and realigning the ego to a deeper wisdom that is not merely occupied with personal gain and survival. The result is a gradual buildup toward a sacred encounter with Spirit: *darshan*. It can happen at any moment during the pilgrimage or it can happen after the pilgrimage. The effects of spiritual renewal are deep and continue to unfold, even long after the pilgrimage is over. Pilgrimage is a return to the radical awareness of Being, to a freedom to psychological time, and a conscious move to a new level of Reality.

For more information on the pilgrimage or to register for 2001, contact Asha Paul at Russill Paul Music and Publishing, Tel and Fax 510-653-5368, email guha2000@cs.com or through their web site at www.russillpaul.com ■

At this point you are under the law, the moral law. We begin to think that's all there is: try to do your best, try to keep the law; don't sin, don't transgress in any way, and then you will go to heaven.

This is exactly what, according to Paul, the gospel came to overthrow: this religion of the law. I'm afraid it is still with us. Of course you can't do without some moral law. We have to teach children, "you can't do this, you can't do that"; but that's for children. When you're mature, you get beyond the law; this is the real mystery of the gospel. St. Paul says so clearly that we have to get beyond the law. In the reading that we had, his words are very instructive, "even when you were dead in sin...he cancelled the bond that stood against us with its claims, snatching it up and nailing it to the cross." (see Col 2:13-14) That bond is the law, you see, commandments written on stone. You don't do this and you don't do that because, if you do, you will be punished, you will be destroyed. That is the state of humanity under the law.

In another biblical reading God hears the outcry about terrible sin in Sodom and Gomorrha and says, "I must go down and see what to do." God goes down and He wants to destroy Sodom and Gomorrha; in fact, He does so. And that is under the law, where there is all this judgment, condemnation and destruction. Then Abraham comes along. It is an amusing story, really. Abraham pleads with God, saying, "If there are fifty good men, or forty, or thirty—or maybe twenty, or even only ten—will you not spare them?" So there is mercy, but there is still sin and judgment. God goes out to destroy the inhabitants. There is a controversy about just what these evil people represent. Down through the years it was thought that it was homosexuality—a great sin then, you see, and so it must be destroyed. There was also another sin; that was probably the lack of hospitality, and probably the two went together. The point is, you see, that in either case there are certain laws that people feel are absolute, and we must keep those laws. If you don't keep them you are going to be destroyed; God will destroy you. That is the religion of the law, the religion of the Old Testament. There is justice, there is mercy, God may forgive, but there is always judgment and justice.

Then comes the New Testament and Paul says so clearly that you can't go on living under the law. Then you're a servant, a slave really, and God is up there counting on this, and He's going to punish you if you don't do it right; this is the religion of the law. Paul saw that Christ had canceled all that bondage of the law and set us free. When he was nailed to the tree, Christ took all that judgment upon himself, you see. That was the idea, that he accepted the whole judgment upon himself, punishment for sin. He took it upon himself. Because he could accept that totally, he could set humanity free. We are not under the law, once we surrender ourselves. Jesus taught self-surrender on the cross, and by doing that he enabled us to make this self-surrender.

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As long as we're trying to keep the law—be good Christians and do what we ought to do—it's OK. We have to do what we can, but as long as it's coming from ourselves in our effort to be good, [it is limited]. Only when we are able to surrender ourselves, to surrender ourselves totally to God, does something else come and take over, and that is what Jesus is talking about in the gospel. He makes a lot of the prayer of intercession—ask and you will receive, seek and you will find—but the fact is that as long as you are asking out of your own ego, you're not going to receive. Unless we experience that surrender, we will ask and we won't receive, we will seek and we won't find. Most people's experience is that: asking and not receiving, seeking and not finding. That's because we are still living under the law, still living under the ego in a separated self.

When we surrender that separated soul and allow God to take over, then we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. "How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" And when the Spirit comes, we can keep the law. We can keep it no longer out of anxiety, because we want to look good in front of other people, but simply out of surrender to God and allowing God to act and work in us. Ramakrishna used to say constantly, "I am not the doer." When that Other comes, when the Spirit acts in us, and we're not doing it, but the Spirit is doing it in us, then we begin to know freedom. We're free from the law and we are under grace. We're able to fulfill the law, but no longer out of our own ego; rather, from a gift of God. We fulfill the law but without being in bondage.

So we go on, aware that there are judgments in the Church, there is condemnation in the Church. Christians are judging and condemning other people all the time, but only under the law. Now we learn the mystery of unconditional love, the grace of God, and everything is transformed. Of course it's terribly difficult. We have to get rid of the ego, it has to die. And when it dies this mystery takes place, this total mystery of transformation, and the happiness and hope of this change.

