

The Golden String

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THE 1999 PARLIAMENT AT CAPE TOWN: A VISION OF HARMONY Wayne Teasdale

It seems that the 1999 Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town captured the attention, imagination and hearts of Africans, especially of Capetonians. South Africa and Cape Town really enthusiastically embraced the Parliament and the 8,000 or so participants during the eight days of the session from December 1-8th. The diversity was breathtaking with some two hundred religions represented, numerous organizations and NGOs. Although the Parliament had to compete with the excitement over the World Trade Organization and its opponents who took to the streets of Seattle, it was major news every day in Africa, Asia and Europe. The American media displayed its usual myopia with things spiritual, and hardly noticed the historic event, with the exception of *The New York Times*, and a few other newspapers.

The Cape Town gathering was marked with significant controversy caused by Thabo Mbeki's refusal to meet with the Dalai Lama. The South African president caved in to Chinese pressure not to meet with the exiled spiritual and temporal leader of Tibet. Mbeki was criticized by many for this moral failure and political blunder, including Desmond Tutu. Some point out that Mandela would certainly have met with His Holiness, as he did when he was president. Feeling the heat from the fallout, Mbeki modified his position, and said he would gladly meet His Holiness as part of a six or seven person delegation of religious and spiritual

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JESUS WALKS ON THE WATER: A PROPHETIC SIGN

John Martin Sahajananda

The episode of Jesus walking on the water is found in the gospels of Mark and Matthew. It appears to me that this act of Jesus has a very important significance for our times. Traditionally it has been interpreted as a proof that Jesus is the Son of God, as it is expressed in the gospel of Matthew. You know very well that the gospels were written after the resurrection experience. All the words, actions and sayings of Jesus are colored by that experience.

God is the fullness of life. A person who is in communion with God speaks the words of fullness and manifests the life of fullness. Every word that comes out of his mouth, every story that manifests this person, every parable that he or she narrates, contains the whole truth. When we understand one word, one parable, one episode, one miracle, we understand others also because the part contains the whole and the whole contains the part. This is the beauty of the words and actions of Jesus, or for that matter the words and actions of any person united with God. For me the story of Jesus walking on the water contains the whole gospel. Through this action Jesus reveals his true mission and the ultimate destiny of every person in his or her spiritual journey.

For us Indians, walking on the water has an infinite significance and it is a revolutionary act. It does not reveal the power of the person or the greatness of the person, but humility in the highest grade. The spiritual destiny of every person is to enter into the womb of God and be reborn. This is the true birth which Jesus demanded from Nicodemus: to leave the womb of his spiritual mother and enter into the womb of God. Jesus guides his disciples on various levels. In the first place he guides them on the road. The road signifies a moral code according which to live in the world. On the earth we need a solid road. But this road takes us to the sea, to the infinite. Nobody can make a path on the water, on the sea. One needs a boat. This boat is the boat of belief. Every religion has her boat in the sea of God. We can say that every religion is like a boat. Jesus is the teacher, the head of this boat who guides his disciples in the infinite sea of God.

At one point, Jesus does not go with his disciples in the boat but leaves them to go by themselves. "And he saw that they were distressed in rowing, for the wind was against

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Parliament

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leaders from the Parliament. The Dalai Lama declined, mentioning a schedule conflict.

The Parliament opened on December 1st with an AIDS awareness event in the Company Gardens with the AIDS Quilt prominently held up for all to see. AIDS is a huge problem in South Africa with 20% of the population infected with HIV. The Parliament wanted to draw attention to this critical matter by identifying with South Africa's suffering. From Company Gardens, the site of the South African Parliament, thousands of the participants marched to District Six, a sacred place for South Africans in their struggle to overcome the apartheid regime. On the way, they were greeted with placards of Evangelicals and fundamentalist Muslims who had found rare common cause in their fear and opposition to the interfaith movement. A few days later, four of the Muslims had actually approached Parliament leaders to apologize because they discovered the positive nature of what was happening in Cape Town. In an open field in District Six, under the subtropical heat, the Parliament celebrated its opening on the African continent.

There were more than 700 programs, including lectures, workshops, presentations and performances, and symposia. One of the most fascinating of the latter was the Science and Religion Symposium entitled *At Home in the Universe*, a meeting demonstrating the growing congeniality between scientists and sages. There were nine plenary sessions accenting themes like sharing sacred space, human rights, understanding and cooperation, celebrating life, creative engagement, meeting essential needs, and the Next Generation's nurturing transformative community.

The Next Generation, or the youth, had several forums to express themselves in, and had twenty-five members in the Parliament's Assembly, composed of four hundred representatives from the religions, the guiding institutions and significant organizations, activists and scholars. The dance and musical events were spectacular, and the noteworthy stars were the Taiko drummers from Japan and the Zulu dancers who appeared at various points during the Parliament's eight exhaustingly rich days.

One of the highlights of the Cape Town gathering was the appearance of Nelson Mandela at one of the evening plenaries. His humility, warmth and graciousness contrasted with some who were too serious and self-important, indeed, who took themselves much too seriously, and wished to bask in his glow of brightness and celebrity. The former president's speech was substantive and brilliant. He drew attention to the role religion had played in South Africa's struggle against racism and the apartheid system. He remarked how the religious schools were the only means of blacks, colored and Indians achieving an education, since the best schools were reserved for the white minority. His words were meaningful in an age when it is common for



people to criticize and even reject organized religion.

