



The Golden String

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TEILHARD DE CHARDIN AND BEDE GRIFFITHS Robert Hale

Teilhard was born in 1881 in France, 25 years before Bede Griffiths' birth in England. And he died in 1955 in New York, the year Fr. Bede traveled to India and 38 years before Fr. Bede's death there. Not only were they of different generations and different nationalities, but they never met. Teilhard was never influenced by Fr. Bede. But what is interesting for students of both these great spiritual leaders is that Fr. Bede became more and more familiar with Teilhard, quoted him several times, and wove important elements of Teilhard's teaching and vision into his own.¹ Fr. Bede praises Teilhard, along with Sri Aurobindo, in the highest terms:

This conception of an evolution of the universe towards an 'omega point,' an ultimate state, in which life and consciousness converge on the plenitude of life and consciousness in God, has been put before us in recent times in the Christian tradition by Teilhard de Chardin and in the Hindu tradition by Sri Aurobindo. These would seem to represent the most profound insights of modern man, working within the tradition of orthodox religion, to penetrate into the ultimate meaning of life².

Certainly there were significant differences between Teilhard and Fr. Bede besides their nationalities and generations. Teilhard was a Jesuit, a paleontologist, optimistic all his life about the essential contribution of

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SCIENCE AND RELIGION: TOWARD AN INTEGRAL VISION Wayne Teasdale

Some years ago, while on a walk in Big Sur, California with Rupert Sheldrake, the topic of the relationship between religion and science came up. He is both a great scientist, though regarded as unorthodox by his critics, and a person with a deep spirituality. I asked him if these two ways of seeing the world would ever heal the rift between them. Rupert turned to me and said: "The future of science and religion will be a congenial one." Everywhere we see evidence of this congeniality flowering: in books, symposia, workshops, dialogues etc. it is explored...

When science and religion finally unite their efforts, the consequence will be nothing less than a revolution in culture affecting every aspect of our lives. For centuries these two ways of knowing and being have been at odds, held in an uneasy contrast by a mutual suspicion, competition and often open conflict. Their relationship got off to a difficult start because of fear of science and an intolerant attitude in the Church during a long period when it exercised political and cultural dominance, subsequently reinforced and hardened by an equally intolerant and arrogant attitude by some scientists, though many have always been open to faith. In this history there has been fault on both sides, but now a new age is being born in which these two powerful forces are coming together in a common pursuit to discover a new collaborative approach to knowledge, wisdom and action. I believe the friendship now developing between science and religion is here to stay, and I'd like to suggest that the rift has been primarily an epistemological one, and that healing it will require a recognition of the multivalent nature of knowing, a knowing that has its one ground in consciousness itself as the "place" of all things.

Sometimes this multivalent nature of knowing, that is, that there are many ways of knowing, i.e., religious, mystical, scientific, or empirical, aesthetic, interpersonal, psychological, intuitive, cosmic and historical, to name a few, is manifested within the same person. Oftentimes scientists are exceptional in their fields and are also mystics and poets, or musicians, having impressive intuitive capacities beyond the usual...

But the scientist who is also a mystic, even though such a one realizes the mystical is valid and ultimate, is not permitted to take into account mystical knowledge within the range of scientific methodology, even though the

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Teilhard and Bede (Continued from page 1)

science to the emerging mysticism. Fr. Bede, on the other hand, was an English Benedictine monk who became deeply identified with Indian spirituality, and at least in his earlier years was very critical of science and technology, as the root of all modern evils, and praised pre-industrial civilizations and cultures³. Teilhard also looked to the past, but as a paleontologist, interested in the first emergence of *homo sapiens*, and convinced the picture was not at all idealistic, and precluded any “paradise” nostalgia. His theological and spiritual emphasis was on matter, the world, to stress their evolving “spiritualization,” to integrate them in a Christian unitive vision. Bede tended to focus rather on the spirit, and he sought to promote its rediscovery, beyond body and psyche, but always stressing the need of their full integration. Though Teilhard spent years in Asia, his purpose was not spiritual exploration but rather his scientific research, and the development of his own Christian vision. He never penetrated deeply into the Asian religions themselves⁴. Fr. Bede, on the other hand, became more and more profoundly knowledgeable about and even shaped by Hinduism as well as Buddhism.

But if there were significant differences between the two, there were also striking similarities, explaining Fr. Bede’s appreciation of Teilhard. Even in their formative years there are interesting parallels: both were strongly and positively influenced by their capable, loving mothers; both as sensitive and highly intelligent young men benefited from outstanding educators, and would be supported in their later years by wise, affirming friends. Both were Roman Catholics (Fr. Bede through conversion), and both became vowed religious and ordained priests. Both, for all that, became more and more critical of the institutional church, and sketched a wisdom ecclesiology that privileged the emergence of a new people of deep spirituality and insight.

Both felt that the articulating of a modern mystic vision was the primary need and objective of our time, and the central purpose of their own lives. Both felt that this needed to be paradoxically a unitive vision, in which “union differentiates.” Thus Bede writes:

Teilhard de Chardin always emphasized the principle that union differentiates. We become more ourselves as we enter more deeply into relationship with others...We do not lose ourselves, but we lose our sense of separation and division and discover our integral oneness in the One Reality. This is essentially a mystery of love...The whole process of evolution, as Teilhard de Chardin saw it, is a process of personalization. The ultimate goal of humanity is a communion of persons in love...This is the meaning of Christian doctrine of the Trinity, that the ultimate Reality...is a communion of love⁵.