It is the result of this mystery, that we sooner or later become free of that perpetual striving in fear under the old law. Grace makes this transformation, and it is happening all over the world. People are discovering this new way of being; getting free from the law, getting out from under it—free of judgment, free of condemnation, and awake to grace and to transformation. This is where we are today; in America, in every part of the world, people are searching; and people everywhere are finding that there is this freedom from being under the law, freedom of spirit. People are finding this everywhere. Something is happening to people everywhere: this transformation to a freedom beyond the law, a freedom of the Spirit. ■

CAVE OF THE HEART (*Seminar-Retreat at Mercy Center, Burlingame, CA, June 6-11, 2000*)
Anne Anderson

Gather armloads of roses, light fragrant incense sticks, listen to haunting Vedic hymns and enter a beautiful replica of Bede Griffiths' ashram, Shantivanam. The music, rituals, fragrance, and the stillness of the meditation sessions prepared the minds and hearts of participants for the enlightening and profound messages of our presenters.

Wayne Teasdale, a lay brother and Sannyasi, gave the keynote address. His inspiring message spoke of interspirituality, which allows a creative appropriation of many forms of spirituality—for we are all mystics! Wayne explained the power of a universal spirituality and its eight practical elements. He said God is both a loving, wise presence and an impersonal, ultimate condition of consciousness, emptiness, or nirvana. "Consciousness creates the world. In consciousness we live and move and have our being." The self, the soul, the human identity is a *community* of consciousness individually appropriated and known. The spiritual journey is a process of *returning* to the totality of consciousness from which we have arisen.

Our next speaker, Meg Funk OSB, spoke of the gifts of the East: for example, the Ananda of the Inner Life, and the gifts of the West, including technology and the concepts of justice, law and order. She also presented a powerful definition of Christ-consciousness, saying that the mind is the engine of the heart. We can will-to-have-in-our-heart what we prefer. One must accompany the quest for Christ-consciousness with a practice. Sister Meg found the Jesus prayer a most helpful practice.

Judy Walters, a hospice nurse who served for decades in Bangladesh, shared her time with Bede Griffiths, when he awoke to the presence of the Divine Feminine. Her quiet voice brought us into the mystery of that sacred time.

Bo Lozoff, ex-hippie, reluctant mystic, and friend of convicts, gave a powerful testimony of his life. He discovered his guru, Neem Karoli Baba, had inhabited his childhood dreams as "the magic man." On a psychedelic trip he experienced the crucifixion of Christ in his own body. His Damascus Road experience has given him great compassion for others. He said the safest way to God is through devotion. Bo and his lovely wife Sita operate Kindness House in North Carolina, where they live out their faith in love.

Louis Vitale, a Franciscan friar, told a marvelous story of his life and work. A "party boy," he became a social activist. Louie was deeply affected by the life and work of Bede Griffiths. His message is one of non-violence. A friend of Cesar Chavez, he has followed the example of Mahatma Gandhi in his unselfish ministry to the poor.

Bonnie Greenwell, a transpersonal psychologist and
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Cave of the Heart (Continued from page 6)

faculty member of the California Institute of Integral Studies and the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, gave a beautiful presentation of the Kundalini process of yogic practice. She spoke of the perils of Kundalini rising without proper spiritual and psychological preparation and guidance. Kundalini release, however, also brings energy for transformation and liberation.

Alzak Amlani, clinical psychologist and nutrition guru, gave a powerful and lucid talk on the relationship of diet to physical and spiritual health. Hippocrates and the Essenes were aware of this. It is being reemphasized by many well-known medical experts today. He spoke of the critical cancer-fighting compounds in common fruits and vegetables. Alzak taught about Ayurveda and our bodies' needs for Sattvic foods such as fruits, vegetables, soaked seeds and nuts, grains and fresh raw dairy products. Body cleansing was also emphasized as well as the benefits of eating living foods. I attempt to follow Alzak's dietary suggestions, and my body thanks me.

Olga Luchakova, a medical doctor from Russia who teaches Comparative Religion and the psychology of Kundalini Yoga, spoke of the structure of the subtle body and gave some exercises for connecting with the Cave of the Heart.

On Saturday evening we watched an exquisite dancer from India interpret some ancient Hindu myths.

Bruno Barnhart, of New Camaldoli, presided at the Indian Rite Eucharist on Sunday morning. He is compiling an anthology of the essential writings of Bede. His homily on the Perennial Philosophy was a capstone for all we had learned. He said that John's Gospel is the key for understanding the core of the Perennial Philosophy from a Christian perspective. His words were filled with spirit and wisdom that Pentecost morning.