The Dalai Lama's presence and participation represented another high point, though his contribution was limited to the last day, December 8th. He arrived the day before, and during a news conference he was asked about the value of the Parliament. He responded by pointing out that it was definitely a positive force, but that it needed to walk the path of action, and not simply words. Later in his address at the final plenary, he reiterated his plea for concrete action, though never specifying what kinds of action he meant.

In the Parliament Assembly where he arrived on the morning of the 8th, His Holiness spent two wonderful hours with the twenty-five members of the Next Generation who were chosen to interact with him, expressing their concerns and hopes, on the basis of essays they had written reflecting on the Parliament's document, *A Call to Our Guiding Institutions*, a substantive challenge to the leaders of the political, economic, educational, media, religious, scientific areas, and other segments of culture that influence our life in the world. The Dalai Lama was his usual playful but wise self. He and the young people clearly enjoyed themselves.

The Assembly itself, along with the Next Generation, were engaged in considering ways to implement the *Call*, to disseminate it far and wide, and to offer ideas for programs related to the *Call* in service to the planet. The Assembly itself was divided into tables of nine or ten people, and the conversations were useful, often profound, and providing a lot of ideas for the Parliament as it considers how to proceed with the document, which is regarded by many as an innovative, imaginative and bold step by this third Parliament.

There was some fascinating and powerful political symbolism and links formed. When His Holiness spoke in the Assembly and later in the mayor of Cape Town's luncheon for the Assembly members, the entire group spontaneously broke into refrains of *We Shall Overcome*, thus linking the Tibetan struggle still to be won with the victorious campaigns of South Africa and the Civil Rights movement of America. A further link was provided to the successful struggle of India for her independence in the presence of Ela Gandhi, the granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi, and a member of the South African Parliament representing a district in Durban.

This Parliament was memorable, like the previous two of 1993 and 1893 in Chicago. I believe the Parliament has now emerged as a world force, and 2004 will be even more significant providing it can incarnate its teaching in practical guidance in precisely how we can transform consciousness on this planet as the *Global Ethic* asks and the *Call* requires. If the reaction of Cape Town's taxi drivers is any measure, the Parliament will be enormously influential in the future. These drivers often remarked to many of us that: "This Parliament has changed our lives forever!" ■

Jesus walks on the water (Continued from page 1)

them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. And he wanted to pass by them.” (Mk 6:48) Jesus does not need a boat, he does not need a road, a way, because Jesus is one with the sea of God. The sea will protect him. He does not struggle like his disciples. Perhaps by walking on the water Jesus is telling the disciples who are struggling in the boat, “Come to me all you who labor and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest. Look at me and learn from me how light I am. I can walk on the water. You can find rest in me, because my way is not a way in the boat. My way is a way without a way. It is easy because the whole sea is my way. My law is easy because it is the law of liberty.” Liberty is not a quantity, but quality. (see Mt 11:28-30)

To walk on the water one must be very light, very humble, without 'ego', because the ego cannot walk on the water. The ego is heavy, like a stone. It needs a road, it needs a moral code. It needs a boat of belief. It always needs a way, a vehicle and a leader. The ego which tries to walk on the water will be drowned. The ego which tries to fly will fall to the ground. But our real 'I' which is created in the image and likeness of God is light like a feather. If God is the water, our real 'I' is ice on the water. It can walk on the water, it can fly in the air. In fact it is the water that carries it. It is the wind that controls it. Every religion must help its followers to leave the unreal 'I', the ego, and discover their real 'I.' But unfortunately every religion creates an artificial 'I.' Christianity creates an 'I' called 'Christian.' Hinduism creates an 'I' called 'Hindu', etc. Every religion has its boat in the infinite sea. Today we have so many boats in the sea of God which promise people to take them to eternal life.

When the great religions are breaking up, people can hold onto even a small piece of wood floating on the sea. But every boat becomes an obstacle in the sense that it is the boat that separates one from direct contact with the sea of God. The religions, which are meant to help people to unite with God, end up being an obstacle to that union. This can be a tragedy for the religions. Before Vatican II, Christianity was saying that Jesus Christ and Christianity are the unique way of salvation. Later this Jesus and Christianity were identified with the Catholic Church, with the famous dictum, “Extra ecclesia nulla salus” (Outside the Church there is no salvation). But today the theology of religions has passed from ecclesiocentrism to christocentrism, from christocentrism to theocentrism, from theocentrism to the centrality of 'Reality,' to accommodate non-theistic religions. Christianity, which was in an affirmative position, has taken up a defensive position. But when Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life', he did not mean it in the way that we interpret it, but meant the exact opposite.

