



The Golden String

Vol. 9 No. 2

BULLETIN OF THE BEDE GRIFFITHS TRUST

Winter 2002-3

ADVAITA AND CHRISTIANITY Cyprian Consiglio

Though persons more competent than I have written on *advaita*, allow me to give a brief sketch as I understand it. *Advaita* basically means non-duality; non-duality means that God and created things, including the human person, are not two. Even more than that, *advaita* is the spiritual awakening to the absolute unity of all beings in their innermost spiritual nature, an experience of the absolute unity of the spiritual Self. This is the revolutionary discovery of the writers of the Upanishads, the last writings of the Vedanta.

That all sounds too stiff. Let me try it another way, paraphrasing Fr. Bede in a kind of prose poem:

Before any form that nature takes
there is one, absolute, infinite transcendent Reality,
the ground of being.
This is known as Brahman.

And behind all human consciousness,
before sense or thought,
there is one, absolute, transcendent Self,
the ground of consciousness.
This is known as Atman.

And this Brahman and this Atman
are one and the same;
the ground of being and the ground of consciousness
are the same.

And so the Upanishads say "Thou art That,"
meaning,
Thou—
my consciousness, my deepest Self
in its transcendent ground—
art one with That—

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AMERICA'S INTERSPIRITUAL POTENTIAL Wayne Teasdale

It is not an exaggeration to say that in the long, troubled history of this fragile but exquisite planet there has not been a more inventive society than America. While creativity is a universal human attribute, in the United States this precious trait has received a scope of activity that is virtually unlimited. America can be rightly admired for its multifaceted inventive genius, a practical intelligence that knows no bounds.

American preeminence can be seen in politics, economics, military power, law, governance, in literature and entertainment, social consciousness and altruism, in its eloquent espousal of human rights, and in its deep-seated compassion when this people is in touch with its soul, its original source of inspiration, and the depth of its spiritual capacities.

It must also be mentioned how America has failed. The United States has not done much to close the gap between the haves and have-nots. Its foreign policy in recent years has lacked the maturity and selflessness one would expect of the only superpower. It continues to support an essentially heartless capitalism, the moral bankruptcy of which is clearly evident in the corporate scandals, the decay of our cities with respect to the urban poor, and the frightful exploitation of cheap labor. There is also the terrible failure of America in generating and disseminating our artificial, economically motivated culture through globalization, the similarly heartless process of extending American influence abroad.

But these failures and successes are not what I will focus on here. I wish to share a dream of America as an *interspiritual* superpower, a great society in which the acceptance of diversity and pluralism is innate to the psyche of this land, where it reaches a depth of integration that can be of benefit to the whole of humanity in this very dangerous period of history into which we have been thrust by tragic circumstances, and serious challenges requiring perspective and wisdom.

Interspirituality is a term I have coined to identify the phenomenon of our age of openness to other traditions of faith, wisdom, and spiritual life. Interspirituality is also, more concretely, the willingness to explore these other traditions, and to imbibe spiritual practices in these other systems of spirituality. I have elaborated the meaning of this approach/phenomenon in both *The Mystic Heart*, and *A Monk*

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Advaita

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the transcendent ground of the Universe.
This Self is not known by abstraction,
nor less is it known by philosophical speculation,
but by *direct experience*,
a religious experience in the ground of the soul
beyond sense or reason,
in the center of the soul by direct intuition.
By an immediate experience
the soul comes to know its own ground of being
as being one with the ground of all being.

And this, the experience of Being (*sat*)
in pure Consciousness (*cit*),
is one of absolute Bliss (*ananda*)!
Saccidananda!

This is the experience that underlies the Hindu religious sensibility at its best. This is for a Hindu a matter of faith; it is not something you can "figure out": theological, philosophical, psychological, anthropological speculations can at best lead to a thirst for the experience. And the best way to foster the experience is through of life of virtue and spiritual practice, that is, yoga.

What follows from this in the strictest interpretation is that individual selves and created matter in some schools of thought actually come to be seen as *maya*, which means the "illusion" or "mere appearance" that results from *avidya*, ignorance. Once one has had an experience of non-duality, of the Absolute Self, such as Ramana Maharshi had, that ignorance disappears.

The main proponent of this advaitan school of thought was the great Sankara, an eight century Indian wandering philosopher. Among the implications of his theology is the teaching that God is strictly 'abstract,' *nirguna-Brahman*, which means without attributes. Those who reach this awareness realize that their own deepest Self is none other than the Absolute, of which 'God' is only the first emanation, and a semi-illusory one at that.

