

The Golden String

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SPIRIT, SOUL AND BODY, II: **THE END AND THE GOAL** **Cyprian Consiglio**

*When the Ten Thousand things are viewed in their oneness,
we return to the Origin and remain where we have always been.*
Sen T'sen

In what follows, we shall explore how much ground can be found to be shared between a few traditions that line up to some considerable extent, in the hopes of finding a new vocabulary for a new age of spirituality. Specifically, though, I want to begin where I hope to end, where I think the best of our traditions end. In seeking to avoid any kind of dualism and in the quest for a more holistic spirituality, I would propose as a bottom line that the material world, and with it the body, is *not to be shunned*. The goal is to *transform* matter, and to divinize and spiritualize the body.

Particularly toward the end of his life, Fr. Bede had a whole new integral worldview in mind, drawn together from both Asian and Western influences. I want to trace a few of those sources back to their roots and make a little more explicit what was implicit in Bede's vision. Specifically I want to tie together Sri Aurobindo of Pondicherry and Teilhard de Chardin. Bede speaks of the two of them almost in the same breath: "Teilhard presented an evolutionary view of matter evolving into life and into consciousness..." he wrote in *New Vision of Reality*; and what Teilhard did for Christianity, Bede says, "Aurobindo did for Hinduism. He developed a system of Vedanta which incorporates the concept of evolution into the Hindu vision of the universe." Ultimately we will not just deal with the greater wide-vision cosmology, but also see how this new vision applies to the microcosm of the human person as well. But before we get there, in order to understand Aurobindo we need to have a little background in the Indian *darshanas* (philosophies), and the Tantric approach to yogic philosophy in particular. Then, perhaps in

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INTEGRAL DYNAMIC **MONOTHEISM** **(Fully Human and Fully Divine)**

John Martin Sahajananda

All philosophies, all ideologies, all scriptures, all religions and all prophets and sages tell us two important things: who we are and how we have to live our life in the world of time and space. The way we live our life depends on the identity we have about ourselves.

In this article we limit our search to the religious level. Let us see what the religions tell us about who we are and how we have to live our life. In these days it is common to divide religions into two important categories (not in an absolute sense): Wisdom Traditions and Prophetic Traditions. Religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism belong to the Wisdom Traditions. These religions have some common elements like, *karma*, *samsara* and reincarnation. Religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam belong to the Prophetic Traditions. These religions are also called Monotheistic Religions as they believe in one God. We focus our reflection on the Monotheistic Religions¹ and Hinduism.

Prophetic Monotheism

According to traditional Judaism² God is the creator and human beings are creatures of God. God creates the creation and human beings out of nothing. There is a gulf between God and human beings. There is an essential difference between them. Human beings cannot see God face to face. God is the liberator and saviour. He guides his people through the prophets. He reveals his will through the commandments. The Torah reveals the will of God and people have to follow it. To obey the Torah is to obey God. One has to submit one's will and intellect to the will of God and one has to be faithful and loyal to God. Jews consider themselves to be specially chosen by God. So according to Judaism human beings are creatures of God. They are expected to live a moral life according to the will of God.

According to Christianity³, God is the creator and human beings are creatures of God. There is an essential difference between God and human beings. God revealed his will through the prophets in the Old Testament and he revealed his final will in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the only Son of God. He is the incarnation of the second person of the Holy Trinity. He is the only way, the truth the life. One has to believe in Jesus Christ as the only

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Integral Dynamic Monotheism (Continued from page 1)

Son of God and become a Christian to be saved. Some insist only on believing in Christ as the saviour to be saved and others insist not only on believing in Christ but also on living a moral life and doing good works. If one lives a good life one will go to heaven and if one lives a bad life one will go to hell after death.

According to traditional Islam⁴ God is the creator and human beings are creatures of God. There is an essential difference between God and creation. God revealed his will through the prophets in the Old Testament and in Jesus Christ, but he revealed his final will in the Holy Koran through the Prophet Muhammad. Hence the Koran is the final word of God and Muhammad is the last prophet. God did not reveal himself but revealed the Koran in which he tells human beings what they should do and what they should not do. The Koran is considered as the eternal word of God dictated to the Prophet Muhammad. Submission to the will of God revealed in the Koran is necessary for salvation. To obey the Koran is to obey God. If one lives a moral life according to the Koran one will go to heaven and if one does not live a moral life then one will go to hell after one's death.

According to these three religions **God is the creator and human beings are creatures of God**. The difference between Judaism, Islam and Christianity is the person of Jesus Christ and Trinity. Jews and Muslims do not believe that God is Trinity. They think it violates the unity of God. They do not believe that Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the second person of the Holy Trinity. They do not believe that he is the only Son of God and that he is the only way, the truth and the life. They believe that he is a human being like any other human being. He is a messenger of God or reformer of Judaism. If he called himself as the son of God, it is only in the metaphorical sense that every one is a son or daughter of God.

These three religions are called Monotheistic Religions because they believe that there is only one God and this one God is the creator of the universe. The general expression is that God created this universe out of nothing. There is an essential difference between God and creation which includes human beings. In Christianity exception is given to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is not a creature of God but the incarnation of God. There is an essential difference between Christ and other human beings.

Hindu Monotheism

The expression 'Hindu Monotheism' may surprise some. In general Hinduism is described as monism, non-dualism, pantheism and polytheism. But one has to be aware that according to Hinduism there is only one God or absolute Reality (Monotheism) but this God is not the creator but he/she/it manifests in creation. Hinduism does not propose the theory of creation of out of nothing. This is the basic difference between Prophetic Monotheism and Hindu Monotheism. There are three important theological positions in Hin-

duism⁵. These positions are based on the interpretations given to the teachings of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita, and the Brahma Sutras, the sacred scriptures of Hinduism. The Upanishads belong to the period of the fifth century before Christ and the Bhagavad-Gita belongs around the first century before or after Christ⁶. These scriptures did not propose any theological system but the systems came later. The fundamental question of these systems is the relationship between God and creation, God and human beings. In the Prophetic Monotheism this question seems to have been resolved with the theory of creation out of nothing. Since Hindu Monotheism does not accept this solution it needs to propose different solutions.