The way of Jesus is truly the only way to God, but this way of Jesus is not a way in the boat. The way of Jesus is not the boat that denies the validity of all the boats. The way

of Jesus is not a boat beside the other boats, as some say today. The way of Jesus is without a boat. The way of Jesus is direct contact with the sea so that one does not need a boat. When someone walks on the earth, that one leaves traces for the others. One makes a road for the others. When one prepares a boat to lead others on the sea, one becomes a founder of a religion and thus attracts others to enter the boat. To walk on the road left by others and to travel in the boat prepared by others until the end of one's life is to live a second-hand human existence. Perhaps it is necessary at the beginning of one's spiritual life. But when one walks on the water, one does not leave any traces for the others to follow. Everyone walks into the fresh waters, into the original waters, everyone lives an original life. No one will be a disciple of the others.

The master leaves the boat, which means that he renounces his position of being a master. In this sense, in eternal life there will be no master and there will be no disciple. The master dies in order to give life to his disciple, the disciple dies in order to give life to his master. The master and the disciple become friends. It appears to me that Jesus wanted to tell his disciples, “I no longer want to call you my disciples, I want to call you 'my friends'. I do not want that you always call me 'master' because the Father is the only master, but I want you to call me 'friend.'” Jesus came to give his life for others and to give life to others. Just as the Father has life in himself, he has granted the Son to have life in himself. (Jn 5:26) I have come so that they may have life and have it abundantly. (Jn 10:10) Walking on the water is an act of giving life to his disciples, an act of inviting his disciples to the true life.

Walking on the water is an act of great humility. Who can be more humble than the one who does not want to be a model for the others? Who can be more humble than the one who does not leave any traces for the others to follow, but gives the possibility of entering into the original water of life? Just as the fish in the water make their journey without leaving any traces for others to follow, just as the birds in the air make their journey without leaving any traces for the others to follow, so also Jesus manifests his true humility. The road which he had made leads to the sea. The boat which he had made leads to the one who walked on the water. With his presence on the water Jesus invites all his disciples: 'Leave the boat and enter into the sea of God.'

In the gospel of Matthew, Peter responded to the call of Jesus. He was attracted by the life of Jesus. He left the boat—which is leaving his ego—and could walk on the water. But that experience was too much for him. Immediately his previous self came back, and he began to drown. The boat is the symbol of the life of belief. The belief has some content. To walk on the water is the life of love. Love does not have any content. It is union. It is oneness. In love there are not two but one. 'I and the Father

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Jesus walks on the water (Continued from page 3)

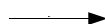
are one,' says Jesus. (Jn 10:30) To pass from belief to love, one needs faith. To leave the boat is faith. To leave the content of belief is faith. Faith is empty. It is the content that makes the boat and the ego who travels in the boat. When the content is left behind, the ego which depends on it also disappears. If the ego is not there, who enters into the water? In this emptiness one realizes that one's true self is already in the hands of God. So it is not so much leaving the boat and entering the water as realizing that one's true self is already walking on the water. Otherwise, the moment one thinks of walking on the water, one gets frightened.

Thus faith is the way from belief to love. St. Paul says that there are three things, faith, hope, and love, but love is the greatest of all for the other two disappear. I think Jesus and Peter reveal something more profound to us. Jesus reveals the ultimate destiny of humanity in relationship with God. Peter, as the representative of the disciples of Christ, and of the Church, has attempted to leave the boat and become a friend of Jesus, at least for a few seconds. He has already shown the next step that the Church of Christ must take. Peter did not betray his companions by leaving the Church. He discovered a growth in his relationship with Jesus, and he responded generously.

There is no betrayal when there is a growth in one's relationship with God. The true betrayal is when one does not respond to the growth but clings to the boat and binds the master and the companions to the boat and says that this is the way of Jesus. But this step, this path, which is not a path, to eternal life, is very narrow - not in the sense of space, but in the sense that this step cannot be taken collectively; each person must take this step alone. Each one should leave his ego and discover his true self. Each person should enter into the sea of God, into the original life. On the road and in the boat one can travel as a group, with one's parents, brothers and sisters, wife, husband and children. But to enter into the water is a personal act. One has to leave everyone; not necessarily externally, but internally. This path to eternal life is not only narrow but very short because this path can be trod only moment by moment. The eternal life, paradoxically, can be lived momentarily. But when one discovers the relativity of the roads and the boats, this choice of the eternal life becomes a choiceless choice.

Today we are in a situation where there are so many boats in the sea of God. Some are in the name of Christianity and others are in the name of other religions. We are trying to find unity among these boats in the name of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, but no boat is sufficient to contain the message of Jesus. Jesus is out of these boats and is standing on the water and invites everyone. "Come to me, all you who are struggling in the boats, and I will give you rest. I am the way, the truth and the life. My way is without a boat.