Advaitan philosophy has had a profound effect on Indian thought. All three of the founders of Shantivanam wrestled with it at length. For all three the aim of the Christian is somehow a reconciliation of *advaita* and the Trinity, whom they loved to refer to as Saccidananda, the Father as Being, the Son as Consciousness and the Spirit as Bliss. At first glance the doctrine of the Trinity seems to be opposed to *advaita* if one follows the strict school of Sankara, because it seems to imply separate beings, ie. duality in the Godhead. Bede characteristically approaches it all very carefully, and often speaks of union by communion rather than union by identity. Though he writes eloquently and at great length about *advaita* in many articles and books, he seems to associate himself a little more closely with another school of thought that was also very influential, known as *visist-advaita*, qualified non-duality. This school of thought drew its language from the philosophical school of *samkhya*,

which Bede was also fond of. The main teacher of qualified non-duality was Ramanuja, an 11th century philosopher-theologian. Ramanuja, who was a worshipper of Vishnu, first of all differed from Sankara in that he did not regard God-Brahman as simply *nirguna*, without characteristics; though beyond description, God can be worshipped as *saguna*, with attributes, through various manifestations and *avatars*. Ramanuja did agree with Sankara that Brahman is the only thing that truly is, without any distinction, but he did not agree that nothing else is real, nor that everything else is merely appearance or *maya*, that is, the projection of ignorance-*avidya*. According to Ramanuja, individual selves and the world of matter are real, but they are the instruments of Brahman in a relationship like that of souls and bodies, and their existence and their ability to function are totally dependent on Brahman.

Abhishiktananda, on the other hand, leapt right in to a strict interpretation of *advaita*. I found a little booklet called *Saccidananda: Garland of Letters*, that Bede and the monks of Shantivanam prepared in 1990 for their canonical visitation. There Bede writes, in an essay entitled "Our Founders", with uncharacteristic frankness about Abhishiktananda's path. He says that Abhishiktananda's experience of this oneness with God, while in a cave on the mountain of Arunachala in Tiruvanmalai—and no one, not even Bede or Francis Acharya, denied that he had had a real and profound experience—was in fact so profound that it shook his faith in the traditional form of Christianity. In his experience of *advaita* he was left with a sense of absolute oneness in which he no longer felt any difference between God and the individual human person. For the rest of his life, as evidenced in his diaries, Abhishiktananda had to wrestle with how to interpret this experience as a Christian. It seemed to involve a denial of "rational difference between God and creation, whereas his Christian faith called for the recognition of distinctions in the Godhead and the Incarnation and the church."

To the end Abhishiktananda never gave up his faith in the church and continued to celebrate the mass, but he also felt that he could not give up the conviction born of personal experience of the truth of *advaita*. In his diaries he expressed the agony which this conflict brought to him, and he was never able to reconcile his faith with his experience.

Then Bede writes that in his interpretation of Hinduism Abhishiktananda was too influenced by the extreme non-dualism of the school of Sankara and had ignored the modified non-dualism of other schools. (I have heard him say in interviews before that he thought Abhishiktananda "went too far.") Bede goes on to explain that there is an understanding of *advaita* today that avoids any kind of monism, (which rejects all differences) and recognizes that while the supreme reality is "not two," it is also "not one." This is the distinction that we speak of in regard to the Trinity, recognizing that there are distinctions in the Godhead

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Advaita

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and distinction between God and creation which do not negate the underlying unity of all reality. The example that he used very often was of Jesus in the Gospels saying "the Father and I are one," but never "I am the Father."

Whatever were his personal struggles in reconciling his experience with his faith, I was deeply consoled to read how Abhishiktananda himself had addressed this, concisely, beautifully, in his book *Saccidananda*, which I had only begun reading over again my last days at Tiru. When I found these two paragraphs I almost leapt up for joy.

The experience of the Absolute to which India's mystical tradition bears such powerful witness is all included in Jesus' word: 'My father and I are one.' All that the Maharshi, and countless others before him, knew and handed on of the inexorable experience of non-duality, Jesus also knew himself, and that in a pre-eminent manner. We need only refer to his words: 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9). Whatever the Father does, he does through the Son; whatever the Son does, it is the Father doing it through him. And yet, at the very heart of all this, there remains the 'face-to-face' of the Son and the Father.

The conclusion is inescapable: the experience of Jesus includes the advaitic experience, but it certainly cannot be reduced to the commonly accepted formulation of that experience. Vedanta obliges us to recognize in [the human person] a level of consciousness deeper than that of reflective thought, more basic than [a person's] awakening to oneself through sense-perception or mental activity. Christ's experience compels us to admit the existence in [the human person] of something even deeper still. That [a human being] attains to this depth by grace alone is another matter. . . It is enough for us now to have recognized the existence of such a level in the person of Jesus. If, as non-Christians maintain, Jesus is only a [human being], than whatever natural endowments he possesses must necessarily be available to every [human being]. And if he is the Son of God, as Christians believe, then they must not forget that, according to their faith, Jesus shares with them by grace all that he possesses by right of his divine Sonship. (*Saccidananda*, pp. 82-83)

What of course is interesting about this is that in saying that Jesus' experience "included" the advaitic experience, but cannot be "reduced" to that implies, at least to this reader, that there is something even beyond the advaitic experience, the experience of being-in-communion — of Being, Knowledge and Bliss — of the Trinity. ■

...when in meditation we transcend the categories of space and time and of the rational mind, we experience this one reality in itself. The finite, changing temporal world of our experience is known in its infinite, changeless ground. All the multiplicity of creation is known in the simple unity of its origin. (*Marriage of East and West*, p. 92)

BEDE GRIFFITHS TRUST BOARD MEETS

The Board of the Bede Griffiths Trust conducted its annual meeting electronically this year, in two sessions which continued for about three weeks during October (business meeting) and November (general discussion). John Douglas, the Treasurer, served as moderator. Ten non-board members from various countries were invited to be active participants.

