

# The Golden String

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## NEW AGE AND NEW SCIENCE IN BEDE'S THOUGHT<sup>1</sup>

Everardo Pedraza

In a very wonderful way we are at the birth of a new age and a new consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

—Bede Griffiths

### The New Age

The 'New Age' and the 'new science' characterize the seventh historical movement of human consciousness expressed in Bede Griffiths' writings. Since the 1960s, Griffiths became aware of this new age, a new movement in human consciousness evolving beyond the rational mind wrought by the Age of Reason. This is what Griffiths called the new age. It is at once the next historical movement of human consciousness which Griffiths considers after the Ages of Reason and Enlightenment, and at the same time it can also be seen in a broader context as the second major historical "breakthrough" in human consciousness. If the first "big breakthrough" which occurred in the sixth century B.C. broke through the mythic mind, then the breakthrough taking place at the end of the second millennium is a breakthrough beyond the rational mind toward the non-dual state of human consciousness. Griffiths writes that, "a new consciousness is emerging, moving beyond the rational mind with its awareness of separate entities and its dualistic approach. We are beginning to discover the unitive consciousness which goes beyond the dualistic awareness."<sup>3</sup> Griffiths considers this notion of the new age more in terms of the breakdown of the old civilization and the emergence of a new one: "I think that is exactly where we are today: the breakdown of the old civilization and of the whole order

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## BEDE GRIFFITHS: SIMPLICITY AND GRATITUDE

Meath Conlan

In his autobiography *The Golden String*, the late Bede Griffiths spoke of an experience when he was in his final year at school; an experience that would provide a foundation for a growing sense of life-long gratitude for all that transpired for him – good and bad. It was while he was walking along in the evening, as the sun was setting over the playing fields. He wrote "as I walked on, I came upon some hawthorn trees in full bloom and I thought that I had never seen such a sight or experienced such sweetness before". He thought he had chanced upon the Garden of Paradise and in that moment, he recalled, "a lark rose suddenly from the ground, poured out its song above my head, and then sank, still singing, to rest". A "feeling of awe" overcame him; the sky itself seemed "but a veil before the face of God."

For many years Bede Griffiths tried to recapture and express that experience. He began to see what the poet Wordsworth meant when he described the world with "the freshness of a dream". Even the smallest details of nature drew him, in gratitude, beyond himself, and, with an "overwhelming emotion" helped him become aware that "we are no longer isolated individuals in conflict with our surroundings; we are parts of a whole, elements in a universal harmony"

Years after his experience at school, he created a small garden in front of his single-room mud hut at Shantivanam ashram in south India. The yellows, reds, whites and mauves of the bougainvillea and marigolds, and their bright green stems and leaves throw sutras of colour against the dull ochres of his hut; they lead the eye up to the glassless window, from which Bede would gaze in contemplation, appreciating the beauty of his garden plot; perhaps waiting for his next visitor, or writing a letter to one of his many friends. He told me that he created this colourful space because it reminded him of the way the natural entanglements of colour in a garden constantly surprised him with the sense of unity to be found there. For him a garden provided wondrous opportunities for breaking the daily routine and of adjusting to some new experience or demand on his time and energies. Most of all it filled him with a sense of gratitude: anything that can do that, he said, is "a message bearer" to the soul, giving us a new vision, allowing us to see the interiority of things, "as though a veil has been lifted".

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**Bede: Simplicity and Gratitude** (Continued from page 1)

At a particular time of crisis in my life, I discovered Fr Bede through his books, and started to write to him at his ashram in India. He took my lack of ease seriously and addressed my concerns with sympathy, grace and intelligence. He said I should plan one day to come and spend a year with him at the ashram. Meanwhile, he said, I should seek "ways of discovering a sense of unity and meaning in the day-to-day experiences" of wilderness in my part of the world.

He exhorted me to seek solitude: some time each day, some each week and some each month in which to listen to nature, and to the sounds of silence. He urged me to stop and watch intensely the daily play of nature and the individual aspects of my own life; and to get a sense of others who long to find their own sense of meaning and purpose in everyday life. From these observations, he said, I should recall the poet William Blake's "golden string", and keep it in mind when thrown back again on self-doubt and confusion, living in its light and shaping my life by its law. In this way I would be enabled to "wind the string into a ball, and find your way out of the labyrinth of life." The loveliness of the vision imparted through his letters and books touched me.

Fr Bede assured me that the individual inner spiritual journey of discovering is "something that calls for all our energies, and involves both labour and sacrifice; each one approaches it from a different angle and has to work out his own particular problem. Each alike is given a golden string and has to find his own way through the labyrinth." If I glanced into his room on my way down the path near his hut in the pre-dawn, I would see him sitting deep in contemplation, as part of his several hours of preparation for the morning Eucharist. Fr Bede lived for more than 30 years his simple life at Shantivanam ashram, all the while trying to break through the rational mind. It was only through suffering a stroke in the last couple of years of his life that he "won through" the labyrinth. Then he said to his listeners one day: "I have so much for which to be grateful: I have learnt more in the last two years than in all of the rest of my life to this point" For Bede the "golden string" led on from that evening at his school: he had, he felt, to keep seeking and learning in a spirit of gratitude. He said that "every step in advance is a return to the beginning" and that the beauty to be found in nature, in the whole cosmos, "is not only truth but also Love"

For me too the search goes on. Fr Bede said that he discovered the divine not only in the life of nature, but also in the minds and hearts of human beings. He found that he had "sought the divine in the solitude of nature, and in the labour of his mind", but eventually found the answer in his community and the spirit of charity. His sense of gratitude was indeed profound; he had been "wandering in a far country and had returned home"; he "had been dead and was alive again"; he "had been lost and was found".

