



The Golden String

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NONDUALITY IN THE VEDIC AND BIBLICAL TRADITIONS

John Martin

I. The Vedic Tradition

The Vedas are the sacred scriptures of Hindus and the Upanishads are the culmination of the Vedic search for Truth or Reality. The Upanishads reveal the ultimate experience of God in which a person can declare "I am Brahman", or "I am God," which is described as Non-dualistic (*advaita*) experience or ontological non-duality. The Vedic tradition reveals a progressive growth of divine-human relationship in four stages: relationship through poetry (*Samhithas*), relationship through ritual or sacrifices (*brahmanas*), relationship through meditations in the forest (*aranyakas*) and finally self-realization (*Upanishads*).

The Upanishads speak of four levels of consciousness, which again show the progressive growth in divine-human relationship: waking consciousness, dreaming consciousness, deep sleep consciousness and the *thuriya*, which means the fourth. In waking consciousness one identifies with one's physical body and lives to satisfy one's physical desires and ambitions. In the dreaming consciousness one identifies with ideals and ideal persons taken from the past or memory and tries to follow and imitate them. Here a person might say I am a Hindu, Christian, and Muslim etc. In the deep sleep one is freed from the personal and collective ideals and ideal persons of the past (time) and enters into the realm of originality and creativity (eternity) and becomes an original and creative person and is able to say, "I am." In the

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AUGUSTINE AND THE WISDOM OF THE WEST

Bruno Barnhart

As we experience a rebirth of the wisdom tradition of Christianity, it is natural to want to know the story of that tradition and of its strange extinction in the West. We cannot understand the history which has led us into this sapiential desert of the modern West, however, without interrogating St. Augustine. Sometimes it seems as if, all by himself, he knotted with his muscular mind the central tensions and polarities which have become the warp and the woof of our western history. Like Walt Whitman — perhaps a distant, paradoxical descendant — Augustine might reply to his questioner,

Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself.

(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

To approach this massive progenitor is a personal challenge today. He can call up a wide range of emotions in us, because of our intimate — though mostly unconscious — relation with him. That is, because of the overwhelming influence which he exerted upon the development of western Christianity — whether Catholic or Protestant — and because it has been during the past half-century — the time of Vatican II — that this influence has been critically reassessed and that modern Christians have begun to get 'out from under' Augustine. Long before Aquinas, Augustine had become nearly the sole patristic authority for the western churches, the singular 'father of western Christianity.'

The unreflective images called up by his name may include a fortress church, City of God filled with all the divine Truth and all the divine Goodness, beaming complacent on its mountain far above the murky stew of this world and its doomed masses, or a small human figure groveling, helpless, beneath the omnipotent will and the sovereign grace of God. Our relationship with Augustine is a quasi-Freudian tangle, and while passionately denouncing one of his positions we are very likely standing in another one.

Augustine (354-430) was a whole-hearted seeker for Wisdom, a Christian *jnani* if ever there was one, but not in the tradition of the "East" — whether Greek Christian, Hindu or Buddhist. In his search for divine Wisdom he set a new course which became definitive for the sapiential theology — and in great measure for the spirituality — of the West until our time. Phillip Cary, in his lucid study, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self* (Oxford, 2000)

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Nonduality

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thuriya or the fourth state, one realizes one's identity with God and says "I am Brahman." The utterance, "I am Brahman," may appear to be a statement of spiritual arrogance but in reality it is an experience of profound humility. In this state, only Brahman remains. To say that "I am God" does not mean that a human being becomes God but affirms that God is the only Reality. There are four or five *mahavakyas* connected to this ultimate experience: I am Brahman (*ahambrahmasmi*), you are that-Brahman (*tatvamasi*), Atman is Brahman (*ayatmanbrahma*), all this is Brahman (*sarvametatbrahma*) and Brahman is non-dual (*prajnanambrahma*). These mahavakyas are different ways of expressing the same advaitic experience. The Vedas should not be seen as systematic treatises of philosophy but as a collection of the various philosophical discoveries and experiences of the seekers of Truth or God.

Later the great teachers (*acharyas*) tried to define the teachings of the Upanishads into various systems of thought. There are three main schools of thought: *advaita* (non-duality), *visistaadvaita* (qualified non-duality) and *dvaita* (duality). According to *advaita*, propounded by Shankara (Kerala, 7th cent. AD) Brahman or God alone is real and the world is an illusion or *Maya*. The human soul is ultimately identical with Brahman. The mahavakya *ahambrahmasmi* (I am Brahman or God) is the experience of this non-duality. Brahman is *nirguna*, without any attributes. The way to realize this truth is *jnana marga*, the path of knowledge. The system of *visistaadvaita* propounded by Ramanuja (Tamil Nadu, 12th cent.) states that God and creation are like soul and body (or like the body and the hair that grows on the body), inseparable. God and human beings, though inseparable like soul and body, are not identical. God lives in human beings and creation, and creation and human beings live in God, but they are not identical. The soul, though of the same substance as God and emanated from him rather than created, can obtain bliss not in absorption but in existence near him. The way to have this experience is through self-surrender. Ramanuja proposed the path of devotion or *bhakti* as a way to this realization, which comes through the grace of God. A person might say "I am in God and God is in me," but not "I am God." For Ramanuja God is *saguna*, with attributes like omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence.