- After approval of the annual financial report, the business meeting continued with a discussion first of the prioritization of needs and then of fund-raising. Later in the meeting it was announced that the Bede Griffiths Association has been granted 501c3 status as a nonprofit corporation, with tax exempt status for receiving donations. (*See page 6*)
- Fr. Robert Hale reported on the BG Archive collection at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, which is administered by GTU archivist Lucinda Glenn Rand. He announced an appeal for contributions to the collection of further materials such as letters and manuscripts, publications, recordings and photographs of Fr. Bede, as well as writings about him and his work.
- Fr. Douglas Conlan reported on progress in planning for the International Conference on Religion and Globalization at Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand, July 27-Aug. 2, 2003. The Trust had agreed earlier to co-sponsor the Conference and to organize a panel in honor of Fr. Bede Griffiths during his 10th anniversary year.
- There followed a lengthy discussion of various issues regarding the publication of Fr. Bede's books, the supervision of which is a responsibility of the Trust. A major concern of the Trust is the unavailability of the books in many English-speaking countries. To secure the precise information needed for the Trust to make its decisions concerning world rights to several of the books, a subcommittee was appointed consisting of Sr. Pascaline Coff (chair), John Douglas, Adrian Rance and Judson Trapnell.
- Reports on activities planned for the celebration of Fr. Bede's 10th anniversary in the U.S. and in the U.K. were made by Sr. Pascaline and by Adrian Rance, respectively. (*See page 6*)
- Board members supported co-sponsorship by the Trust of the East-West Conference to be held in Berkeley, "Contemplation in the City: Buddhist and Christian Monastics and Lay Contemplatives in Dialogue" during April 2003.
- Shirley Harriott, with regret, announced her resignation from the Trust Board for personal reasons. ■

America and Interspirituality (Continued from page 1)
in the World. But first it is necessary to consider some background.

A Society at the Crossroads

American culture in this period is spiritually illiterate, morally confused or ambiguous, psychologically dysfunctional, addicted to violence, consumerism, and entertainment. While most Americans believe in God, only a small percentage of these actually understand that life is a spiritual journey with a definite destination and purpose in mind.

Similarly, American culture is morally confused and steeped in ambiguity. It is confused about abortion, the death penalty, war, and the tolerance of all kinds and levels of violent behavior.

Spiritual illiteracy and moral confusion result in psychological dysfunction, affecting every aspect of our lives: our relationships in the family, friendships, our work environment, and how we relate to associates, our aspirations, ambitions, dreams, and fears, even our health. It moves people to accept so much less than they can achieve in their spiritual lives by a deadening attachment to what is radically passing away.

On the positive side, our society is characterized by a prevailing, deeply-rooted religious and spiritual freedom. This freedom is profoundly guarded as a precious attainment of the American psyche. America has attracted all races, cultures, religions, and spiritualities, and we are the most ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse society in the world; this is clearly the case in our major cities of Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and Seattle.

America has welcomed all the religions of the world. It is no longer dominated by Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, since now Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Jains, and Sikhs exist here in great numbers. There are more Muslims — some five million of them — than Episcopalians in the U.S. Every faith and form of spirituality is here, and since the sixties, truly gifted spiritual teachers, or masters are here, operating centers, and with large numbers of devotees following them. A number of the indigenous traditions are also represented, including native American faiths and Latin American shamans, with their natural mysticism. All these streams of mystical wisdom are available here, and are mingling in the great American spiritual culture. Their existence in America is helping to raise the level of awareness of very many, and they are passing on their insights, their methods of prayer/contemplation and meditation together with the related psychology, as well as their insights into cultivating community as a foundation for transformation.

When the interfaith movement is added to these streams of mystical wisdom, there is a possibility for a huge breakthrough in American culture, setting the stage for something never seen before in our hemisphere, the emergence of a spiritual superpower, reminiscent of the golden age of India's mystical, contemplative civilization.

A broad, interspiritual American culture is being born,

and is becoming increasingly conscious, aware of a horizon of meaning and spiritual life that can overpower the predominant culture of entertainment, consumerism and an essentially heartless capitalism.

The Interfaith Movement, Community, and the Birth of Interspirituality

This concentration of spiritual genius in all its cultural expressions from all the great world religions, spiritualities, and systems of mystical wisdom, has been made possible by the blossoming of the interreligious, or interfaith movement. This interfaith movement in the modern age began in September 1893 in Chicago during the World's Parliament of the Religions, which brought the venerable faith traditions together for the first time in historical memory. From this event, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Shinto were introduced into American culture, and the West more generally, but it was not until further historical occurrences that something jelled on a deeper level of development, sparking the possibility of an interspiritual awakening. These occurrences were the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), and the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, August 28-September 5, 1993. Both of these events have helped bring us to where we are today.

Interspirituality arises where the mystical life is fruitfully manifesting itself in a person's experience, their consciousness, and their actions. All three are in contact with the Divine, the Absolute, God, Spirit, infinite consciousness, and are inspired. The mystical life, the spiritual journey, the evolution of the person brings that one to inner freedom, as a gift of knowing the Divine, being one with it, and the possibility, indeed the longing, to explore and know the depth of mystical wisdom in all other traditions, particularly in ways relevant for, or related to, what that person is intensely knowing in a contemplative manner. Interspiritual wisdom dawns when a person has the freedom, the generosity and the capacity to explore, delve into, inwardly come to know in a mystical sense, the other traditions.