Fr Bede closed his autobiography, *The Golden String*, with some words from the prior in Dostoevsky's novel, *The*

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## RECENT EVENTS

- **The Bede Griffiths Trust** conducted its fifth annual **cyberspace meeting** from March 8 to April 13, 2007. The meeting was moderated by Dr. Meath Conlan. When it was suggested that the Trust engage in active fund-raising to support the charitable activities of Shantivanam Ashram, a discussion ensued on the relation between the principal purpose of the Trust — "the renewal of the contemplative life in the world" — and these social concerns. Brother John Martin of Shantivanam, current President of the Trust board, reaffirmed this primary goal of the Trust (contemplative renewal) and declared that the Trust should not engage in actively raising funds for the ashram's charitable projects. (The Trust had already resolved in 2006 to donate at least \$500 annually to a charity selected by Bro. John Martin)

It was resolved that the Literary Committee pursue the possibility of having Bede's and Michael von Brück's new German edition of Bede's *River of Compassion* published in English. It was further decided to place an advertisement for Meath Conlan's new book, *Bede Griffiths: Friend and Gift of the Spirit* (Templegate, 2006) The Literary Committee is also pursuing a corrected re-publication of *The One Light: Bede Griffiths' Principal Writings*.

Reports were heard on the Bede Griffiths Website, on the activities of the Literary Committee and on other activities of the Trust. The financial report was presented by John Douglas.

- **The Bede Griffiths Mahasamadhi celebration** at Osage Monastery took place on Sunday, May 20th this year. Some 30 Friends of the Forest were invited to join the O+M Community in a pilgrimage to our new Hindu Temple of Greater Tulsa, with Swami Venugopal Gaptu and Rajagopal Raghavan hosting us. After puja by the Swami and a talk by Raj on the temple *murtis* and on some of their Hindu celebrations, all returned to the Forest for creative Vespers with a reading from Bede Griffiths' writings. The much-enjoyed buffet supper was enhanced by many who brought dishes. Fr. Bruno Barnhart spoke, this year, on "Bede Griffiths and Teilhard de Chardin" to about 40 invited friends. ■

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*Brothers Karamazov*. I feel these describe beautifully the way Bede tried to live his life for 86 years. They also present a vision: one in which I would like to live my life: "Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of it . . . . If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love."

**Meath Conlan** is an Australian spiritual director and author of "*Bede Griffiths: Friend & Gift of the Spirit*" (Templegate 2006). ■



## SHANTIVANAM: A FIRST VISIT Elbina Rafizadeh

Writing to fellow-members of the Bede Griffiths Sangha in Santa Cruz, California, Elbina describes her first visit to Shantivanam Ashram.

Dear Sangha friends,

I cannot be with you on Feb 25<sup>th</sup>, for I begin my lenten journey at the Hermitage, so I send my thoughts. Sorry for the length, but so much to say.

Before I left for India, I admit ambivalence because there was so much to do at home. Work, personal projects, holidays. Then the 20 or so hours of plane ride to endure, not to mention the 8 hour layover in Singapore. The excitement of the promise of the days ahead began, only when friends came up to me, more energized about the trip than how I actually felt, having spent a stressful month before hand completing seven weeks of work in public health condensed into four weeks. As I was packing, I was still in work mode, wondering if this trip was going to be worth all this preparation. Sometimes it seemed easier just to stay home, in my comfort zone, routine of daily life, without worry about things like drinking water, no flushing toilets, or mosquitoes. There was just so much to do at home. But God had led me this far, and I knew I could not turn back.

Despite the hesitancy and ambivalence of those days and nights before the trip, somehow I knew I was destined to experience Shantivanam, for I had read so much about this sacred ashram of worship through the writing of Fr. Bede and Abhishiktananda. Interestingly, the hesitation began to melt when my son, Omeed, drove me late Christmas night towards SF airport and led me into a discussion about all the possibilities that I might discover during this trip. Perhaps he did this out of concern, as I had expressed my anxieties about all the things yet undone at home that desperately needed attention. Thinking back, I very much appreciated his sensitivity. It was a nice way to begin the journey, for our two hour discussion helped me to enter into the right thought framework before I embarked into the tight quarters of the all too familiar overseas flight to Asia.

And the journey began, as the days unfolded, from the 20 hour or so plane ride, then 8 hour overnight car ride from Chennai, approaching Shantivanam along back country roads while listening to Hindu chants, through villages where people were walking to the temples. Kenan (Shantivanam's driver) drove me into the ashram around 7:30 am. My exhaustion, which had already begun to lift when we drove through the villages, transformed to excitement. A few minutes of silence to absorb the scenery, at the tea circle before Fr. George and Cyprian emerged from the temple. How warming it was to arrive and be greeted by friends. They thought I was due to arrive the night before. That would have been nice, but my introduction to Shantivanam, approaching via back road countryside, while in

prayer in the silence of my heart, as I listened to the chants of Hindu prayer, while passing fields of green, ox carts, cows, and goats, and villagers walking along the roadside, was rather poetic. Everything was one, I thought. The people were not separate from the earth. Everything blended and seemed in unison. What immediately struck me was that there was no separation between man and nature; man and nature were One. No wonder Fr. Bede fell in love with India.