Madhava (from Karnataka, 13th cent.) proposed the system of *dvaita*, duality. He clearly distinguishes between God, human beings and creation. God is the only Supreme Being and there is nothing or no one equal to him. He proposed the path of devotion (*bhakti*) and good actions (*karma*). To reach God, one needs a Guru. Here a person might say "God is greater than I" but cannot say "I am God."

Interestingly, all three of these masters are from the South of India. Though a majority of Hindus believe that the non-duality of Shankara is the supreme truth, most of them practice the path of devotion and worship of the various manifestations of Supreme Being, (as Vishnu, Siva, Krishna

and Rama) and the path of self-less action. Thus the path of knowledge (*jnana*), the path of devotion (*bhakti*) and the path of action (*karma*) are the three typical ways that the Indian sages propose to reach God.

II. The Biblical Tradition

In the Biblical tradition also we see a progressive growth in divine-human relationship. First, relating to God through prayers and psalms; second, relating through the rituals and sacrifices in the temple; then God's promise of a New Covenant and John the Baptist preaching in the desert (symbol of *aranyakas*) the end of the old and the coming of the new; then Jesus' experience of God as non-dual, "I and the Father are one," and the inauguration of the new relationship with God. We can say that the New Testament is the 'Upanishads' of the Biblical tradition.

We also find four levels of consciousness in Jesus: first Jesus a human being (waking consciousness), Jesus the Jew (dreaming consciousness as Judaism was his spiritual ideal), Jesus, the Son of God (universal consciousness freed from the Jewish memory), deep sleep consciousness in which he says "I am the way, the Truth and the Life," and finally Jesus as God (the *thuriya*, "I and the Father are one"), ontological non-duality. Jesus also utters mahavakyas, 'great statements.' To quote four of them, "I am the light of the world" (I am Brahman), "You are the light of the world" (You are Brahman), "I and the Father are one" (Atman is Brahman) and "This is my body and this is my blood" (All this is Brahman).

Jewish religion is basically a dualistic religion. God is the transcendent reality and creator. Human beings are creatures of God. Nobody can see God and live. No one should make any image of God. No one can come near to God, as He is Holy. This God can speak only through the prophets. But the prophets also foresaw a new relationship with God in which God would write his law in the hearts of his people. God will be 'Emmanuel,' with us and within us (*visistaadvaitic* experience). Jesus inaugurates this new covenant at the moment of his baptism and takes it further into advaitic experience. He could say boldly that he and God are one. This experience was not in the memory of Jewish tradition. The belief that God is our creator and we are his creatures makes this experience impossible and it would be blasphemous for anyone to claim it. Thus Jesus brings about a revolution in his spiritual tradition and fulfills the spiritual search of that tradition.

Jesus does not abolish the dualistic and qualified non-dualistic relationships but opens them to a new possibility of non-duality. "I have not come to abolish the law but to fulfill the law," he said. Can we make a system of thought from the teaching of Christ? Is it advaitic or visistaadvaitic or dvaitic? Jesus made three important statements, which may bring some light. "I and the Father are one" or "I am the light of the world" (*advaita*, ontological non-duality of Shankara) "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (*visistaadvaita*,

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Nonduality

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qualified non-duality of Ramanuja), “My Father is greater than I,” and “my God, my God why have you forsaken me?” (dvaita, the duality of Madhava). Is Jesus a non-dualist or a qualified non-dualist or a dualist? It seems to me that we cannot put Jesus into any category since he manifests all these experiences. These statements belong to the different levels of human consciousness and can be present at the same time. The difference between stages and states is that the stages follow one after the other, while the states can be present simultaneously.

Truth is not a static system but a dynamic living reality which cannot be defined into any system. One has to grow from duality to qualified non-duality and from there to non-duality (Spiritual life is a growth. Sin is a refusal to grow or a blocking of the growth of the others). And then one has to come down to qualified non-duality and then to duality. But there is qualitative difference between a person who had the non-dualistic experience and lives in the qualified non-duality and duality and a person who lives in qualified non-duality and duality without having non-dualistic experience. A person who lives dualistically thinks that he/she is a creature of God. He/she praises and worships God. A person who lives qualified-non-dualistically is a mystic. He might say that I am in God and God is in me. A person who experiences non-duality is a realized person. He can say, “I am God” or “My Real I is God.” But he also can be a mystic and a worshipper of God. Sri Shankara had non-dualistic experience of Reality but he also wrote devotional hymns as if he were a dualist. Sri Ramakrishna had non-dualistic experience but he had great devotion to the Divine Mother. Jesus had non-dualistic experience of God but he also prayed and spoke to God dualistically.

Spiritual life is not only an upward movement towards God but also a downward movement towards human beings and the world: the love of God and the love of neighbor, of the biblical tradition. When one is growing spiritually the dualistic experience, qualified non-dualistic experience and the experience of non-duality appear to be *stages* but when one is coming down they become *states* of consciousness. In general, Christian tradition presents divine-human relationship in a dualistic sense and only in the case of mystics is a somewhat qualified non-duality acceptable. Nondual experience, in this tradition, is reserved only to Jesus and is closed to Christians.