Leaving the boat is the only way to enter into life



without end and into the truth without limits. This is the only hope for the future of humanity. The message of Jesus is very clear. Only we need the courage to open this path to all. The beauty of the road is that it knows its limitation. It points us to the sea and says, you can stay with me until you are ready to take the plunge. The boat is always open. When one is ready one can enter into the sea of God. Christ has three aspects: first he leads us on the road through his moral teaching; secondly, he leads us in the boat of belief in him and in God; finally he invites us even to leave the boat and to become one with God. But when the road and the boat become absolute, then they become evil and block the growth of people in relationship with God. How liberating would it be if Christianity were to take the place of John the Baptist and show Jesus walking on the water and tell her followers, "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"? ■

**REFLECTIONS ON SYNTHESIS
AND THE DHARAMSALA
DIALOGUES** by Wayne Teasdale

A most extraordinary conference occurred in the tiny hill station of Dharamsala situated in the outer Himalayas, the highest peaks of which range around 17,000 feet. Dharamsala, the home of the Dalai Lama and his government-in-exile, welcomed and embraced 110 of us from various parts of the world, who came together, joining His Holiness and other Tibetans for a week of intimate conversations that were interdisciplinary, cross-cultural and interreligious. These dialogues were held mostly at the beautiful Norbulingka Institute, a gem of Tibetan culture about ten miles from Dharamsala in the Kangra valley below.

Thirty-five of the participants were eminent leaders representing eight fields: science, religion and spirituality, economics and business, government, media, education, politics, and medicine. Some of the figures included Fred Alan Wolf and Amit Goswami, who are quantum physicists, astronomer and astrophysicist Eric Carlson, Clifford Matthews, a biochemist and one of the most significant thinkers in the area of origin of life studies, John Mack of Harvard's Medical School, Elizabeth Sahtouris, evolutionary biologist, Rolf Carriere of the World Bank and UNESCO, Duane Elgin of the Millennium Project, Rajiv Mehrotra of the Foundation for Universal Responsibility (New Delhi), David and Fran Korten from the Positive Futures Network, Gordon Davidson and Corinne McLaughlin from the Center for Visionary Leadership, musician, composer, writer Don Campbell, Indian musician and composer Russill Paul, vocalist Ricky Byers, Michael and Justine Toms of New Dimensions Radio, Thom Hartmann, author, Vandana Shiva, Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology

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Synthesis

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(New Delhi), Sulak Sivaraksa, Buddhist writer and reformer, Ravindra Varma, the Gandhi Peace Foundation (New Delhi), futurist writer Barbara Marx Hubbard, and cultural thinker Jean Houston, to mention some. The remaining members were observers, media and staff. The entire event was filmed by Wakan Film from San Francisco, calling on the skills of a sixteen member film crew. New Dimensions and the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives also recorded all the proceedings.

The idea of the Synthesis Dialogues came to me several years ago, and was inspired by Bede Griffiths. Father Bede was always talking about the coming new age and a new synthesis. In one of his later books he actually attempted to formulate what the new synthesis might look like. In that book, *A New Vision of Reality: Western Science, Eastern Mysticism and Christian Faith*, Bede had narrowly conceived the parts of the synthesis, but he didn't realize that it had to be much more inclusive of all aspects of reality and life. For some years I've wanted to honor his vision and continue his work. With that in mind, in September 1997, I spoke to His Holiness about it, and we decided to have the Synthesis Dialogues in Dharamsala two years later. When I came back to the States, I asked two friends of mine, Barbara Fields Bernstein and Brian Muldoon, whom I had known from the Parliament of the World's Religions, to organize the conference with me. They agreed, and the Synthesis Dialogues were born.

What follows is not particularly systematic, but a series of points related to synthesis and/or our dialogues in Dharamsala. Some of these will be actual principles of synthesis; others will be examples of seeds of synthesis, that is, germinal insights of integration that need cultivation and elaboration. Still others represent the more existential level of our meeting. In the weeks, months and years ahead, we will have so many opportunities to develop these and other insights.

Principles of Synthesis

1) The Primacy of Consciousness. What many of us brought to Dharamsala, what we heard or contributed there, and certainly presupposed, is a mind-dependent reality, cosmos, nature, being and life. The primacy of consciousness is self-evident upon careful reflection on human experience, for there is only a world, nature, cosmos, and our life if we are in fact first *aware*. A number of us have been cognizant of this insight for many years, perhaps as early as our undergraduate days. In our book, *Readings in Synthesis*, Peter Russell, Amit Goswami, and I address this essential principle of synthesis, and it came up a number of times during our meetings. Amit mentioned it; Eric Carlson, and I as well. This point presupposes further that pure objectivity is impossible. There is only *shared subjectivity*, that is, an agreed upon common experience.

2) Consciousness has an inner nature: compassion, love, and concern guided by wisdom, or practical insight

into what is required in all situations.

3) Consciousness is the basis of the interconnection of all beings and reality in this cosmos and in any other world or realm. There is interdependence culturally, politically and economically because there is first and more fundamentally, an ontological interconnectedness. Because this ontological integrity exists, everything is intrinsically relatable and thus synthesis is possible and inevitable. Synthesis is the metaphysical reality of unity that is uncovered over the millennia through insight and realization, research and reflection.

4) Because consciousness is the basis of reality it is also the Unified Field, that which holds everything together, more narrowly in physics, the four forces: gravity, electromagnetism, the strong and weak nuclear forces.

5) Because consciousness is the absolute and the source of unity and integration of knowledge and reality, all things are intelligible, a basic presupposition of science itself. Intelligibility, that everything can be understood, since all things follow certain laws within a vast system of order that is intrinsic, is the eye of consciousness itself, though compassion, love, concern and sensitivity constitute its heart.