### A glimpse into my memories

Mass in Tamil, walks to the temple under a bright moonlight before dawn for *namajapa*, talks with George, John, Fr. Paul, Fr. George of the Benedictine monastery in Kerala, Fr. Augustine, Ulla, and Christian, morning, noon, and evening prayers, photographing the children at daycare on Br. Martin's birthday, meeting the residents of the old-age home, the smiles on gentle faces of the workers who tend the fields and carry cow dung in large baskets balancing on their heads, the laughter and gleeful expressions of village children, dinners and breakfasts with Sr. Mary Louise and the "three wise women from the West", an evening with Sr. Mary Louise as she spoke about Monchanin, Sr. Sarah leading the *arati*, Sr. Mary Louise in the kitchen making yogurt, chopping onions with other ashramites from Germany, Italy, Sweden, and France, welcoming the sangha on New Year's eve and serving their dinner, ashram style, on their first night, meditation and prayers at the chapel in Ananda ashram, my two solitary desert days, one in Shantivanam and the other at Ananda ashram, meditation in the caves in Ramanashram, the hollow sad faces of the HIV victims who visited me a few nights before I left, witnessing the charity work of village social workers who have founded an NGO, and the sweet gentle calm of Usharani, the 15 year old woman who was born with HIV and lost both parents to AIDS.

This summary does not fully describe the experience, because there was so much in so little time. All I can say is, "you must also experience the journey, too, if you are financially able and your health allows."

Perhaps God will allow my return to Shantivanam to witness again the mystery of God's love amongst the poorest of the poor, whose gentle and calm expressions greet the holy in each person they encounter with a *Namaste*. Having seen that changes one's perspective when returning to my own adopted country where indulgence is the norm, rather than the exception. When what's taken for granted is tossed aside, yet never experienced by the poorest of the poor. Where those who have everything remain unhappy, unsatisfied. It was in Shantivanam where I found where God's presence flourished in a life where beauty can be experienced, despite the lack of hot showers, eating utensils, mosquito-less evenings, and hygienic roadways free of cow dung or otherwise. Perhaps that is why ashramites and retreatants from the industrial and developed West return

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**ABHISHIKTANANDA: ESSENTIAL WRITINGS, edited by Shirley du Boulay (Orbis, 2007) reviewed by Bruno Barnhart**

Shirley du Boulay has earned the gratitude of everyone interested in the Hindu-Christian dialogue by providing excellent biographies of Bede Griffiths (*Beyond the Darkness: A Biography of Bede Griffiths*, Rider (London) and Doubleday (New York), 1998) and Abhishiktananda (*The Cave of the Heart: The Life of Swami Abhishiktananda*, Orbis, 2005). The present volume – the *Essential Writings* of Abhishiktananda (1910-1973) – complements her life of the French monk (known also as Henri Le Saux) with a collection of many of his most cogent – and pungent – passages. The texts are collected largely from Abhishiktananda’s major books well known in English Translation: *Saccidananda, Prayer, The Further Shore, Hindu-Christian Meeting Point*, but also from sources less readily available or unavailable in English, including a number of personal letters to his friends.

The collection will be most useful as an *introduction* to Abhishiktananda’s thought and writing, and anyone who has been grasped by these powerful texts will want to read du Boulay’s biography. The texts are pervaded by a single passionate thought, by one attraction – to the experience of *advaita*, or nonduality. From his early days in India until his death, Le Saux was captivated more and more completely by this gravitational force, that seems almost physical. His personality was suited to this quest; the 19-year old aspiring monk wrote, “A monk cannot accept mediocrity; only extremes are appropriate for him.” (p. 45) Through all his years, this youthful enthusiasm – and resolution – never swerved nor weakened, and in this single focus lie both his strength and his limitations.

After du Boulay’s twenty-page biographical introduction, the collection focuses upon Henri’s Benedictine years in France (chap. 1), and then upon his discovery of India and

*Shantivanam* (Continued from page 3)

every year. Each has told me that Shantivanam is “home” and “home,” as a very special friend once wrote to me, is “where the heart is.” For me that translates to: finding God is returning home.

I returned to Santa Cruz with these statements that have stayed with me:

*Br. Martin:*, “Jesus meant for us to live in a nest, not in a cage,” and

“Jesus is the trunk, and we are the branches, so all belong to Christ, no matter who we are.”

*Fr. Dominic:*, “though you may forget God from time to time, He will never forget you.”

*Fr. Paul:* “Those irritating daily challenges and misunderstandings are cause for celebration because God has shown you a path for growth.”

Yours in Christ,

Elbina (Ash Wednesday, 2007) ■

of *advaita*, which would prove decisive for his life journey. Many of the most powerful — and the most difficult — texts in the book are centered in his ongoing process of awakening to nonduality.