In the same way, the three paths of jnana, bhakti and karma should not be seen as exclusive. The good actions lead to devotion and devotion leads to jnana. This jnana manifests in devotion and further in selfless action. In spiritual life there is a movement of ascending and there is also a moment of descending, since nobody can remain on the top of the ladder. Meanwhile life is not only to *be* (jnana) but also to *relate* (bhakti) and to *act* or to share (karma). These are all integral phases of being alive. Our relationships and actions should be based on the strong foundation of our Be-

ing. Otherwise they can be very superficial.

The non-dualistic interpretation of the Upanishads by Shankara seems to focus entirely on the ontological non-duality and to neglect the functional duality, though he himself wrote many devotional hymns later. With his zeal for the absolute Shankara refused to give any value and meaning to the world and human relationships and held to the view that the world is an illusion. Thus he moved towards monism. While Ramanuja tried to correct this extreme position and give some meaning to the world and human beings, he was suspected of moving towards pantheism. Madhava, while trying to keep the balance between monism of Shankara and the pantheism of Ramanuja, created an unbridgeable gulf between God and human beings. Though Ramanuja and Madhava, with their qualified non-dualistic and dualistic interpretations, tried to give meaning to relationship and bring God closer to the ordinary people, they also closed the door to the non-dualistic experience of God. These dualistic experiences have functional value but not ontological value. As long as we have a physical body and live in this world of time and space we need to relate with God and with one another in a functional duality, though we know that we are ontologically one with God and one another, since there is only one Reality.

Christian tradition also focused too much on the functional duality while it closed the door to the experience of ontological non-duality to its followers. Though Jesus opened the door to this possibility for every human being, Christian tradition reserved it only to Jesus and closed this possibility for Christians. Christian mystics could go as far as the experience of God’s indwelling presence, but they could never claim the non-dualistic experience. If there is anyone on record who made the statement “I am God,” it was Meister Eckhart of Germany, who said that a spiritually poor person is one who says, “I and God are one.” But he was condemned as a heretic. Perhaps at that time no one could have imagined the possibility of non-dualistic experience. But today Christians are ready for it. Jesus did not abolish the dualistic experiences of God but he used them as preparatory ground for his non-dualistic experience and came back to them to live functionally. He invited his brothers and sisters to grow into this deeper relationship with God. Jesus did not relate with God as his creator but as his Father. That was a revolution. Jesus was not only a non-dualist (I and the Father are one) but also a qualified non-dualist (I am in the Father and the Father is in me) and a dualist (My Father is greater than I). He was not only a jnani who realized his oneness with the Father but also a bhakta, who had devotion to his Father and a doer, who did the will of his Father. Jesus’ experience of God includes both ontological non-duality and functional duality. To realize ontological oneness with God and at the same time live dualistically in the world of time and space at the functional level is the miracle of life. ■

TRANSFORMING EVIL THROUGH LOVE

Wayne Teasdale

If we can learn to embrace the diversity and otherness we encounter here in this world, and heal the ancient divisions and misunderstandings of the past, if we can give and accept forgiveness, always choosing the path of non-harming, in relation to all of humankind, other sentient beings and the natural world, then we will have come of age as a species, and our spirituality will have prepared us for the next steps in our cosmic/spiritual evolution, steps that will inevitably lead us into a larger identity in the Divine Mystery, and greater responsibility in our area of the universe. As the human family, each one of us has to stretch beyond self-interest, or the concerns of simply our family, friends, community, religion, or culture, nation and species, and think more in terms of the whole community of life on Earth. Tribalism and nationalism must give way to our larger identity closely linked to the Earth and the greater community of the cosmos itself.

I have witnessed the growth of sensitivity and compassion, love, mercy and kindness in persons who have accepted the invitation, with heroic generosity of nature, to walk in the ways of spiritual discipline, the timeless wisdom of the inner life, the mystical journey. This path opens our hearts to quantum leaps of love and compassion, founded on an ever-expanding sensitive awareness of others and otherness in its broader sense. The spiritual journey, wherever it is lived, is an infallible means of transformation into an exquisite human being, one with the gift of that wisdom we call awareness, the deep existential realization of the interconnectedness of all sentient beings.

Such individuals (all of us, when finally awake) radiate love and forgiveness. Their presence in every situation heals, transforms, while disarming hostility, confusion, ambiguity and indifference. Confronting evil, injustice, violence and tragedy, they maintain the essential perspective of wisdom, the awareness of the larger picture: the absoluteness of love. They call others through their witness and presence to consider this larger reality that is often obscured in the heat of violence, shouting matches, and war. If in the face of those who are destructive we are consistently loving, compassionate and wise, while doing what must be done to protect the innocent, we will eventually have a transformative impact on them; they will realize there is something beyond hatred and violence, the nihilistic behavior of immature souls who perhaps don't know anything better. Alan Ginsberg in a brief poem characterizes the awakened person: "Holy is the supernatural extra brilliant intelligent kindness of the soul." Kindness is of the essence in spiritual realization, in the nature of awareness itself, and this is our ultimate treasure which becomes a resource for substantial personal and social

THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF BEDE'S VISION

George Nelliyanil

The basic idea of Father Bede's vision develops in his reflection upon the theology of St. Paul. It appears explicitly in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, and is implicit elsewhere in his writings, especially in the letters to the Corinthians. This Christian view of the universe deriving from Paul has been lost to many Christians for a very long time. There are three levels of reality, three modes of human existence and human consciousness. These are the *body*, the *soul* and the *spirit*; and we must distinguish between the soul and the spirit. The western tradition confuses these two.