Advaita- Non-duality

The first philosophical system is called *advaita*, a system of non-duality proposed by Shankara in the eighth century⁷ after Christ. According to him **God (Brahman) alone is eternal (sathyam). Creation (Jagat) is an illusion, non eternal (mithya)**. It is also described with the famous word *Maya*. **Ultimately the human soul (jivatman) is identical with God (Brahman)**. This can be explained with the analogy of water (God) and ice. Only water is there. The ice comes from water and melts back to water. But the form of ice does not have an independent existence. It has a beginning and an end. The ice is essentially one with water, though functionally different. The ice does not become water. It is water. But it is not aware that it is water. Because it is solid it imagines that it is a stone. It is in ignorance. It needs to free itself from ignorance and realize that it is water or God. Shankara proposed the way of wisdom, *jnana marga*. The paths of devotion, *bhakti* and action, *karma* can prepare the way but *jnana* is the ultimate as ignorance can be removed only through wisdom and not by devotion or action as they are not opposite of ignorance. For Shankara God or Brahman is *nirguna*, without qualities. Brahman is impersonal. Human beings are essentially one with God but they are ignorant of this truth. They have to realize this truth. According to him ultimately every human being can say '*ahambrahmaasmi*', I am Brahman, 'God and I are one'. A person who realizes this truth while alive is called *jivan muktha*, liberated while alive. In general Shankara is considered to be a monist but a better description would be that he is a non-dualist: God and creation are not two independent realities.

Visistadvaita- Qualified Non-dualism

The second system is called *Visista Advaita*, a system of qualified non-dualism, proposed by Ramanuja in the 11th century after Christ. He disagreed with Shankara's position regarding the nature of God and creation and human souls. For Ramanuja, as with Shankara, **God (Brahman) alone is eternal (sathyam)**. But this God is not *nirguna*, without qualities, but *saguna*, with qualities. God is personal. **Creation (jagat) is the manifestation of Brahman** (not an illusion, *mithya*, as with Sankara). The creation

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Integral Dynamic Monotheism (Continued from page 2)

is not created by God. It is an emanation from God. God is the material and instrumental cause of creation. **Human souls are part of God but not identical with God.** There is an essential difference between God and human souls. God has the creation and human souls as his body. The relationship between God and creation is like soul and body, or body and the hair that grow on the body. God and creation are inseparable. Creation is not an illusion, *mithya* or *Maya*. *Maya* is the creative power of God through which he manifests the creation. If we take the analogy of water and ice, Brahman is water; ice is the creation and human souls. Ice is not an illusion. It is the manifestation of Brahman. It is the body of Brahman. But there is a subtle difference between God and creation which includes human souls. They are not identical with Brahman. Ramanuja proposed the way of devotion, *bhakti marga*. One has to surrender to God through devotion or faith so that God takes responsibility for one's life and one finds peace and joy in this surrender. There is no human soul merging with God. No one can say, 'God and I are one'. Personal relationship with God is very important. If the human soul merges with God, then no personal relationship is possible. Human beings can have a personal relationship with God with different aspects like: father and son, husband and wife, protector and protected, physician and patient, sustainer and sustained, sun and lotus, clouds and grains, supporter and dependent, owner and the owned. Ultimate liberation is only after the death of physical body. In general Ramanuja is considered to be a pantheist. But this may not be correct since he holds that there is a subtle essential difference between God, on the one hand, and creation and human souls on the other.

Dvaita-Duality

The third position is called *Dvaita*, a system of duality, proposed by Madhva in the 12th century after Christ. He disagreed with both Shankara and Ramanuja regarding the nature of God, creation and human souls and proposed dualism. Madhva would agree with Shankara and Ramanuja that **God alone is eternal (sathyam)**. According to him God is Brahman and Brahman is Vishnu and his other incarnations. **The Creation is essentially different from God.** Creation is not an illusion (Shankara). It is not the manifestation of God (Ramanuja). It is not created by God. It is there from the beginning, as eternal but essentially different from God. **Human souls are essentially different from God.** There is a gulf between God and creation and human beings. The immeasurable power of Lord Vishnu is seen as the efficient cause of the universe and the primordial matter or *prakrti* is the material cause of the universe. God is personal and has many qualities, *saguna*. The human soul is essentially different from God. This position keeps human beings somewhat distant from God and strengthens the relationship between them. He proposed the path of devotion, *bhakti marga*, and good works, *karma marga*. One needs to surrender to God through devotion and do good works. It

is the Lord who performs actions energizing the soul from within and awarding the results to the soul, but he is not affected by it. According to Madhva human beings are more or less creatures of God (though he may not like to use the word 'creatures', in the sense of being created out of nothing), essentially different, and remain so after this life. The human soul should come closer to God through devotion but without merging with him. Liberation is the state of attaining maximum joy or sorrow, which is awarded to the soul according to its actions at the end of its spiritual practice, which would be after its death.

These three systems believe that there is only one God, one eternal Reality. In that sense they are monotheistic religions. But they do not believe that this one Reality is a creator. This is the main difference between Prophetic Monotheism and Hindu Monotheism. Many think that Hinduism is polytheistic. In practice it looks like that but Hinduism believes that there is only one God and different gods are either various manifestations of that one God or like angels in the Prophetic Monotheism. It is very interesting to note how the Vedic tradition reached its climax in the Upanishads in the 5th century before Christ, when it was realized that human consciousness is identical with divine, and in the 12th century after Christ it arrived at the dualistic understanding in Madhva, where an essential difference between God and human souls is affirmed.