For the man who has direct experience of the Real nothing else remains except the naked uncompounded light of Being itself. (63)

My Hindu and *advaitin* submersion plunges me more and more into Unity. Being is inexpressible. In the within there is only Being . . . . Coming back into the within, there is nothing other than Being and only he who possesses Being quite fully, he only can truly say I . . . . He who penetrates to the Center, the within, to the essential I, to the essential HIMSELF, how will he discern from then on what he used to call I, me, him? “Used to . . .” but these words themselves sound wrong. The within has nothing more to do with, nothing in common with, time. Everything which has direction, notion of past, future, is of the without, the unreal . . . . (70, 1953)

The goal of the universe is the consciousness of being, the final unveiling of the intuition that constitutes the human being. (72, 1966)

We then (chap.3) read of the lifelong conflict between his two loves.

Easter is the great passing over to the pure reality of *advaita*. But how agonizing it is to be perched on the knife-edge between the opposite slopes of Hinduism and Christianity. (86, 1954)

I know what it is to be torn in pieces. (87, 1972)

The texts lead us through Abhishiktananda’s immersion in the practices of Hinduism (chap. 4), his later life as a hermit (chap. 5) and his re-visioning of Christianity in the light of Asian nonduality (chap. 6)

The Christian is the man who has accepted from Jesus this amazing revelation that . . . by reason of his faith in the only Son of God, he too is a son. (152)

The Christian is not one who primarily busies himself with doing. He is primarily one who is intent upon the mystery of his existence, who in the depths of his heart humbly and simply accepts the fact that he is, in virtue of both his creation and his redemption. (153)

After some passages of his teaching on prayer (chap. 8), we arrive at Abhishiktananda’s last months: the time of his heart attack (in July 1973) and his final enlightenment (chap. 9). Here the passionate eloquence often gives way to silence.

After some days [following the heart attack] there

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**Abhishiktananda**

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came to me, as if it were the marvelous solution to an equation: I have found the Grail. And that is what I keep saying and writing to anyone who can grasp the figure of speech. The quest for the Grail is basically nothing else than the quest for the Self. (199)

The Christ I might present will be simply the I AM of my (every) deep heart, who can show himself in the dancing Shiva or the amorous Krishna! And the kingdom is precisely this discovery of the “inside” of the grail (198).

Both Henri Le Saux and Bede Griffiths experienced their great final enlightenments at their moments of acute physical crisis: heart attack and severe stroke, respectively. While Bede would continue to live and to speak for a few more years, the French monk died only five months after his attack. The moth, circling closer and closer around the flame, had finally plunged into it with a brilliant flash.

Abhishiktananda’s contribution to Christian spirituality and theology is first of all in the example of his unflagging zeal, his thirst for the Absolute, for God; then in his confidence in the ultimate convergence of religious traditions. But what is most unique and valuable is his theological gold-strike. This is the correlation of Vedantin *advaita* with Christian baptism and with the central affirmations of John’s Gospel: the I AM statements of Jesus, his unitive divine sonship and his communication of this unitive identity to his followers. Here, I believe, is the fertile connection between *advaita* and Christian experience, between Vedanta and Christian life – and, we can even say, between Christianity and the great Asian traditions. The potential of this discovery — for the revitalization of Christian theology and Christian life — is immense.

Alas, the greatest gifts received by mortals often cast a shadow. The brilliance of this nuclear flash casts into near-darkness, for our single-minded monk, the rest of the Christian mystery. This sannyasi ‘Baptist’ leads us to the Jordan, to initiation and new birth – and little further. Christian life concludes in the brilliance and transformational power of its baptismal beginning, which has become permanent in a life of self-sufficient contemplative interiority.

Abhishiktananda’s explicit gospel of nondual realization, conceived in the light of Hindu Vedanta, has no close precedents in the Christian tradition. The strongest affinities are with the Christian spiritual writers influenced by Neoplatonism, and among these it is Meister Eckhart who developed the most explicit and powerful doctrine of nonduality, recognized by Asian teachers as articulating an experience close to their own. Compared with the master and preacher, however, the monk becomes much more one-pointed. In the end he has but one thing to say, at the very edge of silence.

Abhishiktananda has become a fiery signpost on the path of Christian self-discovery today. These texts will awaken the seeds of unitive contemplation that lie waiting in many hearts. ■

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**BEDE GRIFFITHS: HOMILY ON  
ROMANS (12:1-8)**

Having concluded his long argument on the problem of the Jews and the Gentiles, Paul now turns to moral instruction. And this is very interesting as he is showing the moral teaching of the Church from the earliest days. He says first, “*I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*” This idea of sacrifice is very important—sacrifice, from the verb “*sacer + facere: to make a thing holy*”, is to make a thing over to God; it hasn’t got the negative aspect which we often give to it. There is a negative side in the sense that you take it out of this world. When you sacrifice an animal, you may kill the animal and then you offer it to God. But it is the offering to God which is the essential aspect of sacrifice.