America needs to awaken to this vision of knowing, because her vocation in this age so fraught with danger, darkness, and uncertainty, is to shed the light of interspiritual wisdom in a world flirting with catastrophe. American culture, as a basic presupposition of its truth, life, and dynamic of civilization, is totally committed to diversity of views, faiths, spiritualities, and so, quite organically, naturally, intrinsically required of it by its nature, is, and has to be, interspiritual, that is, open to and nourished by the spiritual treasures of all the world's venerable faiths.

America can be this noble kind of superpower, this light to the nations, and the worlds beyond. She can cultivate this intermystical openness that is what interspirituality is in its ultimate sense, a dynamic, creative perception of the wisdom in all traditions, and ways of knowing, including science, creativity, music, poetry, art, and all human experience, uniting it in herself, by integrating it, knowing it in the

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America and Interspirituality (Continued from page 4)

integration, and applying it to her culture, life, and society in all its modes of presence and activity. America can be all this because she has the capacity, nurtured by centuries, to accept not only the diversity of peoples and cultures here on these shores, but the equality of these views, approaches to ultimate reality, a basic generosity, a spaciousness of being that allows her to welcome and embrace the great plurality, the bewildering and endlessly fascinating differences between and among persons. I have no doubt that this is the path of greatness for America now and in the future. In this way she will become inevitably an interspiritual superpower, like India in her day.

The Nine Ways of Interspirituality

American spirituality, as becoming more and more interspiritual and intermystical, is a universal spirituality that is eminently practical in nine ways, and through these ways, becomes immensely transformative of the individual, the community, and the world. Interspirituality finds these nine elements in the mature expressions of spirituality in every tradition, that is, in their saints, or mystics. They include 1) an actualized moral capacity, 2) a sense of solidarity and interdependence with all beings, 3) deep nonviolence, 4) humility of heart, 5) a spiritual practice, 6) mature self-knowledge, 7) simplicity of life, 8) love in action: compassionate service, and 9) prophetic witness and action.

The first way or element is moral consciousness, having an actualized moral life, that one is naturally moral. It has become second nature to the person. That's the foundation of the spiritual life, the path, the evolution of one's development. Secondly, the enlightened man or woman knows of their interdependence, and so, a joyful solidarity with all living beings, in all worlds. Because of this, thirdly, there is an innate commitment to non-harming of all beings with whom we come in contact, since we are all interconnected, and everything we do affects everyone and everything else. Fourthly, it is humility of heart that knows, sees, acts aright in each situation. Humility of heart is honesty about yourself, who you are, and the integrity you have. Humility is a non-manipulative relationship towards everyone, everything, and reality itself. One doesn't impose on, or manipulate others, but respects their inherent right to be, and to be respected. The fifth way, or element of spirituality, and of interspirituality, is spiritual practice. It is primarily through a spiritual practice, the central commitment to a method of prayer that the person pursues the spiritual life, in real dedication of praxis, whether in meditation, verbal prayer, singing, chanting, dancing, or giving adoration to the Divine.

The sixth is related to the fifth, in that self-knowledge often results from, and is the fruit of prayer, meditation, or whatever form spiritual practice takes in the committed activity of the person. This self-knowledge is a precious gift from prayer, part of its fruit in knowledge of ourselves, our nature, and deeper motivations, motivations often hidden

from view in the unconscious life of the person.

When we reach the seventh element, or way of a universal spirituality, of an intermystical spiritual path, we are in the clear understanding of the need for simplicity of life, which requires a more simple lifestyle. The aspect of spiritual life, of a viable American spirituality, connects us with nature, and all beings. It makes it possible for us to simplify our needs so the planet, the natural world, is not harmed by our presence, but greatly enhanced. It opens us to all others, especially the poor, because there are no material concerns that keep us apart. Being simple we are open to the vulnerable, the poor, the marginalized of the world. It then makes us docile, and receptive to the Divine.

Then comes the eighth element, or way of love in action, selfless service, or compassionate action. This capacity for love, kindness, compassion, sensitivity, is related to all the other elements, and in many ways is the fruit of them in relation to all others. Spirituality is not genuine if it isn't engaged with the world, that is, with others. This attitude, activity and being concretizes our spirituality; it makes it authentic, or real. It is this capacity that constitutes us most like God.

Closely related to the eighth in its active orientation, is the ninth and final element of American spirituality, as a viable interspirituality, and that is prophetic voice, witness, and action where warranted. Part of being an engaged spirituality it is concerned with social and environmental responsibility, with the struggle for peace and the promotion of justice, in the search for common ground and harmony. American spirituality is always so engaged, when it arrives at maturity and greatness.

This spirituality, as a whole, is marked by this attitude and practice of engagement with others, with the world. Furthermore, it is holistic; it integrates the body, soul, and mind, or spirit, and it unites the conscious with the unconscious, and them to the super-consciousness. Finally, this spirituality is integral because it seeks to relate faith, mysticism, contemplation, science and creativity; that is, to unite all avenues of knowing.