We can now see that there are three important concepts of a human being: **essentially one with God**, as per *advaita* of Shankara; **a manifestation of God** as per *visistadvaita* of Ramanuja; and **essentially different with God**, as per Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and the *dvaita* system of Hinduism. What is common to them all is that there is only one God. **In that sense they are all monotheists.** The difference is the way human beings relate with that one God.

Notes:

1. Sikhism is also a monotheistic religion but we do not speak about it here.
2. Here we are not taking into account Kabala, the mystical tradition of Judaism.
3. Here we are not taking into account the mystical tradition of Christianity.
4. Here we are not taking into account Sufism, the mystical tradition of Islam.
5. There are a total of five: *sudda advaita*: pure non-dualism, *bedebeda*: God and creation are different and not different; *advaita*: non-duality; *visista advaita*: qualified non-duality; and *dviata*: duality. *Advaita*, *visista advaita* and *dviata* are important ones.
6. This is not in an absolute sense. There are different views on it.
7. There may be different views on it.

(To be Concluded) ■

“To the third Christian millennium is reserved the task of overcoming a tribal Christology by a Christophany which allows Christians to see the work of Christ everywhere, without assuming that they have a better grasp or a monopoly of that Mystery, which has been revealed to them in a unique way. “ *Raimon Panikkar, quoted by Joseph Prabhu*



HERMITAGE REFLECTIONS

BELONGING Elbina Rafizadeh

The Real incessantly reawakens us to an impassioned awareness of a wider expansion and an all-embracing unity...when the world reveals itself to us it draws us into itself: it causes us to flow outwards into something belonging to it, everywhere present in it, and more perfect in it.

(Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Divine Milieu, paraphrased by Thomas Corbishly)

The other day, as I was putting the Camaldoli pendant back into the front pocket of my backpack, I paused to finger the image on the pendant, of two birds drinking from opposite sides of a chalice. For me, the symbol represents the relationship between the monk and oblate, in Christ. This commitment to the monastery was formally established when I became an oblate of New Camaldoli. This partnership with the monks of this order means praying, living, and participating in the life following the Rule of St. Benedict, which has its center in living a life of simplicity, work, and prayer. The difference is while the monks live this way of life in the monastery, oblates participate in the world. This centering way of life has established how I begin and end each day. I do not have to convince myself that the decision is heartfelt, but when I wear the pendant, I demonstrate to the world that I, too, drink from the chalice of Camaldoli; the chalice that represents faith, hope, and friendship. This has been life changing in the many aspects of my daily living as the meaning relentlessly resonates in the passing moments, ringing deeply and forever embedded in the unseen corners of my heart.

In the contemplative life, I have found solace in solitude. However, sometimes the silence aggravates repressed feelings, which can no longer remain buried and must rise to the surface. Needless to say, these feelings are very unpleasant. In solitude, though there are many days of peace, there are an equal number of days that bring anxiety, fear, and loneliness. When the emptiness is so overwhelming that not even the thought of friends can appease the painful emotion. When family who have stood by me in even more acute periods, seem so distant. The vacuum in my heart is like this bottomless abyss into which I have fallen and the days and nights seem endless. How does the solace arrive?

At the Hermitage, I have found my community for prayer and contemplation. In prayer with the monks, there is a communion in God. The unison of monks and oblates in prayers through chants and praise is like drinking from the chalice that offers peace, which, for me, never fails to arrive during prayer. When I see this emblem, I am reminded that even in desolate days, all is well because despite everything, there is a community that understands the abysmal darkness. Prayer and contemplative meditation have guided me into an inner space that allows this inner



darkness to emerge and envelop me. In this community, I can share this pain, which is universal in mankind. My participation in this community reinforces the acceptance of my loneliness, my fears, and my anxieties. Because I have accepted a share of this belonging, I can realize that the darkness is temporary and, though relentless, this darkness will succumb and thus create the opening for discovery of a divine reality. This life has shown me the deeper meaning of prayer, and from prayer, can realize the sacred in the every day.

The divine reality finds gold in muddy waters, sees sparkling jewels across the desert landscape at mid-day, and can catch the single falling leaf that dances to the ground on the street corner of a busy urban neighborhood. This is the reality that is available for everyone. This is the reality that infuses Love to the center of our hearts and nothing can ever separate us from this Love.

In the morning, I like to drink tea and watch the sparrows and finches at the bird feeder that hangs from a low branch of my birch tree. They consistently arrive somewhere between 6:45 and 7:30. The streets are quiet allowing the barks of the sea lions from half a mile away, to fill the morning stillness. I love to meditate in this space of timeless symphonic silence, of sea lions barking between the sounds of waves crashing against rocks. When I arrive in this truth of simple gratitude, I want to remain forever. What was that loneliness the other day? How did the anxiety ever find a way through the crack in the door? I can sit in this silence without end, until I hear the sounds of automobile engines starting up, as neighbors are leaving to go to work. Then the sparrows fly away, as automobiles begin to leave driveways, drowning out the calls of sea lions.