6) Cosmos, nature, reality, being, and life are part of a System of systems. The various disciplines of knowledge access different parts of this immense System or systems within the System itself.

7) Historically, that is, in how it operates in time, synthesis is a progressive clarification of the real, and a more adequate uncovering of interconnection.

8) Synthesis reveals that all knowing is *one*, but with many forms: mystical, religious, scientific, philosophical, literary, poetic, aesthetic, musical, intuitive, psychological (including dreaming), parapsychological, and natural.

9) Synthesis on a human level—and on an interspecies level—is realized community, and this is an expression of compassion and love in action, with community as fruit.

10) The real synthesis is in the heart, in human or natural spirituality, what His Holiness communicates so well by his presence, and is so eloquently expressed in his book, *Ethics for a New Millennium*.

11) This synthesis of the heart integrates all areas of knowledge with human spirituality, with that natural openness and response to all sentient beings from a center of deep sensitivity, a completely aware and active, or concrete compassion. This is love in action. We witnessed this a lot at Dharamsala.

12) Synthesis is integrative knowledge grounded in love at the service of all beings.

Seeds of Synthesis

What follow here are some examples of insights that need to be elaborated later, but which came up explicitly or implicitly.

1) All knowledge has to be grounded in natural or human spirituality. There is no knowledge for the sake of

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Synthesis

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knowledge in our time, the Age of Synthesis.

2) The awakening of the corporate world to a realization of its responsibility to the earth and all people, thus a synthesis between the desire for profits and the larger welfare. Such an awakening presupposes an understanding of the harm the business world has done everywhere, especially to the environment and the masses of destitute people.

3) Synthesis of art, music, and media with human or natural spirituality. We witnessed this dramatically and existentially at Dharamsala.

4) The mantric seed of synthesis as an action and goal is *only connect*. Justine and Cliff had both spoken of this insight.

5) Erica Teel had identified a seed of synthesis in the integrating of love and generosity in community service.

6) Kenny Fields had spoken of the bipolar entity of consciousness and environment.

7) John Mack contributed an important seed of synthesis -what he calls an ontological gold mine—in the recognition of a vast extraterrestrial intelligence seeking relationship with us on this planet.

8) Fred Alan Wolf added the insight about the spiritual nature of the universe which unites science and spirituality.

9) Amit Goswami shared the seed of the vast consciousness that is the basis of all reality and that is clear to many working in the area of quantum physics.

10) Eric Carlson applied that same consciousness and intelligence to the universe itself, and saw it operative at every level of the cosmos. Thus, the infinitely small and the infinitely great come together in boundless mind, or the Divine itself.

11) Rolph Carrier referred to the necessity of integrating meditation and the new story of the universe into the curriculum.

12) Barbara Marx Hubbard spoke of quantum transformation, uniting our past with our unlimited future, while Michael Toms mentioned a synthesis with the present in the realization of where we have all come from and where we are all going, i.e., the Source, the Divine. Dharamsala reminded us of these directions.

13) John Purcell contributed the insight that love itself is a seed of synthesis because it always seeks harmony and what unites us.

14) Satyagraha on Tibet as an example of compassionate action, and so, of synthesis-in-action, integrating our knowledge with the necessity of political action, that is, a synthesis of economics, politics and moral awareness with the heart in compassionate struggle. In this struggle our goal should be *Free Tibet and Save China!!!* Such an approach sets aside the ‘us against them’ mentality that fuels conflict.



A Buddhist/Christian Seed of Synthesis

Here I want to briefly suggest what I see as the primary point of integration between the Dharma and the Gospel. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This principal insight, taken for granted in all branches of knowledge and human life itself, recognizes the integrity of being, reality, nature, life and the cosmos. The parts display an exquisite interconnection and intelligence. The whole that is greater is this intelligence itself. The Divine Presence and reality is this whole, or wholeness, this integrity of being, and this vast intelligence. And this integrity of being is consciousness itself. Therefore, it can be said in profound truth: the Divine is the matrix, the container of dependent arising, the ontological situation of panentheism, not to be confused with pantheism. Panentheism is the realization that everything is happening in God, in the Divine, or the Source, or in infinite consciousness itself. This represents a metaphysical synthesis between all the theistic traditions with Buddhism, and is an example of synthesis applied in the area of religion and spirituality.

On a purely human level, the truth of synthesis can be seen in the immensely fruitful examples of saints in both traditions, and in all the others. A saint has the same qualities in every tradition, suggesting that though the paths are many, the goal is the same.

The Human, Spiritual Dimension of Dharamsala

So many of our participants were ecstatic in their sharings about the spiritual depth of experience, the deep stirrings and realizations that they had. Our journey to the mountain of Synthesis was a metaphor for the spiritual journey itself. We took an arduous pilgrimage together; our consciousness was altered, indeed, expanded. We participated in a holistic experience of synthesis together: human, philosophical, scientific, mystical, within the heart, welling up from our natural capacity for human spirituality. That is where we met, and were profoundly nourished. A personal experience occurred for all of us, while India and Tibet were the containers.