The effect of this spirituality on the person is profound transformation, a substantial change from one state of awareness to another. This awareness takes in all the faculties of the person. One's understanding, character, will, emotions, imagination, memory, and behavior are all positively affected.

When the American people and their culture awaken to the extent envisioned above, there will no doubt be constructive effects on our thinking as a nation, and as persons. It will have an influence on economics, on capitalism, the process of globalization, and on our corporate institutions, by awakening heart in all of them, with integrity, as well as a sense of social and ecological responsibility. All of this, in turn, will lead to a more conscious engagement with the mystery of otherness here and abroad. ■



BEDE ON NONVIOLENCE

At this moment it may be helpful to recall Father Bede's thoughts on war and peace. *Christ in India* contains two essays on the subject: chap. 11, "The Ideal of Non-violence", and chap. 12, "Non-violence and Nuclear War." Rather than trying to determine the minimal conditions for a just war, Bede leaves this question aside and focuses upon a single, 'maximal' principle — nonviolence, which he sees as an essential element of the Gospel.

Nonviolence. . . is essentially an affirmation of the law of the spirit. Gandhi described it as the 'power of truth' and the 'power of love.' It is the power of truth because it is the recognition of the spiritual ground of all reality and the determined effort to bring everything, that is, all matter, into subjection to this spiritual law. It is the power of love because it is the recognition of the spiritual character in every [person] and the inviolable respect which this demands. . . . The secret of the power of non-violence was revealed in the death of Christ. There was then revealed a love which was capable of bearing every insult and torture and, finally, death, without the least resistance, and which thereby raised up a new power of life capable of transforming the world. The secret of this power still remains within the church; it is her secret, her hidden life. The church and the world depend on our power to learn this secret and to show forth this life. (*Christ in India*, 141-142) ■

BEDE GRIFFITHS ASSOCIATION IS NOW A U.S. NONPROFIT CORPORATION

During the year before his death, Father Bede set up two organizations to continue his work, 'The Bede Griffiths Trust' and 'The Dom Bede Griffiths Association for the renewal of contemplative life in the church and the world.' The purposes of the **Trust** are, first, to take responsibility for publication of Bede's writings and recorded talks and their correct interpretation, and secondly to assist in the renewal of contemplative life in the church and the world. The purpose of the **Association** is to carry out the second of these tasks. While the Trust sets policy, the Association works concretely toward the accomplishment of the goals of this policy. The Association is, practically, the executive and corporate body of the Trust. Both groups are also to provide assistance to the poor.

The Bede Griffiths Association has now been accepted by the Internal Revenue Service of the United States as a 501c3 organization. Donors may deduct contributions to the Association from their tax return as provided in section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code. Donors may deduct contributions only to the extent that their contributions are gifts, with no consideration received. Contributions of \$250. or more require written substantiation from the Association. It is important that checks for gifts be addressed to the Bede Griffiths Association, and not to the Trust. ■

EVENTS COMMEMORATING THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF BEDE GRIFFITHS' DEATH

Father Bede died at Shantivanam on May 13, 1993. During this year which marks the tenth anniversary of his *mahasamadi*, many events will be held around the world to celebrate his life and work. Here are some of the commemorations that have been announced so far.

United States

A special **Memorial Issue of The Golden String** will be published in May 2003, featuring personal recollections of those who knew Father Bede or were influenced by his life and work.

Osage Monastery will hold its annual Mahasamadhi celebration May 16-18. Fr. Bruno Barnhart will be the keynote speaker. Thomas Garvey, son of Hugh Garvey, original publisher of Bede's books in the U.S., plans to attend the weekend with the Friends of the Forest and trustees and members who are able to be present.

The One Light: A Book Study Series continues through May 6, at Mercy Center in Burlingame, California. The series is directed by Sr. Marguerite Buchanan with the collaboration of Russill and Asha.

United Kingdom

The **Bede Griffiths Sangha** is planning a **Celebration of the Life and Vision of Father Bede** at Gaunt's House, Wimborne Minster, July 17 – 20. The event is being organized in the spirit of a family gathering and contributions by people who knew and loved Father Bede are encouraged. Four main speakers will contribute: Brother John Martin Sahajananda, Shirley du Boulay, Dr Rupert Sheldrake and Dr. Judson Trapnell.

The John Main Seminar (annual international gathering of the World Community for Christian Meditation), to be held at Reading College, near London, from August 21-24, will focus on Bede Griffiths this year. Bede himself led the Seminar in 1991 at New Harmony, Indiana, "Christian Meditation: The Evolving Tradition." (later published as *New Creation in Christ*).

Publication of '**You are the Light**' by **Brother John Martin**, in the U.K. and in America, will coincide with the Anniversary. An edited compilation of a number of booklets published by Brother Martin over the years including his 'New Vision of Christianity,' the book will be published by O Books, an imprint of John Hunt Publishing.