Bede in his later years, also through the influence of Teilhard, became committed to the integration of science

(especially the “new physics” and Jungian psychology) into a dynamic unitive vision, “in a new evolutionary perspective”⁶. Kathryn Spink rightly notes that “the principle of transformation was one which under the influence of Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin [Fr. Bede] would eventually apply to life in general – [thus Fr. Bede wrote]: ‘I see life in terms of transformation, matter being transformed into life, life into consciousness, and consciousness into divine experience’”⁷. Here Fr. Bede directly reflects the vision of Teilhard, though in more accessible terms than Teilhard’s neologistic language about cosmogenesis evolving into biogenesis into noogenesis.

The mature visions of both men were rooted in their early deep religious experiences of nature; for Teilhard, as for Fr. Bede, “this nature mysticism...had its roots in childhood”⁸. For each, the rediscovery in spirituality of the feminine was of urgent importance for a reclaiming of the deep, intuitive, receptive capacities of the spirit, of all of creation, and also of the divine⁹. For each, love became the “unifying energy”¹⁰ of cosmic and spiritual evolution, as of the very life of the Trinity. Both grew in their understanding of the cosmic Christ as “Point Omega” and fulfillment of all of creation¹¹. Fr. Bede echoes Teilhard in affirming that this is the key affirmation of Scripture for us: “This conception of Jesus as the Cosmic Person or Cosmic Lord, who is God’s self-manifestation to the world, gives us the key to the New Testament understanding of the relation of Jesus to God”¹². These two spiritual giants of the past century, and the influence of Teilhard on Fr. Bede, offer us much for further study and meditation.

Notes:

1. See for instance Bede Griffiths, *Christ in India* (Springfield, 1984), pp. 174; 187-188; see also Bede Griffiths, *Vedanta and Christian Faith* (Los Angeles, 1973) pp 56-57; 73; see also Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality* (Springfield, 1990), pp. 93-95, 258-259; 273, etc. I am indebted to Bruno Barnhart, OSB, Cam, for references and much help with this article, though I must bear the responsibility for the basic analysis.

2. Bede Griffiths, *Vedanta and Christian Faith*, pp. 56-57.

3. Of course the dominant models of science and technology tended in Fr. Bede’s earlier years to be mechanistic and materialistic.

4. But Teilhardian scholars are noting more and more appreciation of the East in the later Teilhard, and his recognition that “the new mysticism of unification or union must ultimately transcend the traditional religious heritage of the West...[thus] the necessary, in fact essential, contribution of Eastern religious insights to a newly emerging mysticism.” Ursula King, *Towards a New Mysticism: Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions* (N. Y., 1981), p. 204. See also B. Bruteau, *Evolution towards Divinity: Teilhard de Chardin and the Hindu Traditions* (Wheaton, 1974); and see M. Choisy, *Teilhard et l’Inde* (Paris, 1964).

5. Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, p. 94.

6. Bruno Barnhart, “Bede Griffiths” in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (Oxford, 2000), p. 284.

7. Kathryn Spink, *A Sense of the Sacred: A Biography of Bede Griffiths* (Maryknoll, 1988), p. 74. As we have seen, Fr. Bede himself links Teilhard and Aurobindo

8. King, *op. cit.*

9. See for instance Henri de Lubac, *The Eternal Feminine: A study on a Text by Teilhard* (London, 1971). Regarding the feminine and Fr. Bede, see for instance Shirley du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness: A Biography of Bede Griffiths* (N.Y. 1998), pp. 36, 114, 156, 177, and all of chapter 18:

“Breakthrough to the Feminine.”

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THE FUTURE OF RELIGION IN BEDE GRIFFITHS' VISION

Douglas Conlan

I wish to reflect on the vision for religion and spirituality espoused by the late Dom Bede Griffiths, an Oxford educated, Benedictine monk who lived for the last three decades of his life at his ashram in South India. He travelled to India as he put it, "to find the other half of my soul". It was a coming home to himself, and to a perennial wisdom which was contemplative, intuitive and unitive that went beyond structures and the exclusively rational mind. It is of these matters that he spoke publicly across Australia in 1985 and again in 1992.

I recall one occasion in 1992 when, during an interview with the Dalai Lama in Perth, Father Bede said to His Holiness that it may very well be that in spite of the sufferings of his people, the Tibetan *Diaspora* could be the means whereby Christians might recover the mystical dimension of their faith. He said this in the light of the many Christians who found their way to his ashram in India, and the fact that Tibetan Buddhism represented a living tradition of mysticism, whose teachers were available for seekers in their quest for religion's answers to questions relating to meditative and contemplative practices that could help uncover the meaning of life.

Dom Bede saw that the Eurocentric civilization of the past was and is giving way to a global civilization, in which Christianity will no longer be seen as an entirely separate religion, but one that "has a place in the context of the religious traditions of humanity as a whole." He worked tirelessly for the possibility that East and West could meet in science and mysticism, and he developed his thought with the help of his friend, the scientist Rupert Sheldrake, who spent a year at Dom Bede's ashram writing his book, *A New Science of Life*. Through daily exchanges he had with Sheldrake, Dom Bede came to understand the changes in contemporary science and its new understanding of the universe, which can no longer be perceived as consisting of solid bodies moving through space and time, but rather, according to quantum theory, as a field of energy pervaded by consciousness. On this platform he saw the potential for religions meeting, where myths and symbols may be re-interpreted. Here a new language, in which these symbols

and myths may be communicated, could be explored and offered to today's seekers.