The world is first of all a physical universe. We, as bodily beings, are part of that physical universe. Secondly, there is the psyche, the soul. We all belong to a psychological universe. All human beings are psychologically interconnected, interrelated from the beginning of the world. We are all members of a whole, the common psyche of all human beings.

Beyond the body (the *soma*) and beyond the soul (the *psyche*) is the spirit, or *pneuma*. In Sanskrit it is called the *atman*. This is the key to everything. Beyond our body, beyond our soul, every human being has a point of self-transcendence. The human person is constituted with a capacity for self-transcendence. We all have the capacity to go beyond our limited human body, beyond our limited human soul, and to be open to the infinite and eternal. That is our spirit, our *pneuma*, our *atman*. At that point of self-transcendence we are in touch with the Infinite. Many people have lost this contact with spiritual reality. Many Christians see our reality as being merely the body and the soul, with God somewhere up above, but that is not true. We are in God and God is in us — that is in the spirit, at our point of communion. Christian contemplation can be seen as going beyond your body and its senses, beyond your mind and its concepts, with all their dualities, and opening yourself to the transcendent reality in which we are all one. ■

change. The Dalai Lama tells us that his religion is kindness as both practice and fruit.

Let me conclude with a prayer that came to me one morning some years ago as I was coming out of a deep contemplative meditation. "O Blessed One, transform us (all humanity) into the boundless Love you are, and let us always radiate this Love to you, to one another, and to all those we meet (including other sentient beings) unto eternal life." This prayer is both an intention and a practice, a practice that incarnates the intention in the center of our awareness. May this practice, this intention take root in us all, and lead us into greater freedom, generosity, and change, culminating in a new human order: a civilization with a heart! ■

THE POWER OF TRUSTING IN DIVINE PROVIDENCE

Our 2002 Pilgrimage to S. India

Russill Paul

Among the many virtues of the late Dom Bede Griffiths, his implicit trust in Divine Providence stands high on the list. I remember days when Christudas, the administrator of the Ashram, would approach him and mention the absence of funds to keep the Ashram running. Bede would always smile knowingly and say, "be patient, Christudas" or "don't worry, we'll be fine." Sure enough, money would arrive from some source in time to make the transition smooth and worry-free. This of course did not stop Christudas' growing alarm till the funds arrived.

Anxiety about outcomes is a major factor for stress in western culture. Everything is so well delineated and clearly mapped out. If a sign on the freeway says that it's three fourths of a mile to an exit you know that you can clock your odometer and verify the distance to be correct to a fraction of a mile. The East is just the opposite: it is the land of the unexpected. There are maps and rules and guidelines but there isn't the slightest indication that everything is going according to plan. The popular answer, "soon coming," to an inquiry about the arrival of a train, could mean anything from a few minutes to a few hours. The real answer under the reply is "Don't worry. Whatever time the train arrives is just right. It has been ordained this way by Divine Providence and you are meant to be here on this railway platform till then. Bhagavan, the Beloved, has mysterious designs. Trust in that Great Mind and you need not suffer this delay."

India is amazing. It is remarkable to observe how stress-free many Indians are despite the harshness of their lifestyles and environments. Their secret to stress-release seems to lie in their extraordinary capacity to accept what life places on their path; there is a genuine sense of trust that whatever is happening is happening for the best. Many modern spiritual teachers are finding innovative ways of helping us achieve this in the West but the masses continue to think differently. You can have what you want now! There is always someone willing to sell it to you, at low cost, deferred payment, or on credit.

Pilgrimage is a time that we set apart from our regular pace of expected outcomes and surrender ourselves completely to the joy of the moment. Willing to be surprised and challenged by the unexpected, we relearn how to trust implicitly in Divine Providence and rediscover the power of being protected by God's love and God's care. "Oh you of little faith, observe the lilies of the field and the birds of the air..." In our competitive work environments, we are obsessively self-reliant and have little place for trust, our eyes fixed on the stock market quotes of the day. Life is all about getting ahead and not about being here now. The price is a

distressing tangle of physical and mental complications.

Historically, Christianity's emphasis on the past, the crucifixion and resurrection, and the future, the preparation and anticipation of Jesus' second coming, has often diminished the power and reverence for the present moment. This power of the present moment is well addressed in eastern spirituality and perhaps explains why many in the West look to the East for answers and ways of coping with life. A comical representation of this was expressed in a cartoon I once saw that depicted a doomsday prophet with disheveled hair and a large placard announcing "Beware! Jesus said, 'I am coming'". He is marching toward a street corner and around the bend, shielded from his view, is a bald headed Buddhist monk seated on the sidewalk holding a small placard displaying, "Be Aware! Buddha say, 'Be here now'!"

The experience of being in India and living at a Christian ashram offers each one of us many wonderful ways of appreciating both Christianity as well as Hinduism. We learn to compare "shadow with shadow and light with light". When we are confined to the perspective of one culture, it is hard to appreciate the value of another. This is why exposing ourselves to another tradition is immensely rewarding. Invariably, this process invokes in us a deeper respect for our own roots.