Thailand

A **Bede Griffiths Commemorative Panel** is being planned for the **International Conference on Religion and Globalization** at Payap University, Chang Mai, Thailand, July 27-August 2, 2003. Fr. Douglas Conlan will moderate the panel; the names of other participants from the West are to be announced. ■

WISDOM AND HISTORY

Bruno Barnhart

What is the relation between wisdom and history? No simple answer can be given, of course, to such a maddeningly simplistic question. The question is forced upon us, though, by the fact that the progress of history has brought about an eclipse of spiritual wisdom in our contemporary western world. Father Bede repeatedly drew a thick dividing line between, on the one hand, the ages in which the 'universal wisdom' or 'perennial philosophy' prevailed among the various peoples of the world and, on the other hand, the modern age which he saw beginning in the West with the Renaissance. Modern western civilization had, he felt, uniquely among the cultures of the world, abandoned the way of wisdom to embark upon a new way of scientific reason. He saw the domination of this critical scientific reason as destroying the unified threefold universe of antiquity – at once spirit, soul and matter – by reducing it to the one-dimensional world of materialism. Perhaps there is something in Christianity itself that has contributed to this strange phenomenon. The Christianity of the New Testament is both sapiential and historical, contemplative and dynamic. The dynamic historical quality diminished as the church set into fixed institutional forms, as theology adopted philosophical structures. Then, from about the thirteenth century, the Christian wisdom theology of the early centuries and of medieval monasticism gave way to a more purely rational – and still more unhistorical – mode of thought from which developed the scientific mentality which has come to dominate the modern West. And it is science, and the technology which it generated, that has largely driven the historical progress of the modern West!

Bede is far from the first to see history proceeding in this 'descending' direction. Others, however, unlike him, have welcomed the development. Philosopher Auguste Comte (1789-1857) theorized that each science and each human society passes through three phases. First comes a 'theological' phase in which everything is explained in terms of the gods. Then follows a 'metaphysical' phase in which great abstract ideas are seen as the principles of reality. The sequence terminates in a 'positive' or 'scientific' stage, in which explanations become rational and empirical: the facts of observation are correlated with one another.

We can trace a three-phase evolution of this kind in our western culture, in the shift of the intellectual mainstream first from the sapiential theology of the fathers and the medieval monks to the metaphysics of an Aquinas and the theology deriving from it, and then from this scholastic perspective to the dominant scientific mentality of the age of Newton, Galileo, Darwin and Einstein. Comte saw this as a healthy progression in which the lofty dreams and fictions of an earlier age were replaced with the positive empirical knowledge of modern science. While there is certainly some

truth in this judgment – typical of the mind of the Enlightenment – it is hopelessly inadequate to the depth and power of sapiential and metaphysical understanding.

Comte's scheme presents an interesting contrast with the much earlier historical scheme of Joachim of Fiore, (c. 1132-1202), who saw an ascending 'Trinitarian' movement in history from the age of the Father, or age of the 'Order of married people' under the Law, in the time of the Old Testament, through the age of the Son, of the 'Order of clerics', to the age of the Spirit, characterized by the 'Order of contemplatives', which would begin about 1260 AD. But we have witnessed – instead of the conversion of the whole world to Christianity foreseen by Joachim – the growth of a secular culture which is now in the process of spreading over the entire planet. While the Christian monk Joachim, at an early point in the unfolding of western culture, envisioned the continuation of history in an ascending, spiritualizing pattern, Auguste Comte, later in the day, looked back and charted the descending, rationalizing movement which has, in fact, characterized the West since the thirteenth century.

Sapiential (or wisdom) consciousness lives in a unitive light. Sometimes the unitive quality is experienced directly as nondual consciousness. Sometimes it becomes objectified into a poem, a work of art, a philosophical theory or even a scientific equation. Ultimately, however, the unity is something more primal and fundamental than any of these expressions of wisdom – something deeper and fuller than either our experience or our understanding of that experience. As the human spirit walks through the varied landscape of history, it reflects – like a silvered disk – everything that impinges upon it, conferring upon each new discovery the unitive quality of its own light.

A quick survey of some of these different inflections and expressions of unitive consciousness that have successively appeared in the West may bring some light to our question. This consciousness emerged powerfully during the Axial age (the first millennium before Christ). We can detect it behind the thought of the great Greek philosophers, especially that of Plato. (Still earlier, in India, unitive consciousness had already been expressed most fully and explicitly in the writings of the early Hindu and Buddhist masters.) The disciples of Jesus intuited the unity somehow present in their master, then experienced it dramatically within themselves as they were baptized in the Holy Spirit, and projected the unitive fullness back into the Jesus of the New Testament. Its light is particularly strong in the Jesus of John's Gospel. Already and most fully in the writings of St. Paul, the 'mystery of Christ' – identical with the risen Christ himself – was the substantial unity gathering all things into itself. From New Testament times, the church itself in its *koinonia* (communion) had been understood as the immediate locus of the divine-human unity of Christ, in close relation with the 'mysteries' of baptism and eucharist. It was first of all from the prologue of John's Gospel that the pow-

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erful 'Logos theology' of Eastern Christianity developed.