One Sunday morning at the Hermitage, I was sitting on the deck of Sophia, waiting for a friend to arrive for tea. In that span of time of unexpected circumstance, while waiting for his arrival, chance discovery happened. Space and time seem to merge as one moment ended and before the next moment began. I am reminded of Bede Griffiths and find in his book, *Return to the Center*,

I look out on this world of things around me, each one separated in space, each one moving in time, and beyond this comparatively stable world I know that there is an almost infinite dispersion of matter in space, a perpetual flux of movement in time. The one Word has gone out of itself, has reflected itself in this ocean of matter, the one Spirit is at work with its infinite energy, building up this matter in time. In my consciousness this diffusion of matter, this flux of becoming begins to be ordered in space and time. But there is a window in my consciousness where I can look out on eternity, or rather where this eternal Reality looks out on the world of space and time though me. When I turn back beyond my senses and beyond my reason and pass through this door into eternal life, then I discover my true Self, then I begin to see the world as it really is." ■

Wisdom Christianity

THE WISDOM OF THE WEST: I

During the last few years I have been tracking an elusive beast: *the Wisdom of the West*. That has a paradoxical sound, and sometimes I have wondered whether it is reality or fantasy. We have grown used to looking to the *East* for contemplative wisdom — whether to the Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist traditions or to the sapiential theology of Eastern Christianity and its continuation in our Western spirituality. And in fact a true wisdom of the West may become a reality only in the future. We are not going to find it ready-made, complete and waiting for us. Our attempt to find a wisdom of the West will probably also be an attempt to realize, to make explicit, to *achieve* a wisdom of the West. And it will be a wisdom, or *wisdoms*, rather than *the* wisdom of the West — though we are likely to acquire a broad sense of the mind, the genius, the spirit of the West along the way. The quarry is pluriform as well as shy. Let us begin by examining some promising tracks. .

I. The Event of Christ and the West

The Christian wisdom tradition is essentially *theological*: it will not be really content with anything short of an interpretation of reality in the light of the Christ of the New Testament. Further, the wisdom of the *West*, I believe, is essentially *historical*. A major component of it will be a theological interpretation of the history of our Western world. At this point let us not trouble with precise definitions or boundaries.

Claiming, then, the sapiential privilege of grand simplifications, I shall propose that beneath the historical complexities of our history lives a simple twofold structure rooted in two great theological orientations which emerged within the New Testament itself: an ‘Eastern’ tradition that we can associate with the traditional author of John’s gospel and a ‘Western’ tradition that is related to the apostle Paul. (See ‘The Three Ages’ in the last (Summer 2010) issue of *The Golden String*, p. 8)

John and Paul, in this picture, represent two complementary dimensions of the mystery and event of Christ. In the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we can see the walled container of the Jewish Law broken through in two directions — inwardly and outwardly. It is in John’s Gospel — and in the personal experience of baptismal initiation — that the *inward* breakthrough is most powerfully revealed. The barrier of divine transcendence erected and maintained by the Law of Moses has been demolished: the human person, become a child of God in Jesus Christ, experiences an immediate union with the Divinity which is a participation in the “I am” of Jesus.

And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; it is God the only Son, he who is in the bosom of the Father, who has made him known. (John 1:16-18)

Jesus, through his death and resurrection, has opened to our participation his own ‘nondual’ relationship with God, his “I and the Father are one.”

The letters of Paul — and Luke’s *Acts of the Apostles* — dramatically reveal how the *outward* barrier of the Law has been broken through, so that the new salvation in Christ is opened to all of humanity. Luke’s presentation of the scene of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-42) as a fiery centrifugal explosion of the gospel into multiple tongues is a graphic rendition of this same revolutionary *event*. Paul’s personal vocation and mission is identified with this movement of the gospel outward to the Gentiles — that is, to all humanity:

When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, . . . That is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel . . . Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace . . . To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph 3:4-8).

In the Johannine writings, Christian ‘revelation’ appears as an opening of the *Unitive Mystery* of Christ to participation by human beings.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us — that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1 Jn 1:1-3)

In Paul’s letters and in the Acts of the Apostles, however, the same realities appear from the perspective of the explosive historical *Event* of Christ.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, . . .

. . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all [people] most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. (1 Cor 15:3-4, 17-20)

The import and the feeling of these texts is very different. In John’s writing we feel the overwhelming attraction of the one divine *light* which has come into the world — the single full *manifestation* of God within the whole of creation. In Paul’s passionate rhetoric we feel the movement, the divine energy, the *fire* of God’s decisive — and continuing —

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The Wisdom of the West (Continued from page 5)

action in Jesus Christ. It is this divine light that will characterize the Christianity of the East, and it is this divine fire that will define the Christianity — and even the eventual secular civilization — of the West. In the language of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, the East will be characterized by the *wisdom* of God while the West will be shaped by the *power* of God. While the wisdom of the Greeks, through the Eastern church fathers will furnish a medium for the expression of the new light, the 'signs' sought by the Jews will be supplanted first by the great sign of the resurrection of Jesus, and then by a second great sign — the beginning of a transformation of the world through the thought and action of the peoples of the West. If these generalizations are shockingly broad and simple, it is because the realities, seen theologically, are themselves large and simple. Our first approximation or model of a Wisdom of the West is this: *an understanding of the Event of Christ in its full scope and its consequences.*

Since it has become common to speak of the *event of Christ* during the past fifty years, one is not likely to realize immediately the theological revolution that these words imply, when understood in their full import — that is, *a single, central and decisive event which continues its movement until it has transformed all human reality.* This is an event, therefore, which underlies and influences all of the history to follow; an event which continues unceasingly and is realized to a greater or lesser degree in the lives of each one of us.

Only quite recently have Catholic theologians begun to speak openly of the event of Christ in this sense, because only recently has Catholic theology — under the influence of a secular culture which was itself a product of the same central event of Christ — become a genuinely *historical* theology. While a historical understanding had been growing in the secular culture of the West — and among Protestant theologians — for several centuries, it was repressed within the Roman Church until recently, often under the epithet of 'modernism.' I believe that this understanding of Jesus Christ in terms of historical event is one of the most important realizations of the Second Vatican Council. In the achingly long course of history *something has happened*, and this happening has taken its place both as the center of history and as the inner positive energy of history — a happening which broadens as it continues. A comprehension of the breadth and length, the height and depth (Eph 3:18) of this event must be central to the western wisdom we are seeking.