January 2002 was not a comfortable time to travel. Not too long after September 11th, with the threat of nuclear weapons ready on the border between India and Pakistan and a full-scale war being waged in Afghanistan, it was a tense undertaking to say the least. We were deeply moved by our retreatants, who were keen on making the pilgrimage despite all the heavy news updates that we were receiving through the media. Their trust and their faith in Divine Providence were nothing less than phenomenal. This is the true spirit of pilgrimage, and we were all struck by the sense of profound blessing throughout our journey.

Safety has become relative, the planet has grown even smaller and life has come to mean more than the physical body. The titles of Fr. Bede's books are aptly indicative of what is happening today. We are indeed awakening to a New Vision Of Reality, the Marriage Of East And West is taking place in many fields and our common need to Return To The Center in all this chaos has never been more evident.

Have you experienced pilgrimage on such a scale? Temporarily letting go of your family, your friends, your occupation and life as you are used to it, and trusting completely in the unknown can lead you through a path of self-discovery and spiritual adventure that is unparalleled. You return refreshed, nourished, seeing with new eyes and feeling with a new heart. *Journeying to Find the Other Half of the Soul* has enhanced the lives of our participants. Year after year we receive heart-moving responses and people continue to return with us again and again.

Pilgrimage has become essential to our lives. Shantivanam and India rejuvenate our spirits and give us the per-

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RESOURCES FOR BEDE GRIFFITHS CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER GROUPS

During the last several years of his life, Bede Griffiths continually, wherever he went, encouraged people to form small contemplative prayer groups. He insisted that God's call to contemplation is universal, and that the only reason it is not effective is the lack of receptivity to it. *The Bede Griffiths Trust, An Association for the Renewal of Contemplative Life*, is striving to continue this encouragement by suggesting resources to feed the contemplative heart and its receptivity, using Fr. Bede's own writings and conferences and those of other contemplative teachers and mystical writers. Here is a first list of resources.

Bede Griffiths:

Books:

- *The Golden String*
- *River of Compassion*
- *A New Vision of Reality*
- *The One Light: Bede Griffiths' Principal Writings*, edited by Bruno Barnhart
- *Beyond the Darkness: A Biography of Bede Griffiths*, by Shirley Du Boulay
- *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue*, by Judson Trapnell

Tapes:

- *The Universal Call to Contemplation* (audio tape: New Camaldoli Hermitage, Big Sur, 1992)
- *The 1991 John Main Seminar* (audio or video) (Also in book form as *The New Creation in Christ*.)
- *A Human Search: The Life of Bede Griffiths* (video)

Meister Eckhart: Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*

Abhishiktananda: *Prayer*

Thomas Keating: *Open Mind, Open Heart*

Thomas Merton:

- *Contemplative Prayer*
- *The Inner Experience*

Olivier Clement: *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*

Andrew Harvey: *The Essential Mystics*

Ronald Rolheiser: *The Shattered Lantern* ■

Pilgrimage (Continued from page 5)

spective to live in the West with a constant sense of the sacred. We will be journeying again in January of 2003 and we would love to have you with us.

For information on this pilgrimage please visit our website www.russillpaul.com

e-mail (Asha Paul): guha2000@cs.com ■

RECENT EVENTS

- Bede Griffiths' 9th Mahasamadhi anniversary was celebrated by the community and friends of Osage + Monastery, Sand Springs, Oklahoma on Sunday, May 19th. Fr. Bruno Barnhart, OSB Cam, enriched the gathering with his talk "Bede Griffiths' Vision of the Future." On the previous evening Fr. Bruno had shared with the community and ashramites on "Poetry and Wisdom," a subject dear to the heart of Fr. Bede. Preparations are underway already for the 10th memorial mahasamadhi celebration in 2003.
- Dawn V. Hughers of Bayview NSW Australia passed away at age 77 in her home on May 6th. Her funeral was celebrated on May 13, 2002, the Mahasamadhi day of Bede Griffiths, who gave Dawn *sannyasi diksha* in 1986 at the Kavery River near Shantivanam. ■

COMING EVENTS

Mercy Center, in Burlingame, California, will usher in the tenth anniversary of Bede Griffiths' death with "*Re-entering the Cave of the Heart with Bede Griffiths*," a two-faceted program of experience and study, extending from Fall 2002 through Spring 2003.

- The **experiential program** will include two events:
 - 1) "*Return to the Center*," a weekend intensive conducted by Russill and Asha Paul on October 5-6. "Bede Griffiths discovered that chant, yoga and ritual inspired by India's sacred culture are powerful ways of reaching deep into the soul and enabling the discovery of the true Self – the Atman – the spirit of Christ within. Drawing from the liturgy and practice of daily worship used at Bede's Ashram, these sessions will take us on an inner journey of spiritual exploration into the nature of Christ consciousness."
 - 2) "*Marriage of East and West*," a day retreat with Russill and Asha on November 24, 11 am to 5 pm. The goal of this day will be "to identify and balance the opposites within each of us, using yoga, chant and ritual."
- The **study program** will be conducted by Sr. Marguerite Buchanan of Mercy Center, whose life has been profoundly affected by contact with Fr. Bede. It will continue from September 2002 to May 2003. Text for the study will be *The One Light: Bede Griffiths' Principal Writings*, edited by Bruno Barnhart, who will introduce the book.