Asha Paul presided over an exquisite Hindu ritual. Her grace made it seem like a dance. Woven through the retreat were Hatha Yoga and Nada Yoga sessions, as well as times of silent meditation. Nada Yoga is sound yoga, and is a powerful transformative tool. The chants lead to expanded consciousness and integration.

Russill Paul's music was a sacred container for all of us. The melodies and chants were fierce and tender, mournful and joyous. Quarter tones held us in suspension between the East and the West, between dual and non-dual thinking. Like a weaver's shuttle, Russill's music wove the colorful strands of our experiences into a many-splendored tapestry. Time and space took on new dimensions.

I came to this seminar-retreat without any preconceived ideas. However, as I stepped over a river of rose petals into the Oak Room, I was overwhelmed by beauty and the sensual, yet sacred feeling that I had entered Bede Griffiths' ashram. Sr. Marguerite, RSM, and Sandi Peters created this Cave of the Heart. Their meticulous preparation was a lovely gift to all of us. ■

**EAST- WEST DIALOGUE AT
NEW CAMALDOLI**

The Camaldolese Benedictine monastery in Big Sur was the site of a significant event in the continuing conversation between Christians and representatives of the Asian spiritual traditions this summer. From June 25 through July 1, thirty participants exchanged the wisdom of their respective traditions on the subjects of *purity of heart and contemplation*. The monastic symposium was the first major event held by the **Camaldolese Institute for East-West Dialogue**. Among the invited participants were monks, nuns and scholars from a variety of traditions: Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian and, of course, Christian. Participants travelled from Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, England, Hawaii, Canada and various parts of the U.S. to attend the conference.

The program continued for five busy days, with four separate presentations and discussions each day. The conferences and discussions were carried on within the framework of the daily monastic program of prayer and meditation. On one occasion, evening prayer was celebrated in the form of an interfaith service, combining readings from Eastern and Western traditions, and incorporating the Indian ritual of *arati*, a native American blessing of the four directions of the earth, and the chants of Shantivanam.

Until now it has been primarily Father Bede (who visited New Camaldoli several times before his death in 1993), his writings and his Indian-Christian ashram, which have attracted the Camaldolese to the East-West Dialogue. While Christian-Buddhist dialogue has been going on continually in the decades since the Second Vatican Council, a dialogue between Christian monastics and representatives of the Chinese traditions of Confucianism, Taoism and Ch'an Buddhism is only beginning. The Symposium was a significant forward step in this direction. Professor Chung-ying Cheng, a philosopher currently teaching at the University of Hawaii, presented a Confucian view of the human person and the process of self-cultivation. Sr. Donald Corcoran, a Camaldolese nun from Windsor, N.Y., made an original comparison between central virtues in two traditions: Benedictine humility and Confucian sincerity. Prof. Liu Xiaogan, from Singapore, spoke about Taoist meditation and the process of transformation which it promotes.

Fr. Joseph Wong, Chinese monk-theologian of New Camaldoli who originates from Hong-Kong, organized the symposium. The Chinese presence, unusual in Christian-Asian dialogue events until now, is due to his efforts and personal connections. Fr. Joseph himself presented an interesting paper comparing the relation of detachment to contemplative vision in Chuang Tzu and Meister Eckhart.

Norman Fischer, former abbot of the San Francisco Zen Center, presented to the delighted participants his fresh zen-

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Dialogue

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like translations of a number of the biblical psalms. Rev. Taigen D. Leighton spoke on the theme of *Sacred Fools and Zen Rule-Bending*, stressing the primacy of compassion in Zen Buddhist cultivation of the person. Rev. Myo Lahey, prior of the Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, Buddhist neighbor community of New Camaldoli, was able to be present for only part of the Symposium but contributed some important comments.

Three participants, Rev. Heng Sure, Dr. Martin Verhoeven and Steven Tainer, are members of the Institute for World Religions in Berkeley. Rev. Heng Sure and Dr. Verhoeven presented teachings on the practice of bowing as a way of purification and contemplation, and on Ch'an Buddhist meditation. They were the two monks who walked all the way from Los Angeles to San Francisco on a bowing peace pilgrimage in 1978. Heng Sure also spoke to the group about the United Religions Initiative, which was holding a foundational meeting in Pittsburgh and other cities at the time of the Symposium.