It was in Perth, during that hour-long meeting, that the Dalai Lama became excited over Bede's sharing some of the highlights in the history of mystical theology. This, coupled with his ability to talk of several of the great characters of the early Church such as Dionysius the Areopagite, and Evagrius of Pontus, made His Holiness jump alongside Dom Bede and declare: "Well, you know, I never knew Christians could think like that!"

Bede Griffiths held that in the future Christianity would be seen in relation to Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Sufism, as well as the primordial religions of the world. He perceived the so-called "new consciousness" as moving humanity beyond the exclusively rational mind with its awareness of separate entities and its dualistic approach. In his growing appreciation of science, he referred to the work of theoretical physicist David Bohm, who speaks of the "unity of connectedness" of the "implicate order" of the entire cosmos: meaning that the cosmos is always unfolding – giving rise to the "explicate order" of particles, forms and structures, and it is here that quantum physics meets the non-dualistic traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism.

Significantly, Dom Bede's view was that as we move beyond the present religious forms and structures, we begin to see that behind and beyond their diversity there is an underlying unity, and that all religions are expressing symbolically something that cannot be expressed in rational terms. For him, the attempts to do so, whether in catechisms or official statements, are bound ultimately to fail. With regard to his own church, he said that the truth of the Roman Catholic Church, like that of other churches and religions, transcends all rational, discursive thought. He would, during his lunch time meditations at the ashram, occasionally refer to the famous utterance of Saint Thomas Aquinas, who upon having had a vision one day, remarked that all that he had written was as straw compared to what he had just seen.

Dom Bede held that, while the mysteries may not be expressed exclusively rationally or logically, they may be symbolized. He said that scientific theories and religious doctrines are both symbolic structures, opening the human mind to the transcendent. The symbolic structures within each religion have their value of course, but for Dom Bede all symbolic structures have limitations because they are culturally and socially conditioned.

The value of Christianity for Dom Bede was its unique and profoundly historic structure. All matter and humanity is gathered together in the person of Jesus, and transformed in the One Reality whom he called Abba, Father. Yet for Bede one of the main limitations of Christianity was its very exclusivism due to its historical dimension. He held that this in particular had to be transcended, or be allowed to die, as we individually move into the mystery of Christ. It was for Bede a matter of

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10.) King, *op. cit.*, 198, 206.

11. See for instance Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (N.Y.: 1961), pp. 257ff. See Robert Hale, *Christ and the Cosmos: Teilhard de Chardin and the Cosmos* (N.Y., 1972). Regarding Fr. Bede, see the soon to be published anthology study by Bruno Barnhart (ed.), *The One Light: Bede Griffiths' Principal Writings* (Springfield, 2001), sections 11, etc.

12. Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, p. 124. ■

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extreme urgency that we, in the West, realize the opportunity that this age presents for being open to the religious traditions of humanity, particularly of the East, and discovering their unity in the depth dimension which underlies them all: the mystical dimension.

Father Bede celebrated this opportunity in a special way: he was, above all, a friend to seekers of whatever religious faith, or none! He turned no one away, spoke to all new-comers before the following night prayer, listened with his heart to all who approached him with special problems (ashrams have traditionally drawn people with problems), and answered all his mail from the world over. This feeling for friendship had some unusual expressions. When the Dalai Lama first saw his old friend in Perth, he rushed up to him and ran his fingers through Father Bede's long white beard. Father Bede, always the Oxford don, was taken aback by this familiarity, but as soon as he recovered from the shock his face crinkled into an appreciative smile. On leaving that meeting, Father Bede took me by the arm and with a tear in his eye, said: "You, know, I do think he rather likes me!"

As with the religious traditions of the East, Christianity also has a long history of mystical teaching. During his 1992 visit to Australia, Dom Bede spoke to me of his rediscovery of Tibetan *Dzogchen*, the tradition of 'direct transmission' of contemplation, as but one way in which Christians could find common ground with members of other religions. He made the point that perhaps thereby Christians might explore the depths of their own tradition. I recall his mentioning that two teachers of Tibetan Buddhism, the late Lama Anagarika Govinda and his friend the Dalai Lama, had been significant in his own understanding of the psychological depths and practice of meditation.

Dom Bede, the contemplative and mystic, understood that the present world structures, the old civilization, are breaking down. But that within this dying there can be a rebirth of meaning, penetrated by a new consciousness. Science today, he would repeat, recognizes that order comes out of chaos. When old structures break down, and the traditional forms disintegrate, precisely then - in the chaos - a new form and a new structure, a new order of being and consciousness emerges. Perhaps this is one reason why he was always able to comprehend and bear the chaos that, with the many characters and their individual personality traits, was frequently the normal style of ashram life in India.

For Dom Bede, the old is always dying and the new is always emerging, and that which is new socially and culturally transforms the old. We can still take and hold the forms of Christianity, but Bede believed that we can also accept expressions like the coming Buddha *Maitreya*, or the last *avatara* of Kali. Every religion looks forward to a time when the end will come, and the new birth will take place.