Then he says, “*present your bodies as a living sacrifice.*” Of course, it doesn’t mean that you destroy your body; it means you surrender it to God. The body is meant to be guided and governed by the spirit. And when we surrender the body to God then it comes out of the law of the spirit. That is how Paul distinguishes between the “carnal man,” the man of the flesh who is subject to the law of the body, and the “man of the spirit” to whom the body has become under the guidance of the spirit. And I think that is really what we have to seek. Body and soul should be totally surrendered to the spirit so that they have total inner freedom. The body gains its freedom when it is subject to the law of the spirit. When it simply goes its own way, it loses its freedom; it becomes subject to the forces of nature simply. So that is the idea of “presenting the body as a living sacrifice acceptable to God” which is our spiritual worship. We worship God through the body; it’s very important [to recognize] that there is no spirit without the body. And the Mass is very typical; it is the worship through the body, through the bread and the wine, the eating, the drinking, sharing with one another; all this is spiritual worship, the worship in the spirit through the body.

“*Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind*”— *this world* always means the world under the dominion of the rational mind without the spirit. Body and soul have to be subject to the spirit; and when the soul is dominated by the rational mind alone, then you get the world as we have it today with great advantages, great achievements, and also the terrible problems and contradictions in it. So not to “*be conformed to the world*” in that sense, but be *transformed* by a renewal in your mind. The body has to be renewed and surrendered to the spirit and then the mind, the rational mind, has to be surrendered to the spirit. When the rational mind works on its own, it is very active and scientific and so on, but it always brings *good and evil*. Science brings marvelous

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## The Golden String

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### *Bede Griffiths: Homily on Romans* (Continued from page 5)

things—medicine and healing and so on, but then it brings atom bombs and nuclear power and all the destructive forces; so it is always ambivalent in that way. But, when the mind is subject to the spirit, then its powers become creative and constructive.

“... that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”—that is to bring everything under the will of God; the *will of God* is that power which works through the universe but which has to be perceived. There are several levels—there is the physical level—things work on the mechanical level in the physical level and they have their own laws. Then they work on the psychological level and they have their own laws. And then there are works on the spiritual [level]; ideally, the spirit works through the body and through the soul and brings the harmony. But sin is when the soul and the body separate from the spirit and go their own way. The *will of God* is that the spirit should enter into our lives totally and transform them.

Then he said “...by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment...”. That, of course, is the problem of *egoism*—that each one tends to think more highly. We know ourselves in a quite different way from what we know anybody else. We know ourselves totally from within and we get wonderful insights of marvelous powers we have. But we see other people from outside and we don’t see much in them very often. So to learn to speak soberly of one’s self; “to see ourselves as others see us,” as Robert Burns said, is quite an achievement. Try to see one’s self objectively and not merely subjectively.

“...but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him.” And then he gives this great illustration of *the body*, which he uses in several letters. I always feel it is the best image you could have of human society—that we are all members of one body. “For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” [This] is a wonderful image because as you see, in the body there are many members; they are all different; they all have their different functions and they are all necessary. The aim is not for everybody to be the same. The great danger in modern society is everybody wants to be the same. We think that “equality” means “sameness”—that if you are all equal then you must all have the same education, you must all be educated in a literary manner, and so on. But, there are many levels of knowledge; a craftsman without any literary knowledge can have a profound wisdom. And that is the kind of wisdom that tends to be lost if we [expect] everybody to be the same. So the aim is not to be the same but each has its own distinctive gift. That every human being has their own gift

from God and we all have something to contribute to the good of the body. It may be very humble; sometimes the functions of the body are quite humble, a little finger or something, another very important, like the brain or something. But each has its own place and when we accept that place within the body and we see ourselves as we are, then we work with the body and the body works through us and then we achieve fulfillment. So, this illustration is very important.

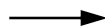
“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them...” Then he gives examples of the gifts in the body. First “*prophecy in proportion to our faith ...*”. Unfortunately prophecy is very rare; it has been ever since the first few centuries. It went out of the Church, partly through Montanism. There was a movement of Montanism where prophecy was made the main thing and it brought hostility and was suppressed and the Church has rather lost the gift of prophecy. It doesn’t mean simply foreseeing the future; it means growing to see things in the *light of the spirit*. And, of course, you find it in many of the Saints and so on, but that prophetic gift is something today which we try to recover. And then [we have] “*service, in our serving*”, teaching in teaching, exhorting in exhortation, contributing and liberality, giving aid with zeal, doing acts of mercy. So everybody has his own gift from God. It is very important that each one has their gifts: men and women and little children, each person has their own place in the Church, their own place in society and has something to give and something to receive. And we should all be willing to receive from others; we have not all got all the gifts; we all need others. We need to be real about our own need and also our own contribution. So all those are useful—teaching and exhorting and contributing, giving aid and doing acts of mercy.

So that image of the body is about as good as anything you can find to try to understand how human society should go. ■

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### THE GOLDEN STRING IS ONLINE!