Sr. Mary Margaret Funk, Executive Director of the Benedictine board for Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, and Fr. William Skudlarek, Benedictine monk who is president of the same board, dramatized an imagined conversation between Sr. Meg and Thomas Merton on the subject of purity of heart. Merton had borrowed from the Islamic tradition the term *point vierge*, or virgin point, for the deep place of divine presence in the soul. The colloquy was a refreshing break in the series of conferences, bringing Merton's spiritual vitality and sensitivity into the middle of the gathering.

Hinduism was represented by three papers. Pravrajika Vrajaprana, of the Vedanta Society community in Santa Barbara, spoke on purity and meditation in the Indian tradition. Two Camaldolese monks, Thomas Matus and Cyprian Consiglio, spoke on *Heart Yoga* and on Bede Griffiths' conception of the *Spirit* in the human person.

Fr. Laurence Freeman, Director of the World Community for Christian Meditation and a Benedictine monk of the Monastery of Christ the King, in London, recounted for the group the history of a dialogue which began between the Dalai Lama and John Main, founder of the Christian Meditation movement, many years ago. The dialogue continues still between the Tibetan religious leader and members of the meditation group.

Bro. Bede Healey of New Camaldoli, a clinical psychologist who has been long associated with the Menninger Clinic, presented a psychological view of the spiritual journey as the 'recreation of desire.'

The presence of Brother David Steindl-Rast, monk of Mount Saviour monastery in New York and presently a hermit, who has been a pioneer in Christian-Buddhist dialogue and resided at New Camaldoli for many years, was

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THE BEDE GRIFFITHS WEBSITE

(www.bede.griffiths.com)

The handsome gate swings open upon a varied and colorful little city. Here you will find streets leading, by different routes, into the world of Bede and of his work, into the ongoing East-West dialogue and its implications, into the future of Christianity. We shall leaf briskly through the pages of the site, giving a brief description of what you will encounter on each street.

- **Biography:** a concise but very informative life of Bede Griffiths by Sr. Pascaline Coff, OSB, editor of the website.
- **Satsang:** conversations with Bede Griffiths in the form of a series of questions from a disciple and answers by the Master. Current questions: What is the responsibility of the Contemplative? Can you say something to us about aging?
- **Dialogue:** events in the world of Interreligious dialogue, selectively but with some detail.
- **Meditations:** short and pithy texts from Father Bede.
- **Golden String:** a rich selection of articles from the Bede Griffiths Trust Bulletin, one article from each of the thirteen issues to date.
- **Wisdom Christianity:** a series of introductory pieces on the Christian sapiential tradition: in the New Testament, through the centuries and in today's time of rebirth (e.g. in Bede Griffiths and Thomas Merton). The accent is on the 'unitive' core of the wisdom tradition.
- **Sangha Newsletter:** selections from the publication of the *Bede Griffiths Sangha* in England: events, articles, Bede texts, poetry. This page makes a helpful connection with British friends of Bede and their activities, and may offer a model for participation by similar groups elsewhere.
- **Photos:** a collection of images featuring Bede and his ashram.
- **Feature:** a single text of particular richness and depth from the world of Bede and of the ongoing interaction between Christianity and the Asian spiritual traditions. Currently featured is 'The Experience of the Spirit,' from Swami Abhishiktananda's book, *Saccidananda*.
- **Events:** current events which have some connection with Bede and his work or with related concerns, especially East-West dialogue and India. Retreats, conferences, pilgrimages and other tours will be found listed here.
- **Camaldolese Institute for East-West Dialogue:** a brief introduction to the Institute and its activities, and in particular a summary of the Monastic Symposium on Purity of Heart/Contemplation which was held at New

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REVIEW: THE MYSTIC HEART: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions, by Wayne Teasdale. With a foreword by H.H. the Dalai Lama and a Preface by Beatrice Bruteau. Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999, \$23.95 (Reviewed by James M. Somerville, Editor of *The Roll, Letter of the Schola Contemplationis*)

The Dalai Lama calls *The Mystic Heart* “a work of great inspiration” by “my good friend Brother Wayne Teasdale” (p.xii). We could not agree more. This exceedingly rich book by a well-known *Schola* Associate is a modern encyclopedia of world spirituality. Dr. Teasdale, writing as a Christian, displays an impressive grasp of the mystical dimension of his own faith, along with deep penetration into the mysticism of other world religions. He has coined a word, ‘interspirituality,’ which he defines as “the sharing of ultimate experience across traditions.” (p.26) It is to some degree related to Thich Nhat Hanh’s ‘interbeing,’ which maintains that nothing can truly *be* by itself alone. Everything that is should “interbe” with everything else. This is especially true at the highest level of spirituality. The authentic mystic cannot exist in isolation from the rest of creation (219). Those who manage to be absorbed in the Absolute beyond the limits of a particular religion’s code, creed or cult must meet and coexist with members of other religions in a true spirit of community.