While the event of Christ is the definitive bursting into this world of the divine Newness, we may be surprised to find how deeply, boldly and diversely the pattern of newness is engraved in the history of God's people. The original act of creation is an event of radical newness. The expulsion of the first parents from Paradise, according to Genesis, sets humanity on a long *journey* through an earthly wilderness which will be resumed again and again in the history of Is-

rael. As the Letter to the Hebrews so forcefully demonstrates, God's people are ever a pilgrim people, seeking their promised home. At the beginning of the story of the patriarchs, Abraham is called by God to leave his home in Haran for a place that will be shown him. His offspring will have to leave their promised land to migrate into Egypt, and then will become a nation in their exodus from Egypt. Their journey will continue through exile and diaspora.

This rhythm of pivotal and dislocating event, of movement, of exile and pilgrimage — of radical *newness* — will continue in the New Testament, symbolized at the outset by the figure of John the Baptist in the wilderness. Jesus will appear as the bringer of good *news*, finally to be recognized as the embodiment of the divine Fullness — the transcendent divine Newness.

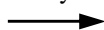
It will be *Paul*, however, who will come to represent — graphically dramatized already in the *event* of his conversion — the radical *newness* of the event of Christ and of the new order that Jesus initiates. But this Pauline dynamic was already inscribed in the migratory history of Israel.

Ultimately this revelation of newness is founded in the very being and life of God, according to our Christian theological tradition. God is not an impersonal Absolute, Christianity proclaims, nor merely an immanent Divinity, but rather Creator. And even before creation, God is *generative*; the 'Father,' indeed, is defined by that generativity in which the Son or Word is born — his birth an eternal Newness that is only remotely reflected in the unceasing well-spring of abundance that is our physical sun. The Son of God has come into our world as the divine Newness embodied, initiating and sustaining a new history. In the event of his Resurrection, the new creation bursts out of the earth. The Holy Spirit, 'Divine Breath,' is the Spirit of Newness, "Creator Spiritus," in which the divine Incarnation progressively pervades all humanity.

It is from this *divine generativity*, I believe, that the restless creativity of western humanity springs forth; the West bears within itself the image — and the energy — of God as Creator, and it is this image and spirit that characterize and gradually define the West. Western humanity gradually manifests the divine Newness emerging in this world and transforming this world.

Our first model of a wisdom of the West grows from this historical dynamism, this 'horizontal transcendence,' this infinite energy and drive embodied and active within the world. It will be an understanding — both participatory and objective — of this immanent divine presence and activity, a wisdom of *New Creation*. A further development of this understanding will integrate the wisdom of the East both in its prechristian and its Christian manifestations — this latter being the unitive interiority that we have related with the Johannine pole of the New Testament. We can imagine the event of Christ — or Jesus himself, his arms outstretched — between these two expressions, to be followed there by the apostle Peter and the Church of Rome.

(See "The Three Ages.") ■



A NEW BEGINNING AT OSAGE

John Douglas

Father Bede Griffiths lived at **Osage Forest of Peace** during July 1992. While at Osage he wrote, "This place has had a profound effect upon me. It is the most peaceful place I have ever known and makes me feel the presence of God more immediately."

Osage Forest of Peace, a center of contemplative practice and East-West encounters under the faithful guardianship of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and Sister Pascaline Coff, O.S.B. for twenty-eight years, and after almost three years of trusteeship by Robert Doenges, has now been entrusted to a new Board of Directors committed to maintaining its original founding vision. The members of the new Board are of one mind and one heart in striving to make Osage Forest of Peace a welcoming place for those who seek to deepen their spiritual practice, in creating an environment for contemplative retreats, daily prayer and meditation, as well as through programs focusing on personal, socio-ecological and global healing all within a context of ecumenical spirituality, East-West dialogue, and interfaith encounters.

The mission/vision statement of Osage states, in part, "Inspired by the wisdom and vision of Father Bede Griffiths, Osage . . . was founded as a monastic ashram in 1979 by Sister Pascaline Coff and the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. Today the Forest of Peace continues to embody its original vision:

- by drinking from the wellspring of the great spiritual traditions;
- through contemplative silence, a simple life-style and communal living;
- by offering hospitality to all who seek to deepen their spiritual practice."

Sister Jane Comerford, C.S.J., who has many years of experience as spiritual director and teacher in the United States and abroad, will in March 2011 come to Osage to be the resident Director of Community Life and Mission. Under Sister Jane's leadership, Osage Forest of Peace will maintain a regular schedule of prayer and contemplative practice, and will offer spiritual direction to those who seek it during their stay at the Forest.

The Board of Directors is developing plans for retreats and programs. In April 2011 David Loy a Buddhist scholar will lead a two day workshop. In May 2011 Ruben Habito will lead a five day Zen sesshin. Plans are being made to create an advanced program for spiritual directors, accenting East-West spirituality.

Osage Forest of Peace is located eleven miles west of Tulsa, Oklahoma on a beautiful forty-five acre tract overlooking the Arkansas River. There are twelve individual cabins available for guests, a main house and chapel.