For further information, or to register for any of these events, contact Mercy Center, 2300 Adeline Drive, Burlingame, CA 94010, phone: 650 340 7474, e-mail: mc@mercyburl.org, Website: www.mercy-center.org
Information on the Experiential Program and on other Bede Griffiths-related events conducted by Russill and Asha Paul will be found at www.russillpaul.com ■

PUBLICATIONS

- **Saccidanandaya Namah, a Commemorative Volume, 1950-2000**, 185 pages, published by Saccidananda Ashram, Shantivanam, Thannirpalli, Karur Dist. Tamil Nadu 639 107, South India. This book has been published for the 50th anniversary of the founding of Saccidananda Ashram, Shantivanam, and in honor of the three holy founders of the ashram. Contents:
Part I. The Foundation and Ashrams.
Part II. The Founders
Part III. Flowers and Fruits
Copies are available from the publisher.
- **The One Light: Bede Griffiths' Principal Writings**, edited by Bruno Barnhart, Templegate 2001, paper, 495 pp., \$29.95. Intended as an "Essential Bede Griffiths," the book includes substantial extracts from Fr. Bede's ten books as well as lectures and articles, and some of his lively letters to *the Tablet* on current issues in the church and world. There are 102 texts in all; each is introduced by the editor. If one seeks a single consistent theme that binds these writings together, this will most likely be Bede's developing vision of a unitive wisdom. His charism as a wisdom seeker and wisdom thinker appears early in his life, continues through his conversion to Christianity, unfolds its dimension of unitive depth in his appropriation of the Vedanta and finally broadens into a synthesis of cosmic proportions.
- **A Monk In the World: Cultivating a Spiritual Life**, by Wayne Teasdale, New World Library, 237 pages, \$22.95. See the *review* in the next column. →
- **Purity of Heart and Contemplation: A Monastic Dialogue between Christian and Asian Traditions**, edited by Bruno Barnhart and Joseph Wong, Continuum 2001, cloth \$35.00. This is a collection of the 18 papers delivered during the monastic symposium at New Camaldoli in June 2000, with a preface by David Steindl-Rast and a foreword by Thomas Hand. The first three essays deal with Hinduism; Cyprian Consiglio writes on "The Space in the Lotus of the Heart: The Anthropological Spirit in the writings of Bede Griffiths." Other essays represent, besides Christianity, the Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian traditions.
- **The Privilege of Love: Camaldolese Benedictine Spirituality**, edited by Peter-Damian Belisle, Liturgical Press, 2002. Bede Griffiths, and eventually his ashram, Shantivanam, became part of the Camaldolese Congregation, with which Bede had come to feel a special affinity. Fr. Bede is mentioned repeatedly in this collection of essays, particularly in connection with his contribution to a new Christian wisdom, his role in the inculturation of monastic liturgy, and his active participation in the areas of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. ■ →

A MONK IN THE WORLD, by Wayne Teasdale

Reviewed by Russill Paul

After initiating Wayne Teasdale into sannyasa, venerable sage and spiritual master Bede Griffiths said to him "The real challenge for you, Wayne, is to be a monk in the world, a sannyasi who lives in the midst of society at the very heart of things." Sixteen years of dedicated application of this loving dictum has led to the birth of Wayne's most recent book *A Monk in the World*

What does it mean to be a *sannyasi* (the Hindu term for one who has renounced the world)? Traditionally, such a person is someone who is "girded with the wind" and stays no more than three days in one place, to avoid forming attachments. Wayne, who makes a great effort to remain true to his Catholic roots, responds: "The way of the sannyasi is a path of withdrawal, a radical extraction from the ways of selfish, purely individualistic pursuits. This withdrawal makes possible a focus on the eternal, changeless reality of the ultimate."

Throughout Teasdale's book he presents the unfolding of his spiritual path and the challenges of being a monk in the world in eloquent language that Andrew Harvey praises as "prose of luminous simplicity". Wayne identifies with the struggles and triumphs, joys and fears of most people in society and offers his insights for all of us who are insecure, vulnerable and living normal, ordinary lives in the world.

It is unmistakably clear that all of Teasdale's insights are born of authentic experience and the struggle of trying to live out an extraordinary inner life without the outer labels and garb of a formal religious person. Wayne demonstrates how this hidden mystical life can be developed and nourished in all the areas and circumstances of an ordinary existence, through personal relationships with others and in seizing opportunities that lie waiting in the commonplace occurrences of everyday life.

This book is the perfect complement to Teasdale's earlier work *The Mystic Heart*. While *The Mystic Heart* presents a panoramic vision of the world's great spiritual traditions coming together through a way of "inter-spirituality," *A Monk in the World* actually shows us how to do it. With sincere humility coupled with a heart on fire, Wayne exposes the details of his personal choices and we are shown what it takes to be in love with the Divine. Our inspiration and model is that this is a simple human being faced with the typical conditions of a working class person; unprotected and unsupported by a monastery or religious community he demonstrates common sense methods that challenge each one of us to embrace the heart of monasticism: perhaps the most sensible solution to the confusion of our times.