Whether as a hidden mystic living quietly in a mud hut in India, or a prince of the church living in a palazzo in

EVENTS AT OSAGE MONASTERY

Pascaline Coff

Tibetan Lama Ringu Tulku Rinpoche and his uncle Thondup Seten visited Osage+Monastery on Saturday, November 26th, joining the monastic community for noon meditation, dinner and a sharing afterwards. Rinpoche is of the Kagyu lineage and resides in Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim, India. Besides teaching in his native Sikkim in India and Europe, Rinpoche teaches Buddhist Madhyamika philosophy and Tibetan language at Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado. He is a translator and the first of the Kagyu lineage to obtain the Acharya degree at Varanasi University. He is the recipient of the Lopon Chanpo PhD from the International Nyingma Society. Rinpoche is the author of *The Lazy Lama* series, published by Snow Lion. The Osage community was happy to share with Rinpoche the many exchanges they have enjoyed with Tibetan monks and nuns both at Osage and in India and Tibet, as well as exchanges with the Dalai Lama.

Fr. Amal Doss, originally from Tamil Nadu in South India, went searching the web for information about ashrams. He was astounded to discover one (Osage Monastery) in the USA intimately connected with Bede Griffiths' Shantivanam. He himself had grown up only a few kilometers from Fr. Bede's ashram, but he has been a missionary and away from his native country for more than twenty two years. Stationed now in St. Thomas Parish in Pointe a la Hache, Louisiana, and Assumption Parish in Braithwaite, he visited Osage in mid-November hoping to learn something about beginning an ashram in the West. He hopes to start one near his two parishes, as a source of renewed spirituality and vitality for his parishioners. Sr. Joretta invited Fr. Amal Doss to offer an Indian rite Mass on one of the mornings of his visit. Though he was here at Osage for only a few days, he found all that he was looking for and more. ■

The Future of Religion

Rome, or one of the millions of men and women of the earth, we all, I suggest, long for unity, peace and harmony. Like Dom Bede, we long to come home to ourselves. I remember discovering a small statement from C.S. Lewis gathered together with other sayings in Dom Bede's hut. Lewis said that the thing he longed for most of all in all his life was to discover the place from where all the beauty came. During his life Dom Bede Griffiths was a living example of one who also desired that wisdom, and for this reason drew so many to himself and his thought.

This is the text of the Eremos Address, given by Douglas Conlan in Adelaide, November 19, 2000. Aspects of the text were drawn from articles already published in the Eremos and Sea of Faith (Australia) magazines. ■

**A VIRGIN, A CHILD,
AND THREE WISE MEN**
by John Martin Sahajananda

There are three archetypes that are connected to the Christmas event: a virgin, a child and three wise men. When Mary gave birth to the child Jesus, three wise men came from the East to worship the child. The prophet Isaiah said, "Look, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel which means "God is with us." (Is 7:14). These three archetypes have not only historical value but also a psychological and spiritual value — more important than the historical because it affects our lives today.

Who is a virgin? Physically, a virgin is one who has had no sexual experience. She is innocent and ignorant. Spiritually, a virgin is one who discontinues the God of memory and opens herself to the God of eternity. Spiritually, as long as we give continuity to the God of memory within our consciousness, we are not virgins and thus we are unable to give birth to the God of eternity.

Who is a child? A child is one who is not conditioned by any experience. A newborn child has no name, no language, no religion and no culture. A newborn child has an unconditioned mind which is open to all possibilities. In this sense, a child is like a virgin. As the child grows it is conditioned by its parents, society and culture. It is given a name, a language, a religion and a culture. It loses its unconditioned mind. It loses its 'virginity.' A child is innocent and ignorant; but a person who has become like a child, though innocent, is also wise.

Who is a wise person? A wise person is not one who has accumulated knowledge, nor is he one who knows all the scriptures by heart, not one who has written commentaries on the scriptures, but one who has realized the limitation of all knowledge and all scriptures and looks into the sky of eternity for wisdom to appear. A wise person is one who has reached the boundary or limit of his own religion and realizes the relativity of those boundaries. To know the relativity of one's religious boundary is also to know the relativity of the boundaries of other religions because Truth has no boundaries. A wise person has no boundaries to defend or extend. He has no system of Truth to propagate, but he only invites people to open themselves to the Truth that has no boundaries. The three wise men of the Christmas story had realized the relativity of their knowledge about truth and looked into the sky for the star of wisdom. They left their boundaries on order to find Truth.

ParaVidhya and Aparā Vidhya

The Mundaka Upanishad speaks of two types of wisdom: *apara vidhya*, inferior wisdom, and *para vidhya*, superior wisdom. To the first category belong all the four vedas (revealed scriptures), all the systems of philosophy and their associated subjects. The second is the direct experience of God through which the sages see God

everywhere. The first is the indirect knowledge of God and the second is the direct experience of God. The direct is called *para vidhya* and the indirect is called *apara vidhya* (It is a very devastating definition for those who base their religion only on the revealed scriptures). In this sense a virgin or a child or a wise person is one who sees the limitation of the God of the *apara vidhya* and opens to the God of *para vidhya*. Thus the nature of virginity, childlikeness and wisdom are the same.

Why does God need a Virgin, a Child, and Wise Men?