Very often the mystic is more at home with mystics of other faiths than with members of his own faith who are wedded to the particularities of their own culture-bound religion.

To say that *The Mystic Heart* is encyclopedic, one needs only consider the number of topics treated and the persons whose thought is considered. To take but one letter of the alphabet, namely, ‘b’, the author has something to say about Thomas Berry, David Bohm, Bernard of Clairvaux, Black Elk, William Blake, Blossius, Robert Bly, Bonaventure, Bonhoeffer, Buber, and several others. So, too, for many other notables.

We are indebted to the author for providing us with accounts of some of his own unitive experiences, beginning at the age of five (173). He also mentions, in passing, recovering from a long siege of agnosticism, followed by a recurring sense of being taken up into the divine presence (225).

Topical headings within the chapters help the reader find sections where the author treats many traditional topics that concern contemplatives. The pages on solitude (84-86) remind us of the importance of withdrawing from busyness for some period each day—something that must be very difficult for Wayne, since there are so many demands on his time in connection with teaching, writing, social concerns and his continuing involvement with the



Parliament of the World’s Religions. Brief summaries on the nature of centering prayer, lectio divina, active and passive forms of contemplation, Buddhist prayer, and the Hindu margas and asramas are all highly informative. The Glossary of terms found on pages 265-272 is most useful. Ample footnotes assure the reader that the author has done his homework. ■

Dialogue

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appreciated by the many participants who know him. Brother David had a long and intimate involvement with the Zen Buddhist community in California. Through his lectures, retreats, books and taped conferences, he has helped countless people to rediscover a spiritual life.

Dr. John Borelli, Secretary for Interreligious Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, brought to the conference his long experience both of studying and teaching the Eastern traditions and of the East-West dialogue itself.

Fr. Tom Hand S.J., who spent years in Japan and is now retreat director and spiritual teacher at Mercy Center in Burlingame, contributed with gentleness and profundity to the contemplative focus and climate of the gathering.

Fr. Bruno Barnhart brought the conference to a conclusion with a reflection on the rebirth of unitive consciousness in Christianity as a fruit of the contemporary dialogue with the Asian traditions.

Participants commented on the freshness and the lively energy they experienced during the week. Everyone seemed to manifest a sincere interest in hearing about one another's traditions. We are clearly in a new era.

The twenty papers which were presented at the Symposium are to be published as a book. Tapes of the talks will be available at the Hermitage Bookstore. ■

Bede Griffiths Web Site

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Camaldoli at the end of June 2000. (see this issue of the *GS*, page 7)

- **Resources:** books (all Bede Griffiths books that are currently in print, as well as other Bede-related works and a few books of other authors), audio tapes and some videos, with links to sources for ordering materials.
- **Advisors:** a brief introduction to each of the people who have been closely involved with the planning and editing of the website

The Bede Griffiths website owes its existence to the imagination and initiative of John Douglas. Teresa Matyniak has put the site together, and we owe her much gratitude both for its elegance and for the expert organization that makes this rich and complex resource so easy to use. Sr. Pascaline Coff has been continually involved in the planning and has the principal editing responsibility.

The site has been getting plenty of attention around the globe. ■

The Golden String

BEDE CELEBRATION IN VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA by Michael Mifsud

On the seventh anniversary of Bede's *Mahasamadhi*, there was a big turnout of people once again at Montserrat Ashram in Milgrove, Victoria. This ashram was blessed by Bede and affiliated with Shantivanam on the 13th day of May 1992—this was precisely the day on which he died a year later.

The weather was perfect for the celebration, which began with meditation followed by a Shantivanam-style Mass with Sanskrit chants. Fr. Roger McGinley gave the homily, on the theme 'Bede Griffiths: Prophet of the Cosmic Jubilee. The co-founder of Montserrat, Fr. Michael Mifsud, Camaldolese Oblate who is now a hermit, conducted the conference on this same topic.

We then enjoyed circle dancing (which I had first experienced in February 1992 at Shantivanam in the eucalyptus grove under a full moon) in the grounds where birds, beautiful streams and mountains surrounded us. A shared festive lunch was followed by a video of Father Bede and a discussion. The theme of the day drew from Bede's *A New Vision of Reality* and from the personal experience of a number of us who had met and known Bede and heard his teachings. We look upon him still as both teacher and prophet. ■

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The Bede Griffiths Website, www.bede.griffiths.com, contains a selection of articles from *The Golden String*, together with many other features.

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Thank you! ■

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