The Future

The Age of Synthesis has definitely been launched through our extraordinary event. What we have done is simply to make this age explicit, for its stirrings have been heard for decades. We have only begun the process of synthesis, and it is a never ending task. The birth of this new age was not easy, but it has become a reality, and we cannot go back to the way things were before. We can only go forward into the vastly rich future, seeking more and more occasions to push the world toward greater and greater harmony and integrity in knowing and compassion in action.

All our attempts at synthesis must impact the necessity of human or natural spirituality, that is, must facilitate its growth in our lives. Transformation of the heart is the goal, and eventually, far reaching changes in the structures, with the goal of creating a civilization with a heart, or a new order

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Synthesis

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that is established on human or natural spirituality. Synthesis is an agent of such monumental transformations of self and society.

Finally, the method in our conversations is what can be simply called *synthesis dialogue*. This means that whatever the topic under discussion is, the participants build on what is said, or bring in related topics and materials. We have a lot of work ahead of us.

In an audience with His Holiness before our departure from Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama expressed great satisfaction in the participants and how the dialogues had gone. He had been part of five sessions with us, and resonated in a profound way with our group. We decided with him on further steps, i.e., a small meeting in the States in 2000 and then a large conference in Europe in 2001. We agreed that the Age of Synthesis has been launched!

In an e-mail to the organizers upon our return, Jean Houston summed up the momentous experience of Synthesis:

You have wrought a kind of miracle and for that I am very grateful. Chaos and cosmos contended, and cosmos won! When the entelechy of a new idea and aspiration enters the realm of becoming then entropy tests its validity, refining it in the crucible of passionate meetings. I believe that all the things that occurred, all the things seen and done—buses and Buddhas, breakdowns and breakthroughs, the gift of the Absurd, and the grace of deep communion—have given all who attended a greening of our minds and spirits. Now, to turn the page, come together in whatever ways we can, and discover the ways Synthesis can emerge within and between all our fields and findings. That is the task. ■

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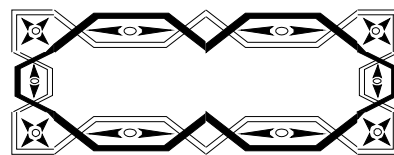
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NEW PUBLICATION:

The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions, by **Wayne Teasdale**, with a Foreword by the Dalai Lama. New World Library, 1999, 272 pages, cloth, \$22.95. In his new book, Wayne Teasdale describes what he calls *interspirituality*, a comprehensive spirituality that draws on the mystical core of the world's great religious traditions. The author proposes that what so often forms the basis for conflict can really be a meeting place of understanding and commonality. For Teasdale, comparing religious traditions is more than a matter of developing tolerance. In their meeting, a greater truth can be realized. Here he shows the power of a universal spirituality and its seven practical elements: solidarity with all life, moral capacity, nonviolence, self-knowledge, selfless service, simplicity of lifestyle, daily practice and serving as a prophetic witness in the causes of justice, peace, and protecting creation. (from the Publisher's press release). ■

NEWS ITEMS

- Shirley du Boulay's biography of Bede Griffiths, ***Beyond the Darkness***, won third place in the Catholic Press Association Book Awards.
- Bede Griffiths' ***The Golden String*** has been selected as one of the hundred best spiritual books of the twentieth century by HarperSanFrancisco, the religious publisher. Selections were made by Philip Zaleski, editor of ***Parabola***, from nominations made by a panel of spiritual writers and editors. The book that received most votes from the panelists was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's ***The Phenomenon of Man***. Also included in the list were Thomas Merton's ***The Seven Storey Mountain*** and ***New Seeds of Contemplation***, Aldous Huxley's ***The Perennial Philosophy***, Shunryu Suzuki's ***Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind***, and Huston Smith's ***The World's Religions***.
- ***Wisdom of the Cloister***, an anthology of monastic writings published by Doubleday, includes about 13 pages of Bede Griffiths' writings.
- In the Czech Republic, Bede Griffiths' books are now appearing in translation, along with the works of Anthony DeMello SJ, Hugo Lassalle SJ and Raimon Panikkar. ■



**SELF-SURRENDER AND SELF-
REALIZATION IN BEDE GRIFFITHS**

Bruno Barnhart (Concluded)

There is something further of importance in Bede's experience at the time of his stroke in late 1990: that is the *descending* movement which I mentioned earlier. It is a descent into darkness and earth and the body.

When I thought of surrendering to the Mother, it was certainly Mary, because I often say the 'Hail Mary,' but also it was more the Black Madonna that came into my mind. The mother who is mother of the earth as well as the heavens—Mother Nature, as a whole. I also thought of my own mother, and motherhood in general.⁷

It's interesting that his original conversion was definitely against the will of his mother, who abominated the Roman Catholic Church. She had said that the worst thing that could happen to her would be one of her children becoming a Roman Catholic - which her favorite son, Alan (Bede) precisely did. The influence of the 'mother archetype' was very strong in Bede's life, whether by opposition or by attraction, and here in 1990 this is once again the force that is operating. Here is a mother who is much greater than his own mother.