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THE FRIENDS OF BEDE GRIFFITHS (CHICAGO)

Nicholas Groves

Sometime in the fall of 1994, Brother Wayne Teasdale met with Nick Groves, one of our members. They discussed the possibility of founding a group called "Friends of Bede Griffiths." The purpose of the group would be to learn more about Fr. Bede and his writings, and to bring together people in the Chicago area who shared an interest in spiritual exploration and discovery. Now, ten years later, we are thriving.

What binds us together, and what do we do? We usually meet monthly, rotating between members' homes, both in Chicago and in the suburbs. Each meeting is organized around a period of meditation, a shared meal, and an exchange of the experiences and questions of our members. A few years ago we agreed not to focus on particular programs or become an action or study group. Rather, we wanted to share our lives, our questions and our struggles, even our illnesses, with each other — with help from Fr. Bede's writings when appropriate. We feel that Fr. Bede, with his great capacity for joy and surprise, would be pleased with this direction.

Past activities have included several retreats, a couple of which have been aided by the direction of Bro. Wayne, with food and musical nourishment provided by Asha and Russill Paul (Especially memorable was one retreat at which Bro. Wayne "froze time" by putting a clock in the refrigerator. It had been disturbing the meditation.)

One highlight among the programs we have sponsored was an evening prayer service offered by Russill, Asha and Nick Groves at the American Academy of Religion convention in San Francisco in 1997. We followed the rite of Shantivanam, Fr. Bede's ashram in Tamil Nadu. The revered Academy seldom includes such activities in its solemn deliberations! We also sponsored a symposium on Bede Griffiths featuring Shirley Du Boulay, from Oxford. Its theme was Fr. Bede, monasticism and the spiritual quest

A Monk in the World, (Continued from page 7)

Like Bede Griffiths, Teasdale strives to draw into his life the depth of Eastern and Western spiritual traditions, honoring both of them equally, and in doing so he succeeds in balancing the outer with the inner world. Fully engaged in a life of teaching, traveling, paying bills and making ends meet through right livelihood, Wayne finds the time to stay present to the homeless and to take a stand against social oppression whenever possible. He makes no excuses and proves through his actions that mysticism must and can find its balance through embodied actions of compassion and justice. ■

in East and West; it was held in conjunction with the International Congress of Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in May, 1996.

As Friends of Bede Griffiths we come from many traditions, including (Eastern) Orthodox Christian and Buddhist. We are eager to learn from each other. While some of us may be deeply involved in a spiritual practice or tradition, others question these traditions. We all are open to the Spirit of God, however we perceive that Spirit. Diversities, the contrasts between us, can only highlight the unity that guides us and binds us together as we meditate, share, laugh and support one another.

What does the future hold for the Friends of Bede Griffiths? One thing is certain. The direction we receive will surprise us, so we must remain open.

Christa jaya, jaya. Namō, namō.

To contact us: Chicago Friends of Bede Griffiths, c/o Mr. Nicholas Groves, 1303 Seward St., Evanston, IL 60202 phone: 847 492 1275 ■

Augustine & the Wisdom of the West (Continued from page 1)

describes Augustine's response to his reading of the works of Plotinus. What we observe here (ch 3) is the encounter of Augustine, the Christian theologian, with 'identity'; that is, nonduality. Plotinus teaches that a person must turn inward to find God, who is identical with the inner reality of the soul. The soul, at its core, is divine. Augustine, despite his deep and lasting love for the wisdom of Plotinus, turns back at this point; he finds himself compelled by his Christian belief to insist upon the distance between the Creator and the creature. God is to be found not simply by turning inward to the center of the soul but, further, by turning *upward*. (Confessions, Bk. 7) According to Cary, Augustine "invents" the private, inner space of the soul, where this upward movement takes place. This step will have lasting consequences for the West — and not only the Christian West. Philip Sherrard has written that the separation of God and the human person — so that God is no longer understood as the ontological core of the person — is the fateful Augustinian step which has separated the anthropology of western Christianity from that of the (thoroughly Platonist) Christian East.

A second characteristic orientation of Augustine which will prove momentous for the future is his conviction that God is intelligible rather than incomprehensible.

This commitment to the intelligibility of God is Augustine's great idiosyncrasy, setting him apart from the rest of the Nicene or orthodox traditions, which unanimously affirm the incomprehensibility of the divine nature, participation in which is mediated to us only by the flesh of Christ." (Cary, p. 45)

Augustine turns away, then, both from the apophatic 'way of unknowing' and from the language of identity or nonduality. Indeed, according to Bernard McGinn, Augustine does not write of divine *union*.

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Augustine (Continued from page 8)

Before the twelfth century in the West, union was not the basic category for the description of the experience of the presence of God in this life. Augustine, despite his dependence upon Plotinus, knows nothing of union. This well may hint at a polemic reaction of the Christian mystic to the pagan one. The African doctor speaks of "touching Eternal Wisdom," or "beholding Eternal Wisdom," or "cleaving to [divine] unity" in this life, but not of union itself. ("Mystical Union in the Western Christian Tradition," in *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn, 61-62.)