Truth or God has two aspects: the manifested, revealed and immanent; the unmanifested, unknown and transcendent. The revealed or manifested becomes the God of memory, the God of the past. When Moses asked God his name, first God replied "I am who I am." This is the transcendent aspect of God, but Moses could not relate with that aspect. So God said, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." This is the manifested aspect of God, the God of memory. Moses could relate to this aspect of God. But God as "I am who I am" transcends our memory. God is like an ever-flowing river that never runs dry. The God of memory is like a pot of water taken from the river. When the God of the past is absolutized, then the door to the living God is closed and direct contact with him is lost.

The difficulty with the God of memory is that he creates division within humanity. The God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob divided humanity into Jews and Gentiles. He had boundaries to defend and extend. In the Kena Upanishad it is said that he who says that he knows God does not know him. He who says that he cannot know him also does not know him. But he who says that he knows God but cannot say that he knows him, knows him. To know the God of memory, the God of the scriptures, and at the same time to be in a state of unknowing, is the essence of being a virgin, a child and a wise person. It is for this reason that God needed a virgin, a child, and a wise person who could stop the continuity of the God of memory and give birth to the God of eternity who could unite humanity. Memory or tradition without contact with the living God becomes stagnant and irrelevant, and loses its spiritual vitality and symbolism. It can even become violent like Herod who was afraid of losing his power, position, authority and continuity and killed the innocent children who appeared to be a threat to his continuity. Christmas is not only an individual experience but is also a collective one. It is a collective experience in which a religion becomes a virgin by renouncing her desire for continuity and gives birth to a child who will be greater than she. This child will not be called a son or daughter of a religion but a son or daughter of God. Christmas is a joyful event because it is the birth of a human being who is greater than religion.

Jesus is a Virgin, a Child and a Wise Man.

Jesus was born into the Jewish tradition. Judaism was his spiritual mother. It was his way, his truth and his

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life. He was nourished by the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob. He drank from the well of Jacob. But slowly he discovered the limitations of his tradition which divided humanity into Jews and Gentiles, which barred people from entering the living waters, the living God. He heard the call of God like Mary and the wise men, to become a virgin, to become like a child and to become like wise men and give birth to eternal wisdom, the God of Eternity. This brought him to the moment of repentance or conversion, of rebirth; the moment of becoming like a child, which is the moment of his baptism. The moment of baptism was the turning point in his life. It was the day of Christmas for him. It was the moment of God's birth in him and his rebirth into God. Jesus came out of the womb of Judaism, out of the God of memory, and entered the universal presence of God. He gave birth to the God of eternity. He saw the star of eternal wisdom. He discovered that God was no longer the God of the Jews alone; rather, he was the God and the Father of the whole of humanity and of creation. His experience had broken down the walls of division and created one God and one humanity.

Now Judaism was no longer the way, the truth and the life for him. He no longer followed a way outside. He no longer had a religion to which he could belong. He no longer had an external system of truth to believe or to propagate. He no longer had a role-model or model of life to follow. He himself was the way, the truth and the life. He could say boldly, "I am the way, the truth and the life." He entered the kingdom of God, the realm of originality and creativity, and became an original person. In the realm of originality no one enters the traces left by others and no one leaves traces for others to follow. Each one lives an original and creative life. Just as the birds make their voyage in the sky without leaving any traces for others to follow, and the fish make their journey without leaving any lasting traces for others to imitate, so also a person who enters the kingdom of God lives such a great and humble life.

It is great not to enter the traces left by others—not to live a second-hand human existence. It is humility not to leave traces for others to follow—not to reduce others to second-hand human beings. This statement of Jesus was the summit of his spiritual journey. A person who says, "I am the way, the truth and the life" will not become a way, a truth and a life for others. (The statement of Jesus that "no one comes to the Father except through me" should be interpreted in a very liberating way and not in a narrow sense). He can only invite people to discover this potentiality for themselves and declare "I am the way, the truth and the life." Jesus had opened this door to every human being. The spiritual revolution and the fulfillment that Jesus brought to his spiritual tradition is this dignity of a human being who has the potentiality to transcend the religious boundaries and declare openly that "I am the way,

the truth and the life." The good news of Jesus Christ is that human beings are greater than religions. Religions are only like nests (not cages) where human beings can find security, protection and nourishment until they are ready to fly into the freedom of the infinite sky. It is this experience which Jesus called the kingdom of God.

Seek First the Kingdom of God.

"First of all seek the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all things will be added unto you" (Mt. 6:33). These are Jesus' immortal words to humanity. The primary purpose and goal of our human existence is to seek the kingdom of God and to live according to its law of freedom. This kingdom of God is to grow into our full potentiality where every human being can say boldly, "I am the way, the truth and the life." Jesus Christ also has given the way or the key to find or to enter this kingdom of God. It is the way of **repentance** or **conversion**, the way of **rebirth** and the way of **becoming like a child**. Jesus announced his good news, saying, "The kingdom of God is at hand; repent" (Mk 1:15). He told Nicodemus, "Unless you are **born again** (or born from above or born of the Spirit) you cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:1-10). He told his disciples, unless you **become like children** you cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Mt 18:3). Though expressed differently, the essence of these three ways is identical.