When Christian thought became strongly influenced by Platonism, as early as the third century, the unitive theological sense began to assume philosophical forms. For various reasons, the bodily unity, or sacramental core of the mystery began to be left behind. Already in the fourth century, an individualized mystical theology was beginning to develop (for example in Gregory of Nyssa and Evagrius Ponticus); divine union came to be seen less as the gift received when one was born into the body of Christ in baptism — and therefore intrinsic to one's Christian identity — than as the final crowning of an essentially monastic life centered in ascetical renunciation and contemplative prayer. Gradually — and particularly in the West — an individualized 'mysticism' will become more and more isolated from the common Christian 'mystery', resulting in a denaturing of spirituality, of theology and of the self-understanding of the church itself. As Christian life ceases to be understood in the immediate light of the divine Word and as a participation in the body of Christ, spirituality becomes one-sidedly interiorized, a private affair, and the church becomes one-sidedly exteriorized and impersonalized in the juridical structures of a religious institution. As person is flattened into the individual, church is flattened into institution, as if the center or heart which held both in a living tension had withered and died. This living transrational center is the mystery, and to the mystery corresponds wisdom. The unity, the vitality and the wisdom of Christianity, it becomes clear, are inseparable from the sacramental core, from that incarnation of wisdom which is the body of Christ.

As the monastic mystical theology of the middle ages begins to atrophy, a new realization of the unitive light appears in the metaphysics of scholasticism, and this will soon be accompanied by a kind of 'metaphysical mysticism' in which 'nonduality' emerges — under the influence of Plotinus and his successors — with an explicitness (e.g. in Eckhart) which is unprecedented within Christianity. The unitive light, at the same time, begins to nourish — more or less consciously — the human rational faculty which expresses itself in philosophy and then in positive science. As the world of 'secular' human activity begins to expand in the West, the unitive light creates a new space of freedom and of creativity in which the individualized art and literature of the West will flourish. Sometimes — as in Spinoza and in German Idealism — the unity will become objectified in a philosophical concept.

The realizations of this unitive light are multiple, varied and often subtle and implicit — as in the new space and light of scientific inquiry and scientific theory. At the beginning of the twentieth century these realizations seem to reach a new level of freedom and intensity, both in the bold metaphor of 'modernist' art and in the bold synthetic intuition of relativity and quantum physics. As the shells of convention are broken, poets and physicists reveal new and

magical transformations; these spring forth freely within the luminous field of unitive consciousness. But the awakening of this creative self-consciousness has been accompanied by a long and deepening sleep of unitive religious consciousness — or the sapiential mind — in the modern West. Creative intellect is seldom reflexively aware of its ground in unitive spirit, nor of the central historical event from which its freedom derives.

Today, as a new age of 'globalization' dawns, expressions and intimations of global unity confront us on every side. At the same historical moment we awaken to a new level of interaction with the Asian religious traditions, with their explicit awareness of 'nonduality,' and this contributes strongly to the emergence of a unitive awareness in the West. Again and again we become conscious of the urgency of a new, global consciousness, of a way of thinking and of living which is immediately illumined by our common humanity, by our coexistence upon this one planet Earth. The Christian prophet of this new era is Teilhard de Chardin. We can recognize the unitive light everywhere in Teilhard's thought, and — with particular significance today — in his vision of a 'planetization' of humanity.

Let us turn back to look more closely at one moment in this long story, a pivotal moment around which the history of consciousness turns. It is the time around the thirteenth century when, as we have seen, a Christian wisdom began to disappear before the advance of scholastic philosophy and theology. At this moment we behold a singular, dazzling spiritual-intellectual flash. It is the 'metaphysical moment' that corresponds to Comte's second phase of history, the brilliant nuclear realization of 'Being' that we associate with Thomas Aquinas and, differently, with Meister Eckhart. This flash of contemplative intellectuality has a significance beyond itself; we can see it as signaling the historical awakening of the 'metaphysical core' of the person — an awakening that will be expressed in a profusion of creative forms from the time of the Italian Renaissance. While metaphysics will very soon give way to mathematical physics as the dominant mode of intellectuality, what is taking place is an awakening, a new self-possession, of the human person, in which a new era — the distinctively 'western' age — begins. This age will be characterized by the increasing autonomy of the individual person and of human rationality, by a new valorization of personal experience and an unparalleled realization of personal creativity. by a consequent flowering of science and technology — all producing an accelerating historical progress — and a secularization — which will come to involve the whole of humanity.

The 'old wisdom' of Christianity, like that of antiquity which it emulated, was a wisdom which carefully maintained its continuity with a venerated tradition — often to the point of repetition. It was also a wisdom totally subordinated to the biblical Word: until the thirteenth century, theology consisted almost entirely of commentary on the Sacred

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Scriptures. With the new dialectic, the 'questioning' method that began to prevail at this time, the human person begins to realize its own free standing in reason, and a new space of personal creativity is opened. From within this space – and the corresponding external space of freedom in the spheres of public religion and politics – will emerge the 'new world' of western creativity in the arts and the sciences. This world has continued its centrifugal expansion to a point at which, today, an overall form or a center can no longer be seen and can hardly be imagined. The intellectual code of postmodernism, indeed, sternly forbids such an aspiration to orientation or synthesis.

What happened to wisdom? Let me offer something between a parable and a hypothesis. As the old sapiential consciousness, with its theology, seemed to be swallowed by the awakening dynamism of western history, it disappeared into the indeterminate freedom of the human spirit – **to be reborn as a child of this human spirit; to be reborn as creative intuition.** Precisely in the new freedom of its activity, the child does not know its origin, its genetic root, does not know the event of Christ from which it came as from a second "Let there be light." Christian faith and human creativity continue, largely, to live in two distinct worlds. Yet the divine Wisdom which has come into the world is within us and within our society, our culture, our tradition. There within dwell the undetermined light of the divine Word and the all-consuming fire of the Spirit – there in the pregnant, unplumbed depths of our own spirit and of our common human heritage. From a Christian perspective, the secret is hidden within the depths and fullness and power of the initial gift, our 'identity.' That identity is precisely that which remains unknown: forgotten by Christians and twice forgotten by the secular 'creatives' living outside the world of explicit religious faith.