And this is a descending movement; it is the Black Madonna, related to the earth, seemingly identical with the earth. This, I think, is a radical turnaround from the view of the spiritual life which Bede had been developing for many decades. That was, basically—following the classical spiritual traditions of both East and West—an ascending journey, an ascent to the atman, to the unitive Self, to the One. No longer do we hear Bede saying, as he had so often, "Go beyond, beyond...body and senses, the mind, to the atman, the deep self, the unitive Absolute." This is no longer the language of pure interiority but a language of integration and incarnation. And it is under the influence of this energy field which is the feminine.

Bede, of course, had always been seeking integration, synthesis. But in his great synthetic essays - *Marriage of East and West, New Vision of Reality*, the ascending paradigm is dominant. His final synthesis on the level of thought, of theological vision, was *NVR*, still in the ascending mode. Now, after his stroke, we have an integration on another level, that of the body. Bede's synthetic vision, of course, had included the body from the start, in his early writings. But it did not *happen* until the end. There is a kind of collapse into reality, into truth at the time of the stroke. This is what we hear in the interviews published in book form as *A Human Search*.

The descent is not only from the head into the heart—we might expect that—but from the head beyond the heart to the lower chakras, as Bede expresses it. All the way to the level of physical sexuality. In some way the whole bodily reality—and so the whole human reality—is being

integrated with the conscious mind at this time, and it is not theory but experience. It happens with a collapse, with something that happens to him as if from outside. It is as if the whole journey were reversed; not the masculine ascent of energy but the feminine descent; not a human discipline but a divine action. First it seems like a death, and then there's a resurrection on a lower and deeper level, an integration around a lower center of gravity.

And it is at this time that Bede has his great experience of nonduality! After Bede has written about the unitive Absolute and the unitive Self, and sought the advaitan experience, for forty years in India, it finally embraces him in the catastrophe of this physical collapse, his stroke.

Bede is disabled only for awhile by the stroke. For the next two years, he seems to be more active than ever. His mind is functioning clearly but in a much more simple way, without grand schemes. He is centered on a deeper level—and now deeper means more physical.

This process of change since my stroke has been very gradual. It is going on all the time...It is partly a physical transformation. The body itself is undergoing great changes. My problem before was that I was living largely from the head; and then after the stroke I got down into the heart. But now it goes right from the heart to all the chakras, right to the root chakra. The root chakra is the body's connection to the earth. What I feel now is that the Spirit is coming down. I always think the *sahasrara* [the supreme chakra] is above the body, and it descends to the head. Then it goes down from the head through the throat to the heart. And now it is descending to the belly, which is very important. The hara - that is where all the blood is - is in the belly. It is your flesh and your blood that this has to penetrate. It then moves down through the sex region. That is very important too, because that tends to be suppressed. In my own experience it was very much repressed. I am rediscovering the whole sexual dimension of life at the age of eighty-six, really. And that also means discovering the feminine. So the whole of this dimension, which I had been seeking for a very long time, is now sort of opening itself up to me.

I think the Mother is gradually revealing itself to me and taking over. But it is not the Mother alone. It is the Mother and the Father, the male and the female, sort of gradually having their marriage.⁸

There is a psychological issue here too. It appears that Bede's psychological integration is taking place at the same time as his spiritual breakthrough. He is himself aware of this and speaks elsewhere of the event happening simultaneously on three levels of body, psyche and spirit.

In late November 1992, just a month or so before the stroke which ended his life of teaching, Bede gave a talk to a monastic community in India on the Tibetan Buddhist tradition called *Dzogchen*. Bede had become very interested

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Self-Surrender

(Continued from page 8)

in Dzogchen during these final months. It is typical of Bede that at age 86 he is making another new discovery: coming upon a spiritual tradition which now seems to him to be a great Key. In this talk we have some further indications of the development of his thinking at the end of his life.

The teaching of Dzogchen is that you don't have to go through all the discipline, you don't have to do tantra. You can get a sudden enlightenment, and it comes normally by transmission (that is, from the teacher)... Dzogchen speaks of the ultimate state as the Primordial State existing from the beginning, hidden in your body, your feelings and your limitations.

In Bede's conception, the shape of the journey is changing from the classical ascending progression toward the realization of atman—the spiritual Self—through meditation and detachment, to something else. His new paradigm looks like a communication of grace, a visitation of the Spirit, in which the primordial fullness is realized in the whole of your humanity: body, feelings and limitations, as he says.

Bede goes on to criticize what he calls the 'meditation movement' for *leaving the world behind*. Do you see, once more, the ladder of spiritual ascent collapsing, corresponding to what has happened to Bede himself? In Dzogchen, he continues, the whole person is integrated into the supreme: the physical and the psychological and all. And then immediately Bede turns to the New Testament and points to the Christian equivalent of this Dzogchen conception in the Pauline *pleroma* or fullness.

There are one or two things in Bede's writings that have troubled me. First, he very seldom mentions baptism, Christian initiation. I think that baptism, called *illumination*, was the primordial contemplative (or unitive) experience in Christianity. Secondly, there is Bede's repeated insistence that Jesus never claimed to be God. Strictly speaking, that may or may not be true. But I had been unable to understand Bede's urgency about it. What seemed too seldom suggested in his writings was the transmission to us through baptism of the divine life which filled Jesus - the event of *divinization* which is at the heart of Christianity. One reason why Bede was reticent about this was his concern to stress the *universality* of 'salvation', of the realization of the Self, the atman. That Self is the core of everyone's being, not only that of the baptized.