Repentance or conversion, rebirth or becoming like a child, is not a change from one religion to another religion. It is to come out of the womb of religions and to enter the universal presence of God where one discovers that God is the God of all and that a human being is greater than religions. It is discovering the potentiality of a human being who can say boldly, "I am the way, the truth and the life." That would be the experience of Christmas in one's life. According to Jesus, every human being is called to have this experience. Christmas is not just a historical event that happened in the past; it should become a spiritual event in everyone's life. In order for this experience to take place one needs to become a virgin, a child and a wise person. ■

The Bede Griffiths Website will be found at www.bede.griffiths.com Features include:

- **Biography** of Bede Griffiths
- **Photos:** Bede Griffiths and Shantivanam
- **Satsang:** questions & answers from the Master
- **Meditations:** brief, profound texts from Bede Griffiths
- **Interreligious Dialogue:** news, events
- **Camaldolese Institute** for East-West Dialogue
- **The Golden String:** selected articles
- **Wisdom Christianity:** introductory essays
- **BG Sangha** (UK): newsletter selections
- **Feature Text:** BG, Christianity and the East
- **Resources:** books, audio and video tapes ■

SHANTIVANAM: FIVE WEEKS IN THE FOREST OF PEACE Cyprian Consiglio

Some years ago, our Camaldolese Prior General Emanuele and our Fr. Innocenzo of San Gregorio, in Rome, who was then a member of the General Council, asked me to consider going to Shantivanam, our monastic community in South India, which had grown to international recognition under the leadership of Bede Griffiths. He had brought himself and the community of Shantivanam under the protection of the Camaldolese Congregation in the 1980's. Fathers Emanuele and Innocenzo specifically wanted me to go to offer some assistance to the community with liturgy and, even more specifically, with chanting the psalms. This request was echoed later by Fr. George Chandy, the young prior of Shantivanam, when we met in Italy in 1999. Even more pointedly, George told me that they wanted to start chanting the psalms using their own music, *Indian* music, and could I help them? With Don Emanuele's blessing and the permission of our prior and domestic council, I set about preparing myself for my pilgrimage to India.

My own experience made me feel somewhat prepared for the mission: besides my background in music and liturgy, I was an avid student of Bede Griffiths in my first years as a monk. I have said often that it is he who formed my monastic spirituality. I met him only once, during what was to be his last visit to America. At that time I heard him speak and we had the briefest of conversations. On the heels of that encounter I pored through every writing of his that I could find, and in the end I wrote my Master's thesis on some elements in his thought. As part of the preparatory work for that writing, I delved at some length into Fr. Bede's own relationship to Hinduism, and how he came to understand western theology in a new light due to his study of and love for Indian philosophy and theology.

Shantivanam is in South India, in the state of Tamil Nadu, near the village of Kalithalai, along the banks of the sacred river Cauvery, the "Ganges of the south," in the diocese of Trichy (Tiruchirapalli). There are currently six monks living there, with four young candidates away studying, and three other postulants in the wings. Immediately I understood that an ashram has a different sensibility about it than a typical western European monastery. It's really a little village, with the monks surely at the center of it, but surrounded by others who live or work there, Hindus and Christians, westerners and easterners alike, many of whom refer to it as "our ashram." Indeed, many of the day-to-day chores are overseen by two lay people, a woman named Prema and a young man named Prabhu, two very trustworthy and capable Hindus. There is a constant, quiet bustle about the place as each goes about his or her own duty. There are also the numerous guests, hospitality being one of the main features of an ashram. Nor

are the guests kept at arms' length: they eat with the monks, often helping to prepare and serve the food; they offer to do many little manual chores around the ashram. Twice a day a bell rings for tea, when all gather for conversation; and most importantly, three times a day—at dawn, midday and evening—in keeping with the tradition of the Hindu *rishis*, all activity stops for prayer.

The liturgy at Shantivanam, having been mostly shaped by Father Bede himself, is already strong and beautiful, combining as it does elements from the Syrian rite, along with ritual movement adopted from Indian traditions and readings from various spiritual heritages, mainly Indian. There is also already a strong musical tradition of *bhajans*, mantras and chants in Sanskrit, Hindi, Malayalam and Tamil, the local language. It was quite clear to me immediately that these were not typical Camaldolese-Benedictine-Roman rite liturgies, nor should they ever be!

For my work, the very first week I arrived I began studying with a local music teacher, a ninety year old woman whom everyone called Paadhi, meaning 'grandmother.' Three folks from Shantivanam were already studying with her, and when I tagged along one day to meet her, she invited me to come as often as I liked. That would wind up being four or five times a week. She was just as enthusiastic to work with an eager student from the West as I was to literally sit at this woman's feet and learn first of all some of the rudiments of Indian music, and secondly how to play this beautiful instrument indigenous to the south of India which is called a *veena*, of the same family as the *sitar*, but older.

My idea for the chanting of the psalms at Shantivanam was this: to write psalm tones similar in form to our western ones, but using the ragas. The best way to define a *raga* is as a combination of a scale, a mode and a melody. Each raga has a very specific tradition regarding the proper time of day it should be used to produce the appropriate emotional and psychological state—*raga samaya*. My next step, then, was to employ morning ragas for morning tones, evening ones for evening, etc. I then divided the psalmody into morning psalms, midday psalms and evening psalms, and then further divided them into psalms of praise and psalms of supplication or penitence, and found raga tones to correspond. All this work I checked with Paadhi, and she approved or corrected, either way being an invaluable help.