Theological interpretations of history have themselves a long history, from the time of St. Paul. Upon the noble gravestones that commemorate these theories we find the names — among many others — of St. Augustine, of Joachim of Fiore and of G.W.F. Hegel. The unceasing progression of history – and its exponential acceleration in our time, however – compel us to try again and again to understand this story.

From a Christian point of view, history may be understood in terms not only of Trinity (with Joachim), but of Incarnation (and here we meet, once again, Teilhard de Chardin). While the three divine Persons suggested to Joachim an ascending pattern of spiritualization, the Incarnation of the divine Word suggests rather a descent. The descending phases of Comte's scheme can be interpreted as expressing a kind of incarnational process within history.

But incarnation is also, from the human point of view, *awakening*. According to Hegel, the history of the West is the history of the awakening of the human person to freedom – a freedom which entered the world in Jesus Christ.

Here too is an ascending pattern, but it remains within the common world of humanity rather than rising above it in the manner of Joachim. And in the course of history this liberation seems to descend continually to lower and lower levels of society, as if it were tracing the path indicated by Jesus in the Gospel. Further, the wave front of liberation seems to spread outwards from the West to the ends of the earth, as Jesus predicted that the Gospel itself was to spread. Perhaps Hegel was right, and this is a key to our theological interpretation of history. Can we read history as a progressive awakening of humanity to its freedom, and thus to its divine identity? This is not the general conversion to Christianity envisioned by Joachim; rather, it is more like a realization of Divinity 'anonymously' embodied within human persons and within humanity as a whole.

Notice that a progressive *unification* is implied in this view of history: the awakening, though multiple, is a single awakening, as if it were the awakening of the one Child of God. This might seem a fantastic dream but for the indisputable fact of globalization – which confronts us on every side and every level in our own time. Notwithstanding the conflicts and tensions, the polarizations and the radical extremisms on the right and on the left, humanity is awakening before our eyes as a single reality, a single planetary organism.

For St. Paul, wisdom (or *gnosis*) was the understanding of the mystery of Christ, but this was an emphatically historical understanding. He often developed it in this sense: the *mysterion* is the historical unfolding of God's plan in the event of Christ, as the pouring out of the grace of salvation (which is now the divine life itself!) beyond the limits of the Jewish people to all the peoples of the earth. This one new humanity comprises the one body of Christ; this 'whole Christ' is the terminus and final goal of the whole of history. In our present age of globalization, and of a Second Vatican Council in which the Catholic Church comes to envision itself as 'in the world for the world' – *one* world, *one* humanity – Paul's historical *gnosis* takes on new life for us.

A new Christian wisdom will be grounded and centered, as always, in the divine Word. Burgeoning into a new pluralism and variety in the 'free space' of the unitive light, however, it will not remain enclosed within the Word like the old Christian wisdom but will replicate itself in new 'tongues,' new worlds of thought. Following the logic of Incarnation, it will learn that manifold language which corresponds to the *embodiment* of Wisdom and Word — the language of the Person. It will learn how to travel along all the passageways of human consciousness, the ways of the human heart. The One has become incarnate, has become a human person, and in the power of this oneness gathers humanity into one beyond – and beneath – the limits of our understanding. The ungraspable light which is – ultimately – our wisdom must also penetrate the flesh of humanity in such a way that nothing remains outside it, in such a way that we can participate actively in this one birth which precedes and succeeds the small light of our knowing. ■

The Golden String

Deaths of Hugh Garvey and John Killian

Mr. Hugh Garvey, of Templegate Publishers, died on January 5, 2003. He had been diagnosed with terminal cancer on Christmas Eve and given only a month or so to live. He died at home on the Feast of the Epiphany, with his family around him.

Under Hugh Garvey's leadership, Templegate had published Bede Griffiths' books in the United States for many years. Mr. Garvey was a long-time friend of Father Bede. Templegate continues with Thomas Garvey, Hugh's son, as head. Most recently, in addition to the books of Bede Griffiths already in their catalogue, Templegate brought *River of Compassion* back into print and published *The One Light: Bede Griffiths' Principal Writings*.

Fr. John Killian was one of the original trustees chosen by Father Bede for the Bede Griffiths Trust. Ever devoted to Bede, Fr. John took Asha to visit him during his last illness; from the bedside he wrote letters to other friends of Bede. Father John died on December 28th at St. Francis Geriatric Center in Buffalo, New York. ■

Visit the Bede Griffiths Website:
www.bede.griffiths.com

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Big Sur, California 93920
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The Golden String, Bulletin of the Bede Griffiths Trust, is published at New Camaldoli Hermitage and edited by Bruno Barnhart, OSB Cam. Statements contained in articles do not represent views of the editor nor of the Board of the BG Trust, but solely of the authors.

The Golden String is available in the U.S. from:

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

and

Osage Monastery
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