For additional information, please see

<http://forestofpeace.net/FOPwelcome.html>

or call 918-245-2734. ■

End and Goal

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order to update the language of both Aurobindo and Teilhard, we will rely somewhat on the language of Ken Wilber, whose writings about the spectrum of consciousness Bede admired greatly.

telos-scopos-praxis: the end, the goal, the practice

A word to explain my method, if it may be called such. The classic formulation given by Raimundo Panikkar in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* will help us here. Speaking of Hinduism and Christianity, he writes that true encounter can only take place where two traditions actually do meet and, despite some undeniable similarities, the doctrines of Hinduism and Christianity are far removed from each other. "They do not really meet in the doctrinal sphere but in another deeper stratum that could well be called the existential level, or the ontic intentional stratum," meaning they have the same *aim* and they point to the same *goal*. The goal of existence of each tradition—what he calls their 'ontic intentionality'—in both cases is union with the Absolute. Moreover, "they start from the same anthropological situation." In both cases, the starting point is that the same human being is found in naked existence, striving to reach fullness and perfection.¹

I have found it useful to distinguish between the *telos* and the *scopos*, that is, the end and the goal. This is a distinction found in the very first *Conference* of John Cassian in his classic tome on desert monasticism. Further, there is also the *praxis*, that is, the practice or practical means. The *telos* is the ultimate end, for Abba Moses in Cassian's *Conference*; for instance, it is the "kingdom of heaven." (I assume this is Panikkar's ontic intentionality.) The *scopos* or goal on the other hand is a sort of proximate aim; for Abba Moses it is the "purity of heart" necessary for acquiring the kingdom of heaven. And then, as was stated already, there is the practice or *praxis*, the means by which we can achieve the goal that leads to the end.² I would turn Fr. Panikkar's vocabulary around a little and say that our traditions describe the *telos* in very different terms. Actually the *telos* can obviously not even be expressed by mere words:

...for example, we have used the expression 'union with the Absolute,' whereas a Yogin would prefer to say 'pure isolation' and a Buddhist 'nirvana.' There is neither Absolute to be united with, nor duality to give the union any sense, they will say, and yet the 'ontic' goal intended is one and the same: it is precisely that end, that final stage, understood in one way or another, that all are aiming at.³

Aurobindo describes the differences this way:

The Monist fixes his feet on the path of exclusive Knowledge and sets for us as a sole ideal an entire return, loss immersion or extinction of the Jiva in the Supreme. The Dualist or the Partial Monist turns to the path of Devotion and directs us to shed indeed the lower ego and material life, but to see as the highest destiny of the spirit of man, not the self-annihilation of

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the Buddhist, not the self-immersion of the Advaitin (*sic*), not a swallowing up of the Many by the One, but an eternal existence absorbed in the thought, love and enjoyment of the Supreme, the One, the All-Lover.⁴

And yet, though we describe this *telos* in different ways, to our surprise (and delight) we often find that we agree on the *scopos*, the proximate goal, which does seem to be easier to describe, just as “purity of heart” is easier to explain than “the kingdom of heaven.” With that in mind, we can also share at the level of *praxis*, what India would call *sadhana*, spiritual disciplines and practical exercises to dispose ourselves to that goal, perhaps also what Buddhism calls the *upaya kausilya* or skillful means—various ascetical disciplines, *tapas*, *lectio divina*, meditation and various other forms of Yoga, etc. Both the *scopos* and the *praxis* dwell at the existential level (which Panikkar says is actually a deeper stratum!), and start from the same anthropological situation—naked human existence.

Aldous Huxley sets up a similar framework right at the beginning of his seminal work, *The Perennial Philosophy*.

In studying the Perennial Philosophy we can either begin at the bottom, with practice and morality; or at the top, with the consideration of metaphysical truths; or, finally, in the middle, at the focal point where mind and matter, action and thought have their meeting place in human psychology.⁵

If I am not stretching my own point too thin: the *telos*—end is “the top ... the consideration of metaphysical truths”; the *scopos*—goal is “the middle ... the focal point where mind and matter, action and thought have their meeting place in human psychology”; and the *praxis*—practice is “the bottom ... practice and morality.” In spite of a firm belief that there indeed is a *philosophia perennis*, we must admit and wrestle with the fact that do not always articulate the *telos*, the end, the highest truths of metaphysics in the same way. But I have found how often we startlingly agree on both that focal point where thought and action have their meeting place in human psychology, and on some of the practical means toward the spiritual goals, the *praxis* of practice and morality.

One root problem that all of our philosophies, cosmologies and theologies try to deal with is the relation of the Absolute to the Relative,—how many different ways can we say this?—the One to the many, the Creator to the created, God to creation, the Subject to the object, the *aham*—I or Self to the *idam*—the objective world of “this.” Panikkar says this is not just a Vedantic problem; as a matter of fact he is proposing the Christian dogma of the Trinity as one solution to it, but also “... in the final analysis, the *amr* of the Koran, the *Logos* of Plotinus and the *Tathagata* of Buddhism, for example, spring from a similar view as to the necessity for an ontological link between these two apparently irreconcilable poles: the absolute and the relative.”⁶ How has this

multiple and complex world appeared? And is it real or is it appearance, illusion? Furthermore, is there really an unchanging unity behind it all?

samkhya, classical yoga and advaita vedanta

Of the six so-called orthodox *darshanas* of India we will focus mainly on Samkhya, Yoga and Advaita Vedanta, and then on one non-orthodox *darshana*—Buddhism—to begin our discussion.⁷

If we may summarize . . . **Samkhya** philosophy is arguably the oldest of the Indian philosophies or *darshanas*. It is generally thought to have provided the philosophical foundation not only for Yoga but for Buddhist cosmology as well. (There is also some speculation that Samkhya and Yoga grew simultaneously, at least pre-classical yoga.) The legendary father of Samkhya is the sage Kapila of the late 7th/early 6th centuries BCE.