George tells me they are still singing the "raga tones." I for my part feel very fortunate to be a part of the community of Shantivanam. After all my study of Father Bede, let alone Monchanin and Abhishiktananda, it was an incredibly moving experience to be physically in the environment where his spirit still so strongly pervades. It was a humbling experience to be at the service of this holy place from which great souls have given an even greater gift to the world. ■

PUBLICATIONS

- Judson Trapnell's *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue* will be published in February 2001 by the State University of New York Press. The book is an 'intellectual and spiritual biography' incorporating much of the research which was the basis for his doctoral dissertation, *Bede Griffiths' Theory of Religious Symbol and Practice of Dialogue: Towards Interreligious Understanding* (C.U.A., 1993).
- *Purity of Heart-Contemplation: A Monastic Dialogue between Christian and Asian Traditions*, will be published by Continuum in the Fall of 2001. The book consists of the papers presented at the East-West monastic Symposium at New Camaldoli last June, and is being edited by Joseph Wong and Bruno Barnhart of New Camaldoli.
- *The One Light: Bede Griffiths' Principal Writings*, edited and introduced by Bruno Barnhart, will be published by Templegate sometime this year. The book, a kind of "essential Bede Griffiths," will be about 400 pages in length. It will include many extracts from Bede's ten books, his lectures and articles, and some of his many letters to *The Tablet* on current issues in the church and world.
- The elegant new *Encyclopedia of Monasticism* (edited by William M. Johnston (not William Johnston S.J.), Chicago and London, Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2 vols, 2000) contains a number of articles by members of the Bede Griffiths Trust board. Sr. Pascaline Coff contributed the article, "Dialogue, Intermonastic: Christian Perspectives." Fr. Robert Hale is responsible for the articles "Camaldolese" and "St. Peter Damian." Wayne Teasdale wrote four articles for the Encyclopedia, on the Dalai Lama, Bede Griffiths, Thomas Keating, and Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktananda). ■

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scientist knows it is real knowledge. This situation has led to what I call *epistemological schizophrenia* in the scientist, fragmentation in our understanding of reality, or compartmentalization, rather than integral knowledge. We need to address this lingering situation, and any attempt to integrate religion and science must take into account this unfortunate impasse. Ken Wilber has devoted considerable intellectual resources to discover ways out of this narrow-minded fixation of the old science, and yet without sacrificing rigorous scientific methodological standards. His *Marriage of Sense and Soul* is such an attempt, and especially his notion of the four quadrants, or "corners" of knowing: the upper left as subjectivity, or the interior-individual (the intentional); the lower left as collective



subjectivity, or interior-collective (the cultural); the upper right as the exterior-individual (the behavioral), and the lower right as the exterior-collective (or the social).¹ This insight is a corrective and a reversal of epistemological schizophrenia. What he is doing is making room for other ways of knowing as valid forms of knowledge, even within the view of science itself, such as mystical experience, aesthetic illumination, poetic imagination, interpersonal love, and psychological reality. This is a very valuable contribution to integral methodology, one that bridges the gap between science and spirit by enlarging the context of knowledge. Only in this way will there be a sufficient foundation for their eventual fruitful and effective collaboration. In integrating science and religion noetically, we are at the same time uniting all the spheres of knowing.

The Primacy of Consciousness

Another significant hurdle to be overcome, indeed to be abandoned, is that of dualism, and its destructive form of naive materialism, which is a complete reductionism that ignores the central place of consciousness, asserting it to be epiphenomenal to matter, and derived from the material substratum. Every form of reductionism, whether in physical science, philosophy, psychology, economics etc. is always inadequate and simplistic. Materialism rests on the postulate of pure objectivity of the old science, and this notion of objectivity, as a working principle and dogma, requires dualism, or a split between the mental and physical realms, a dichotomy we owe to Descartes.

This split between mind and body, however, is reported to our perception by our mind, that is, by our consciousness. When we really examine this matter carefully what we notice is that everything—absolutely everything—depends on consciousness: our memories, ideas, perceptions, emotions, musings of the imagination, dreams, learning, thinking, our relationships... all happen because we are *aware*. They exist in and through consciousness, even the body. We have a body because we *know* we have a body. In this sense, the body exists *in* the mind. It is the mind, in its perception of the body, that makes possible the body, not the other way round as materialism would have it. Let me express it as a principle: that which makes perception possible is the basis of all reality, because without it, there would be no reality for us...

...Since all experience is mediated through consciousness, the postulate of pure objectivity is indefensible, and is holding us back from progress to that integration of science and religion we would all like to see. We can achieve what can be called a shared subjectivity whose contents we can verify as universally valid in the experience of others, and we can do this keeping in mind Ken Wilber's four quadrants as our guide. This gives us a modified objectivity, but again it rests on our shared subjective experience. To move in this direction, which I believe is inevitable, is to announce once and for all the

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validity and truth of the primacy of consciousness itself. It is in and through this primacy that religion and science will finally be “married,” to use Ken Wilber’s metaphor.

The Nature of Consciousness

There are many today who have awakened to the absolute place of consciousness in knowing, being, reality and life.² Albert Einstein once remarked: “The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible.” I believe it is comprehensible because consciousness is its basis. Often we hear reports of how pervasive intelligence is in nature and the cosmos, that it is at work on all levels, from the subatomic, quantum level, to the organic, natural, and cosmic levels. I have a question here. Is it that intelligence is *in* everything, or rather that everything *is* intelligent because everything is *aware*. I think it is the latter, and I believe that everything participates in a vast, universal system of consciousness, with other realms, reaching to the most ultimate, the Divine itself. All reality is internal, that is, is happening again in consciousness, or as Leibniz put it in his *Monadology*, all relations are internal, that there are no “windows” to an outside. We know everything from within in a unitive, non-dual sense.