Each issue of **The Golden String** is now being posted (complete) on the Bede Griffiths website, [www.bede.griffiths.org](http://www.bede.griffiths.org) Back issues, from the beginning of the Bulletin in 1994, will also be found on the website. The format is .pdf, which requires that Adobe Reader be installed on your computer. This program is available free at [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com) — a link to this site will be found on the Bede Griffiths website. Many of our subscribers, now that they can download **The Golden String** from the website, may find it unnecessary to have the paper copy mailed to them. If you wish to discontinue your paper subscription, let us know — for example, by an e-mail to [bruno@contemplation.com](mailto:bruno@contemplation.com) — and we will remove your name from the mailing list. This will be expedient especially for subscribers outside North America, since international postage rates are so high. ■



*New Age and New Science* (Continued from page 1)

which we knew, and, within that, the rebirth of meaning, penetrated by consciousness.”<sup>4</sup>

To be sure, we must not confuse Griffiths’ notion of the “new age” with the modern notion of the New Age movement, for “to associate him with the expression ‘the New Age’, that umbrella term that includes so much that he did not stand for, is misleading.”<sup>5</sup> Griffiths’ notion of the new age goes far beyond the articulations and theological categories of the New Age movement. For example, Wayne Teasdale explains:

On so many occasions in his long and fruitful life, Bede Griffiths had announced the dawning of a new age, which was not the popular notion of the New Age movement but really the opening to an integral humanism that brought together all the religions/spiritualities, science, and mysticism with the concern for the earth and the indigenous wisdom traditions, in a new vision of a reconciled humanity, where community and its gifts of sharing are the focus.<sup>6</sup>

Griffiths understood this new age to be part of a larger movement in human consciousness which was characterized by a synthesis of various streams of human thought and experience, a real global renaissance of cultural and spiritual experience harmonized in a non-dual awareness. Griffiths conceived this new age in terms of a world-wide movement heading toward a more global civilization:

We are entering a new age. The European civilization which we have known for the past two thousand years is giving way to a global civilization, which will no longer be centered in Europe but will have its focus more in Asia, Africa, and South America. Christianity will no longer be a separate religion but will be seen in the context of the religious traditions of humankind as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

We can understand the new science better in light of the next step in human consciousness beyond the Age of Reason and Enlightenment as the modern theories of the new science evolved beyond the scientific and philosophic categories postulated by Isaac Newton and René Descartes (all of which were steeped in the rational dimension of the mind). Griffiths stated that, “As we enter this new civilization, the meeting-place of East and West, and of the nations of the world, will be science.”<sup>8</sup> And so we turn to a more detailed consideration of Bede Griffiths’ understanding of the new science.

### **The New Science<sup>9</sup>**

As Bede Griffiths entered the last thirteen years of his life, he changed his views dramatically regarding the relationship between science and spirituality. Whereas before he had categorically rejected the scientific model that emerged during the Age of Reason, with the advent of the

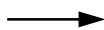
theories of unity and interconnectedness proposed by the new science he began to reconcile his intellectual schism between western science and his mystical contemplative spiritual worldview. Around 1980, Griffiths encountered the “new science,” articulated by innovators such as physicists, David Bohm and Fritjof Capra, British biologist Rupert Sheldrake, and the pioneering transpersonal psychologist Ken Wilber. “Moving from his earlier categorical rejection of western science and technology,” writes Barnhart, “Bede began to incorporate the insights of contemporary physics, biology and transpersonal psychology with the ancient wisdoms into a new and comprehensive vision of reality.”<sup>10</sup> Through the articulations of these scientific writers, Griffiths began to see science in a more positive light, especially in relation to the ancient wisdom traditions and the perennial philosophy. His acceptance of an invitation to address the conference of the International Transpersonal Association in Bombay entitled, “East and West: Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science”<sup>11</sup> signaled a major turning point in Griffiths’ evolutionary thought of integrating the “new science” into his holistic spiritual vision.

As Bede Griffiths began to understand the significance of the new science and its role in the confluence and evolution of eastern and western thought, he realized that, “As we enter this new civilization, the meeting-place of East and West, and of the nations of the world, will be science. The changes in contemporary Western science have provided a new outlook on life for humanity as a whole.”<sup>12</sup> The main point of the new science is the breakdown of the Cartesian and Newtonian models of the physical universe and the emergence of a more organic and holistic scientific model. In *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction to His Interspiritual Thought*, Teasdale defines Griffiths’ conception of the new science as,

the developments in physics, for instance, quantum mechanics and relativity theory, in which there has been a move away from the old Newtonian model of the universe as composed of discrete particles (atoms) to the organic model, a model that reintroduces a sense of the cosmic whole.<sup>13</sup>

So for example, in the Newtonian scientific model, the atom was perceived to be the smallest building block of the universe. But then the new science emerged with particle physics and Einstein’s theory of relativity which proved that the atom could be split and that everything is composed of a field of energy. As Griffiths writes, “The Newtonian universe of solid bodies moving in absolute space and time has given way to the view of relativity and quantum physics.”<sup>14</sup> He continues, “The central point is the new understanding of the universe, which is no longer perceived as consisting of solid bodies moving in space and time, but rather, according to quantum theory, as a field of energy pervaded by consciousness.”<sup>15</sup>

*(Continued on page 8)*



*New Age and New Science* (Continued from page 7)

Fascinated by the discovery that one could connect the concepts of the new science with the ancient wisdom of the perennial philosophy, Griffiths wrote, "The age of scientific materialism which dominated the nineteenth century is passing and a new age of spiritual wisdom is coming to birth."<sup>16</sup> Griffiths interpreted the new science as an indication of the truth of the perennial philosophy, the primordial metaphysics.<sup>17</sup> It is what Wayne Teasdale describes as "finding our way back into a knowledge of the ancient wisdom or the perennial philosophy"<sup>18</sup>

What were these new sciences that impressed Bede Griffiths so deeply?