Samkhya opposes matter (*prakriti*) and spirit (*purusha*), and so is immediately forced into a kind of dualism. The world evolves out of the womb of *prakriti* and is left to the domain of *prakriti*; *purusha* is merely a witness or enjoyer of all that *prakriti* manifests or presents before him. *Purusha*, one might say, is the subject and *prakriti* is the object. As such *purusha* has no part to play in the creative process of the evolution of the world. As a matter of fact, the entanglement of *purusha* with *prakriti* has been an “unfortunate marriage.” Liberation then is freedom from *prakriti*, called *kaivalya*, which is usually translated as “isolation”: *Purusha* must be isolated from *prakriti*. This isolation is achieved through renunciation and *viveka*—discrimination. *Viveka* is a specific type of knowledge; it is not intellectual, rational knowledge, because even the intellect is still in the realm of *prakriti*. *Viveka* is a deeper way of knowing. As Bernie Clark teaches, “*Viveka* develops an inner knowing” that can discern the ephemeral from the actual, the true from the false, the permanent from the impermanent, that is, *purusha* from *prakriti*. “It can separate the apparent nature of the world from its underlying reality.” *Viveka* is gained through reasoning, but it also develops the will to renounce everything that is unreal. Basically it is the realization that the world is impermanent and perishable and that the Self alone is real.⁸

By **Classical Yoga** we mean of course the Yoga of Patanjali. His Yoga Sutras were composed between the 2nd and 3rd centuries, though other sources spread the date of origin from the 4th century BCE to the 4th century CE.⁹ Patanjali synthesized various ancient yoga traditions, molding them into one system based on Samkhya philosophy and developing the *ashtanga* or eight-limbed approach, also known as *raja yoga*, the “king of yogas.” Both of these traditions shared an emphasis on renunciation through fierce asceticism. The major difference between Samkhya and Classical Yoga is that whereas Samkhya was non-theistic and aimed at renunciation and discrimination (*viveka*), the Yoga Sutras do mention a divine being—*Ishvara* (as a matter of

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fact one of the *niyamas* or observances of the eight limbs is *Ishvara Pranidhana*—surrender to the Divine); and the aim is toward renunciation and absorption in the Divine—*samadhi* rather than *viveka*—discriminative knowledge.

Advaita Vedanta has no founder per se because its roots are found in the Vedas and particularly the Upanishads (hence, they are *veda-anta*, “the end of the Vedas”), but it is generally associated with the 8th century wandering ascetic Shankara who was its greatest exponent. The term *advaita* itself is also used by other Indian schools of thought that teach non-duality while still allowing for some internal distinctions within their system. Hence, for instance, as we have seen, Samkhya is forced into a kind of duality between purusha and prakriti. But the Advaita of Shankara is pure non-duality.

The central teaching of advaita is that the individual soul (*jiva*) is one with the absolute ground of being—*Brahman*—there is ultimately no difference between the individual soul and Brahman. Advaita also holds that Brahman is non-dual and, at first glance, the empirical world is not real. Whereas Sâmkhya accepts the reality of creation and the objective world, the language of Vedânta keeps the Absolute unsullied and pure by emphasizing that all creation is *mâyâ*—illusion and therefore unreal. And so the quintessence of the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta as expounded by Shankara can be summed up in the famous verse:

Brahma satyam / jagan mithya / jivo Brahmaiva na aparah—

Brahman is alone real,
this world is unreal;

the Jiva is non-different from Brahman.

And yet, Shankara is a pure monist—whatever is, is Brahman. Brahman is absolutely homogeneous, so all difference and plurality are illusory. In other words, if Brahman is non-dual, one without a second, if nothing is different from the Brahman, *then Brahman is the world!* So ultimately the world is not actually an illusion according to Shankara. The problem is how we perceive it. Shankara quotes the Atharva Veda, ‘The universe is Brahman,’ saying that the delusion is when we see it as having a separate existence apart from its ground.¹⁰ So the variation on Shankara’s teaching attributed to Ramanamaharshi:

The world is an illusion.

Brahman alone is real.

Brahman is the world.

The world is relatively real (*vyavaharika satta*), while Brahman is absolutely real (*paramarthika satta*). The unchanging Brahman appears as the changing world because of a superimposition of non-Self (objects) on Self (the subject, who is Brahman). But this superimposition is *avidya*—ignorance. The individual soul—*jiva* too is also only relatively real; its individuality lasts only so long as it is mistaken for the limiting conditions, when the *jiva* identifies itself with the body, mind and the senses. But just as the drop of water becomes one with the ocean, so also does the

jiva become one with Brahman when the *jiva* gets knowledge of Brahman—*brahmavidya*. It is then freed from its individuality and finitude, and realizes its essential nature as Sat-chit-ananda. “It merges itself in the ocean of bliss. The river of life joins the ocean of existence.”

Because duality exists due to ignorance, knowledge—*jnana* — alone can reveal our true nature. Yoga—or the yogas, Karma, Bhakti, Raja—are all necessary to purify the individual and to help remove this ignorance. (This is our *praxis*, by the way.) But they all culminate in *jnana*—knowledge. *Jnana*, like *viveka*, is not about acquiring any external knowledge; it is simply removing the *avidya*—ignorance and *mâyâ*—illusion.

Sri Aurobindo wrote that the notion of *mâyâ* was an important realization, but he thought that Shankara overstressed it because it was the most vivid to his own experience. Aurobindo himself preferred to fix on the idea of *lila*—the cosmic, divine play, which he thought was a deeper and more penetrating concept that included *mâyâ* while exceeding it.¹¹

What Samkhya and Advaita Vedanta share is the ideal of isolation—*kaivalya*, total separation from the world, since all activity is *mâyâ*, an illusion due to ignorance, and wisdom is the bliss of being in pure consciousness—*sat-chit-ananda*—without any modification. Hence, note, we have the same dynamic at play I mentioned earlier, within the Indian darshanas: a different articulation of the *telos*—end: Sâmkhya accepts the, albeit dualistic, reality of creation and the objective world, Vedânta emphasizes that a separate existence of creation is *mâyâ*—illusion and therefore unreal; and yet they share a common *scopos* or goal—separation from the world; and even share a *praxis*—renunciation and yoga.