The Upanishadic seers knew thousands of years ago that Brahman, or God is Consciousness, and the human is also consciousness, that everything, including the universe, is within us, that is, within our conscious range of experience. Meister Eckhart, the Christian mystic of the 13th century understood the role of consciousness in its mediating function, when in the context of contemplative method, he observed: “The eye in which I see God is the same eye in which God sees me. My eye and God’s eye are one eye and one seeing, one knowing and one loving.”³ Needless to say, this “eye” isn’t the ocular faculty, but is the mind, or self-awareness itself. That is the “place” of encounter, the bridge joining the Divine with the human.

In this same “place” religion and science meet, and are united. They exist in mind as parallel activities of consciousness. The whole of nature and the cosmos exists in mind, as does human and angelic reason. Consciousness is also the elusive unified field that integrates the four forces of nature. It is the basis of love, and the whole range of emotion, for love and emotion as such are expressions of awareness. It is the matrix in which all principles, natures, concepts, notions, mathematical equations and insights subsist. The sea of Consciousness is where all things dwell and are revealed, the realm of Spirit.

The infinite reality of Consciousness contains the human as a regional or species consciousness, and individual human knowers as local awareness within species or regional mind, or spirit. When we have a mystical experience, an aesthetic awakening, an interpersonal love eruption, we break out of our local, and

often our regional awareness, and begin to ascend to other levels of consciousness beyond the horizon of the human, even to the ultimate realm of Divine Consciousness itself. This Divine Consciousness is not a cold, analytical reason, but has ‘heart,’ is animated by unconditional compassion and love, an infinite kindness, mercy and sensitivity, a concern for all that is and can be.

Mysticism as the Further Meeting Place of Science and Religion

If consciousness has primacy and is ultimate, then religion and science can find integration there, and can explore that unity in mysticism itself, the very “heart” of reality, the nature of Spirit...Mysticism is the awakening to the inner interdependence of everything, and their unity in the fontal Source, the Divine. It is the endless horizon of essential, inward-gazing connectivity. It is the common ground alike of the religions⁴ and of the sciences with the religions...

...The two ways, science and religion, have their roots in mysticism, and it is there that they will discover their common identity as parallel forms of knowing. Religion itself has its source in the mystical. All the great world religions bear this out, for their founders were all mystics who received a revelation, illumination, or awakening from Ultimate reality, and this became institutionalized in a tradition. The two ways are complementary to each other; they complete each other, and they refine the picture of reality for us. We need both of them; they are actually forms of each other.

Mysticism gives larger sight or vision to science, while science grants precision to mysticism. Here is the real marriage, a new species of knowing, being, having, and transforming. The integration of science and religion is a journey into mystery, into the Divine, into Spirit. Both mysticism and science are empirical insofar as they are both concerned with and rooted in experience, though some may argue that science is more mathematical than empirical. Mystics and sages throughout time have taught us that an Ultimate Reality exists, more than exists, is all that is, surrounding us on all sides. Now we can discern that insight in the utter truth and reality of consciousness itself, and its nature as caring, love, compassion, *concern* in Heidegger’s understanding. The mystic sage doesn’t ask us to believe this, but to find out for ourselves through experience.

The Partnership of Science and Religion: Vision of its Task and Value

These two venerable activities of Spirit, of Consciousness have a responsibility to discover together, to create as partners, a new and more adequate view of this world, of life, being, nature and the cosmos, the transcendent and the Ultimate. Together they will find a way to inspire humankind to live sustainably by convincing us of the necessity to embrace *simplicity* as a basic survival strategy for all species. Simplicity of life teaches us how to live

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harmoniously with nature, to enjoy its goods in modest use, and to respect the rights of other species.

In this task and others, spirituality, or religion and the scientific enterprise are agents of transformation. They are teachers of this transformation that brings an expansion of understanding in a more integral view of the real. They will free us from our odd fixation on ourselves, our curiously destructive preoccupation with anthropocentrism that has limited us to a kind of “geo-centrism” in this anthropocentrism. They will lead us into the value of other-centeredness and joy. These are essential thrusts of transformation in the human. They will further advocate a stability in virtue as preferable to a disintegrating permissiveness. The virtues of their focus are again: mercy, compassion, love, kindness, sensitivity, joy, and forgiveness. These virtues will move us to other-centered action that will be productive of a new, universal civilization whose heart is compassion and love rather than power and money...

Notes:

1. Ken Wilber, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion*, New York, Random House, 1998, ch. 5.
2. Some of these include Amit Goswami, Fred Alan Wolf and Peter Russell, to mention a few. Amit Goswami’s book, *The Self-Aware Universe: How Consciousness Creates the Material World*, New York, Putnam 1995, is especially significant.
3. *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, ed. Bernard McGinn, *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, New York, Paulist Press 1986, Sermon 12, p. 270.

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

4. I try to illustrate this point in my book, *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World’s Religions*, Novato CA., New World Library, 1999. I call this common ground *interspirituality*.

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 New Camaldoli Hermitage
 62475 Coast Hwy 1
 Big Sur, California 93920-9656
 e-mail: brn2@redshift.com

and Osage Monastery
 18701 W. Monastery Road,
 Sand Springs, Oklahoma 74063
 e-mail: osagemonastery@juno.com

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