**The New Physics: Albert Einstein,  
David Bohm, and Fritjof Capra**

In discussing the new physics, Griffiths always started with acknowledging Albert Einstein's theory of relativity and with quantum mechanics "in order to show the breakdown and collapse of the old Newtonian model of the universe as composed of discrete particles of matter, or atoms in motion, following mechanical laws, an objective system in a universe independent of consciousness."<sup>19</sup> As far as the contemporary physics goes, Griffiths was particularly impressed with the groundbreaking theories of David Bohm and Fritjof Capra.

David Bohm was a disciple of Einstein and was one of the first scientists to "take seriously the place of consciousness in scientific understanding."<sup>20</sup> In addition to being a brilliant physicist, Bohm was also an avid meditator and a student of spiritual teacher J. Krishnamurti. David Bohm's theories of wholeness and the implicate order of the hologram particularly impressed Griffiths. Griffiths writes:

In his [Bohm's] understanding the whole universe is originally an integrated whole, which is "folded up," as it were, and what we see is the explication, the "unfolding" of this whole. This means that the whole is present in every part. This has been illustrated by the analogy of a hologram. A hologram is a lensless photo, which shows simply waves of light, but when a laser beam is focused on the photo a three dimensional figure appears and this figure is present in every part of the photo. This suggests that the universe is a field of energies, of waves of light which presents itself to our senses as a three dimensional world. What we see is not the reality itself but the reality reflected through our senses and the instruments which we use to further the senses, interpreted by the observing mind.<sup>21</sup>

Griffiths summarizes the significance of Bohm's thought and relates it to his interspiritual vision as follows:

David Bohm speaks, as a theoretical physicist, of unity and interconnectedness in what he calls the implicate order, prior to the world of separate entities which is

our normal experience. The implicate order is constantly unfolding, giving rise to the explicate order of particular forms and structures. This is where the new scientific understanding of the universe meets with the non-dualist traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and so on. 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. All the religions are expressing symbolically something which cannot be expressed in rational terms.<sup>22</sup>

This idea of the interconnectedness of all reality behind and beyond the manifest realm really impressed Griffiths. Thus Griffiths could finally reconcile his mystical experience of unity in nature as a young man with the new theories of contemporary physics.

The other physicist who had a tremendous influence on Griffiths' thinking was Fritjof Capra. Capra's books, *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* (1975) and *The Turning Point* (1982) introduced Griffiths to the idea that reality is composed of a "complicated web of interdependent relationships" which form part of a unified whole.<sup>23</sup> We note with interest the parallels between these concepts of unity and interdependence and those of ancient man articulated at the beginning of the previous chapter, "Unity of Being and Consciousness in Primitive Man." This perspective of the indigenous wisdom of ancient humanity parallels that of Eastern mysticism which holds that all of reality constitutes part of a unified whole. At last the knowledge that matter is not separate from consciousness has become integrated into the new theories of physics.

**The New Biology: Rupert Sheldrake**

English biologist Rupert Sheldrake spent eighteen months at Bede Griffiths' ashram in south India, Saccidananda Ashram (also known as Shantivanam), writing the book, *A New Science of Life: The Hypothesis of Formative Causation* (1981), which he discussed in detail with Bede Griffiths.<sup>24</sup> Sheldrake reintroduced to the field of biology the idea of formative causes which he calls morphogenetic fields and "which are responsible for structuring energy, since energy as such is without form." Teasdale explains Sheldrake's theory of morphogenetic fields in relation to Griffiths' thought:

These morphogenetic fields, as formative causes, bring to birth a *morphé* (the Greek word for "form"), which then gives structure to the formless energy. Bede felt that the implication of Sheldrake's discovery is that he has shown that formative causes have to exist because the universe cannot at all be explained by chance and necessity, as some have tried to do in the past. Form gives order, intelligibility, and purpose to the universe, what in fact we discover in its actuality. And it gives

*(Continued on page 9)*





*New Age and New Science* (Continued from page 8)  
this meaning and purpose to the cosmos on all levels.<sup>25</sup>

### **The New Transpersonal Psychology in the Work of Ken Wilber**

Another important area of the new science is in the discipline of psychology, especially in the work of Ken Wilber whose work, along with that of other psychologists such as Stanislav Grof, innovated the field of Transpersonal Psychology, which not only takes into account body and mental consciousness, but spiritual consciousness as well. In referring to Ken Wilber, Teasdale notes that Griffiths was “quite impressed with this man’s achievement and often introduced his insights in lectures.”<sup>26</sup> He adds:

The new psychology, as represented by Ken Wilber, is open to the spiritual wisdom and vast range of psychological experience found in Eastern mysticism. In his major studies Wilber has tried to bridge the gap between clinical psychology, which is based on the study and treatment of pathological states of consciousness, and the Eastern doctrines that study and enter into the higher, more subtle planes of consciousness.<sup>27</sup>