But secondly, I think that Bede was devoted to the classical *ascending* path to the unitive Absolute, which implied a leaving behind of the lower or more exterior levels of reality, in a progression toward the supreme reality. Now his own overwhelming experience has led him to a different view. Let me end with the conclusion of Bede's very late talk on Dzogchen.

There is one aspect of Dzogchen which has a very



close analogy in Christianity. In Dzogchen, the Primordial State, the Supreme Reality, is realized suddenly without the preparation of meditation or yoga. In the Christian tradition, also, contemplation is a gift of God. It is not something which we acquire by meditation and personal effort. It is pure 'grace.' It comes to those who are ready to receive it, not as something acquired by human effort, but as a gift of grace. It is God's action in us, not our own action. In the Buddhist or in the Hindu tradition this may come as a gift of the guru who awakens the disciple by his presence. For the Christian it comes as a gift of the Holy Spirit, given by Christ as the Sat-Guru, the supreme teacher, who communicates his own inner life to his disciples.¹⁰

It is in the new birth of baptism that the plenitude of this inner life is received and the 'Primordial State' of a new creation is first realized, according to the earliest Christian tradition. Contemplative experience can be understood, in the Christian context, as a further awakening to this Supreme Reality.

Bede's doctrine of realization of the Self through self-surrender has come to the end of its evolution. It has become clear that the divine outpouring—'grace'—is the beginning and the end of the story.

NOTES:

7. *A Human Search*, p.89

8. *ibid*, p.97-98

9. Bede Griffiths, 'Dzogchen and Christian Contemplation,' *AIM Monastic Bulletin* no.55, 1993, p.123

10. *ibid*, p.125 ■

INTERSPIRITUALITY Wayne Teasdale

When the spiritually mature representatives of all the traditions are placed together and compared, what becomes obvious is that they are the same in the qualities and fruits evident in their respective examples. They are all morally actual beings, living from a depth of moral awareness that has become second nature. They understand that the happiness of each person depends upon the happiness of everyone else, thus realizing their interconnectedness with the totality of sentient beings....

....The enduring evidence of the reality of a universal mysticism, or a global spirituality, which is an interspirituality, or intermysticism, is the effect each form of authentic spiritual life has on its practitioners. This evidence is as persuasive as it is practical. A Christian saint is no less a hero of virtue than a Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish or Sufi saint. Each one of these types shares in the universal spiritual laws that require a deep change of heart, which is also a change of direction in the problem of self-cherishing; it is a movement from self to others. I do not believe that ethics alone can achieve this change of direction; it has to be supported by spirituality, the inner resources of the heart that can precipitate a revolution in the consciousness of the person. ■

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COMING EVENTS

- February 25-27. Sr. Maurus Allen OSB will be leading a seminar, *The Spirituality of Bede Griffiths*, at Blessed Trinity Shrine Retreat Center, Holy Trinity, Alabama.
- June 6-11. Mercy Center, in Burlingame, California, presents *In the Cave of the Heart*, a contemplative seminar retreat offering an opportunity to experience what the Hindu way offers to contemporary Christians. The retreat's emphasis will be on experiencing a Christian ashram with its rhythms of silence, prayer, yoga, chanting, talks, ritual, and community. Friends of Bede and other Westerners engaged in Eastern practice will bring their wisdom, experience and insights to the seminary. The music of Russill Paul will be woven throughout the week. Presenters include Bonnie Greenwell, Ph.D., Bo Lozoff, Wayne Teasdale and Louis Vitale ofm. An interview will be conducted with Judy Walters, a nurse and close friend of Bede. Asha and Russill Paul will join Olga Luchakova, M.D.Ph.D. and other presenters in a panel. Workshops include:



The Crucial Role of Diet in the Spiritual Life, by Alzak Amlani; *Entering the Light Body* by Olga Luchakova, and *Personal Daily Ritual* by Asha Paul. The retreat will conclude with a Eucharist celebrated in the Indian Rite by Fr. Bruno Barnhart For information on registration, call 650 340-7474

- July 7-14. *Women's Contemplative Prayer: East and West*, the Assembly 2000 of the **Association of Contemplative Sisters (ACS)** at the Mater Dolorosa Retreat Center in Sierra Madre, California. For this 30th anniversary of its founding, the Association has prepared an "in-depth experience of woman's contemplative prayer through the major religious traditions of East and West." The keynote speaker, Sr. Angela Sadlier, O. Carm is from Washington, D.C. Workshops include: *Western Contemplation: St. John of the Cross*, by Sr. Constance Fitzgerald, OCD; *Buddhist Insight Meditation*, by Dr. Mary Jo Meadow, SFCC; *Jewish Spirituality and Kabbala Meditation* by Sandy Buttler; *Hindu Meditation and the Ashram*, by Sr. Pascaline Coff, OSB, and Judy Walters; *Sufi Prayer*, by Amineh Pryor and Jo Ann Haymaker. ■

The Golden String

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