According to Louis Bouyer, Augustine also left behind the *gnosis* of the Greek Fathers: their participative but objective understanding of the mystery of Christ. In its place, he initiated the more subjective or personal tradition of spirituality which would predominate in the West.

Augustinian wisdom, in spite of certain affinities, is something other than the *gnosis* of the Greek Fathers. It is distinguished particularly by its psychological, reflexive orientation: it is not the mystery of God in Christ that it has directly in view, but the mystery of ourselves, which God, which Christ, help us to unravel...An element, we should not say precisely of subjectivism, or of immanentism — this would be to force things unduly, but certainly of anthropocentrism and... of psychocentrism has been introduced. Its emergence, perhaps, will trace out the main line of the alienation of the Latin West with regard to the ancient tradition — that is, what we call the Eastern tradition. (*The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, 493)

The consequences of this turn, as well, will reach far.

It would be foolish to make Augustine either into a Protestant or a modern Idealist in advance. It remains true that neither Protestantism nor the idealistic religious philosophies would have been conceivable in a world in which the influence of St. Augustine had not been practically predominant. (Bouyer, *ibid*, 493)

Augustine's way to God is the way of the intellect (not a merely rational or conceptual mind but the higher, contemplative mind). The light in which the intellect knows spiritual realities, or 'ideas,' is God. Instead of a union with God in the darkness, Augustine envisions a participation in God through the knowledge of the 'intelligibilia' or eternal truths. Yet this is a knowledge in which the divine Light itself may occasionally be seen in itself — an experience of contemplation which is the highest human fulfillment.

It is as if in this orientation of Augustine we behold in its beginning a fundamental option of the western Christian tradition: away from the incomprehensible, toward the intelligible; away from mystery, toward the mind; away from the nondual, toward that which can be understood

and, perhaps, rationalized, structured, administered, controlled; the fateful movement forward from the eastern balance between 'formlessness' and 'form.'

At the same time, in Augustine's view of the participation of the human intellect in the divine Light itself — in God as Light — there is implicit a profound Christian wisdom, open at once to a direct experience of the "One who Is" and to a knowledge of all creation in the divine Light. In this "Illumination" theology of Augustine, perhaps we can even see the beginning of an incarnational Christianity in which the human person 'naturally,' actively and freely, constitutes the presence and the creative activity of God in the world. Here in seed is the liberating vision of a Thomas Aquinas and a Karl Rahner. In leaving behind him the 'Eastern' vision of an original unity, Augustine initiates the journey toward a personal and active participation in which the divine Unity is realized creatively in this world. But this is a step in which we also leave behind us, eventually to be forgotten, a spiritual Paradise. It is like a second, historical, Fall, in which we gradually learn to adapt ourselves to a world of darkness, of existential nakedness, a "land of unlikeness." In the midst of the dark turbulence of our contemporary history, we have desperate need to recover the interior light of that lost kingdom, of which the New Testament tells us that we are rightful citizens.

Augustine's 'faculty psychology' (or anthropology) generated a spiritual theology in the West which was structured in terms of memory, intellect and will, and in which the person or self as a unity appeared infrequently, at certain peak moments of union with God. The spiritual life was conceived as a relation of the conscious mind and heart with God, but consciousness itself, in its simplicity and unity, was seldom considered. The tendency was towards rationalization, analysis, and towards an intentional relationship with God as Other. The principle of relationship predominated over the principle of identity (or baptismal deification in Christ) completely in the West, with very few exceptions, until the time of the Beguines and of Meister Eckhart. The seed of an active participation in the divine Being remained dormant, apparently, until the time of the Scholastics.

The Christian theologian Augustine's ambivalent encounter with Plotinus — the pre-eminent exponent of explicit nonduality in the West — anticipates the East-West dialogue (and particularly the Hindu-Christian dialogue) of our own time, when once again we encounter explicit nonduality and the conception of a Self which is one with the Absolute. Bede Griffiths has pointed again and again to this teaching of the realization of the *Atman* at the heart of India's mysticism. Once again we experience the encounter of two worlds: the world of the divine One and the world of the Personal God or, on our own level, the meeting of the unitive Self and the individuated person-in-the-world. This time, the western partner belongs to a modern world in which the process initiated by Augustine has been carried to a precarious extreme. The individual person and its creative potential

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The Golden String

Augustine

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have been highly developed while the original unity has been totally eclipsed. It seems truly a meeting of opposites — yet we know that this polar difference is a sign of the magnitude — the height and depth, length and breadth, as Paul might say — of the human person growing in God.

This time around we have an opportunity to get behind the limiting presuppositions of Plotinus and of Augustine and allow the New Testament to open itself from within in the light of its own intrinsic nonduality (most apparent in the Gospel and First Letter of John). And today we experience within ourselves both the creative ferment of the Spirit and the convergent momentum of history.

Certainly it is time for Christian scribes — or *jnanis* — to awaken and bring forth from their treasury, as Jesus says, at once things old and things new. The Christ-event is freshly manifested today as the person that we are awakens to its East and its West: to its deepest identity in the divine ground and to its embodied, historical actuality in this world, on the way to realizing one Humanity, the ‘Cosmic Person’ which emerged finally as the center of Bede Griffiths’ vision. ■

Visit

the Bede Griffiths Website:

www.bede.griffiths.com

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