Griffiths was particularly intrigued that this transpersonal psychology took seriously the reality of the spiritual world when dealing with the human psyche. Griffiths perceived this new psychological model as opening “the way to a comprehensive vision of the universe as an integrated whole,” a vision which understands the universe as the place of the evolution of consciousness.<sup>28</sup> Teasdale articulates this evolution of consciousness as a movement

from body to mental consciousness, and from mental consciousness into spiritual consciousness, where we transcend the body and the mind (the psyche), and open up into the infinite and eternal Reality. At that point, we are united with the whole, with the totality, the transcendent consciousness that comprehends the totality.<sup>29</sup>

Griffiths was delighted to learn that the movement in contemporary science represented by Bohm, Capra, Sheldrake, and Wilber was drawing many parallels between Western science and Eastern mysticism. Yet there was still the question of where and how Christianity and its mystical tradition fit into this interdisciplinary and interreligious dialogue. Indeed, “Father Bede was aware of this deficiency and sought in numerous lectures to show how Christianity and its mystical tradition fit in, primarily through the intuitions of Trinity, Godhead, and the Incarnation.”<sup>30</sup>

#### **Notes:**

1. This is an excerpt from Everardo Pedraza’s Master of Arts honors thesis entitled, *Beyond Duality: Integration and Transformation of Mind in Bede Griffiths’ Interspiritual Thought*, written for the Graduate Theological Union / Franciscan School of Theol-

ogy, May 2007. Copies of the entire thesis can be purchased by sending a \$15.00 check payable to “Peace Meditation,” P.O. Box 7982, Fresno, CA 93747. (559) 230-9736. For international orders, please contact Peace Meditation. [peacemeditation7@yahoo.com](mailto:peacemeditation7@yahoo.com)

2. Griffiths, “The New Consciousness,” in *The Tablet*, January 16, 1993, 70.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Shirley du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness: A Biography of Bede Griffiths*, 206.

6. Wayne Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction to His Interspiritual Thought*, 203-204.

7. Griffiths, “The New Consciousness,” 70.

8. Ibid.

9. For further research, see Wayne Teasdale’s exposition of the new science as it relates to Griffiths’ epistemology, in his *Bede Griffiths*, 49-58.

10. Barnhart, *The One Light: Bede Griffiths’ Principal Writings*, 14.

11. Ibid., 5. See also Shirley du Boulay’s *Beyond the Darkness*, 197-201. According to du Boulay (p. 201), it was the Esalen Institute, based in Big Sur, California, that organized this pivotal conference in Bombay. Incidentally, Mother Teresa also attended the conference and impressed Griffiths with her “message of pure love. I have never seen anything like it.” (du Boulay, 199)

12. Griffiths, “The New Consciousness,” 70.

13. Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths*, 178.

14. Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, 27-28.

15. Griffiths, “The New Consciousness,” 70.

16. Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, 27.

17. Griffiths was so impressed by reading Fritjof Capra’s *The Turning Point* that he wrote to Martyn Skinner “It is the final justification of ‘our’ philosophy.” (see du Boulay, 197)

18. Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths*, 57.

19. Ibid., 57.

20. Griffiths, “The New Consciousness,” 70. Bede Griffiths was introduced to the work of David Bohm by Rupert Sheldrake in the late 1970’s (See du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 197-198).

21. Bede Griffiths, “Emerging Consciousness for a New Humankind: Emerging Consciousness and the Mystical Traditions of Asia,” lecture presented to a conference in Madras, January 1985, 1-2.

22. Griffiths, “The New Consciousness,” 70.

23. Shirley du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 197-198. Another book that Griffiths raved about was entitled, *Belonging to the Universe: Explorations on the Frontiers of Science and Spirituality*, consisting of a conversation between Fritjof Capra and David Steindl-Rast, with Thomas Matus. (HarperCollins, 1991)

24. See du Boulay, 197-198.

25. Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths*, 54. Teasdale goes on to relate these formative causes to “Aristotle’s causes, the formal and final ones.” (55).

26. Ibid., 55

27. Ibid.

28. Griffiths, “Emerging Consciousness,” 3.

29. Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths*, 55-56. For a more comprehensive and in-depth treatment of Bede Griffiths’ understanding of the contribution of the new science, see Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths*, especially 43-58. See also Judson Trapnell’s published dissertation, *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue*.

30. Ibid., 56-57. ■



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## *The Golden String*

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### COMING EVENTS

- In early September **Sr. Pascaline Coff** of Osage Monastery will be traveling to **Shantivanam**, gratefully remembering the blessed year spent there 30 years ago with Father Bede and the Shantivanam community. Diane Shabazian (a temporary member at Osage) will be traveling with Sr. Pascaline, as will be Fr. Brian Pierce, O.P., and an Osage Oblate, Bob Doenges. They will carry with them the gratitude of all those who have benefited spiritually from Osage+Monastery since its birthing 30 years ago. Fr. Bede visited Osage five times and affectionately referred to O+M as the “Shantivanam of the West,” for which he was very grateful.
- **Dr. Meath Conlan** will be leading **tours to South and North India** during this year. Meath is Australian Vice President of the Bede Griffiths Trust. He promises “a deep and intimate experience of this wonderful country.” a detailed itinerary and other useful information will be found at his website: [@diversejourneys.net](http://www.diversejourneys.net/drconlan) ■

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*Visit the Bede Griffiths Website:*  
[www.bede Griffiths.org](http://www.bede Griffiths.org)

## The Golden String

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