Turning for a moment to **Buddhism**, that other child of India, whereas the other Indian traditions engage in what we might call “essentialist” thinking—an unchanging essence, a Self or a Ground, a “real” which does not change—the Buddha’s teaching is highly radical specifically in that it breaks from essentialist thinking. The Buddha’s view was that there is no essence: *everything changes!*—even the “Self.” Our everyday world, “the Wheel of Life,” is characterized by “dependent co-origination” or “co-dependent arising”: all things arise together, connected to each other. So instead of trying to describe what the Self or soul was, the Buddha concentrated on how the soul worked, how it functions, because for him what we call the “self” was a process, not some kind of fixed immutable unchanging essence.

If we follow the Buddha’s lineage up to the 2nd century Indian sage Nagarjuna, we find the full exposition of the theory of *sunyata*—the emptiness of all things, and the Middle Way (*mâdhyamika*).¹² Nagarjuna teaches that all things, not merely sentient beings, are without any underlying essence—*svabhâva*, literally their “own-being” or “self-nature.” So all phenomena too are non-substantial, including everything that is part of the cycle of birth and death—*samsâra*; that is also empty. Since *samsara* is also empty and non-

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substantial it must not be any different from *nirvāna*—the state of being extinguished! Thus *samsāra* and *nirvana* are not other than each other: “there is not the slightest difference between the two.” All oppositions between *nirvana* and *samsara*—heaven and earth, the One and the many, the icon and the index—have disappeared. This will be the philosophy behind the great Prajñāpāramitā (or “Heart”) Sutra, where Avalokiteshvara declares all *skandhas*—heaps of aggregates equally empty of an independent essence and states that, “Form is empty (*sūnyatā*), emptiness is form.”

Let’s take one more step, a thousand years later to the 13th century patriarch of the Japanese Soto Zen tradition, Dogen. Usually Buddhism teaches that all sentient beings *have* Buddha nature. Dogen on the other hand teaches that every creature *is* Buddha nature, not just sentient beings but all things, animals and plants as well as rocks and human beings, gods and angels. What is important here is that instead of saying “has” Buddha nature, Dogen says “is.” “Has” could be taken to mean that there is some kind eternal self, some hidden unchanging nature, a “hidden potential like a seed that when it is nourished blossoms into a Buddha”! Whereas some traditional Buddhists tend to teach that we can seek liberation from the ever-changing by finding the permanence of “Buddha nature,” for Dogen even that is a kind of Buddhist heresy, “sneaking atman in the back door.”¹³ There are no eternal substances neither within us nor within the world; all there is, is impermanence. So Dogen uses the phrase *mujo-bussho*—impermanence-Buddha nature. Buddha nature is impermanence.

So how might we articulate the *telos*—end for the Buddhist? Let it suffice for now to say the extinguishing (*nirvana*) of the sense of a separate “self.” And the *scopus*, the goal? Let’s turn to Dogen again: “To learn the Buddha way is to forget the self.” And the *praxis* in this case: the eight-fold path and all the practical disciplines (mostly monastic until modern times) that grow from it.

Fr. Bede, in his great appreciation of the *sanatana dharma* and the perennial philosophy or what he calls “Universal Wisdom,” doesn’t dispute any of these articulations of the nature of Absolute Reality. As a matter of fact he says that there is a profound truth here.

There is an experience of pure consciousness which gives lasting peace to the soul. It is an experience of the Ground or Depth of being in the Center of the soul, an awareness of the mystery of being beyond sense and thought, which gives a sense of fulfillment, of finality, of absolute truth. And indeed there is a sense in which this experience is ultimate. It is an experience of the undifferentiated Ground of being, the Abyss of being beyond thought, the one without a second.¹⁴

Ken Wilber and Mokshananda also comment on this realization:

Spirit whispers its sweet seraphic music into our innermost ear, a siren’s song that leads us to the far shore of eternity. We follow the ubiquitous hymns to the center

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Address: New Camaldoli Hermitage, 62475 Highway 1, Big Sur, California 93920. e-mail: bruno@contemplation.com

RAIMON PANIKKAR DIES AT 91

Raimon Panikkar, famed Catholic theologian of interreligious dialogue, died on August 26, 2010, at his home in Tavertet, Spain. An important influence in his life had been his friendship with the three European monks who would be the fathers of Shantimanam: Jules Monchanin, Henri Le Saux, and Bede Griffiths. ■

of the universe, where all is still and silent, but never ever static. Released from the brutalities of impermanence we begin to awaken at last, recognizing the singularity of Being that underlies every experience we have ever had.¹⁵

“But,” they say, “the story does not have to end here.” Nor is this the end of the story for Bede. He asks, does this have to mean that all other modes of consciousness are illusory? Does any of this have to mean that nature has no reality and that the experience of God is an illusion? He even goes so far as to ask if the isolation of *kaivalya*, or the absorption of *samadhi*, is really the end? What if the end is not really the end, but the beginning? This is where he turns to Aurobindo in the East and Teilhard de Chardin in the West.

Notes:

1. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 5-6.
2. I have developed this theme more in depth in several articles, so will not go further into it here.
3. Panikkar, *Unknown Christ*, 5-6.
4. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, 412
5. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, 1.
6. *Unknown Christ*, 120.
7. The six orthodox *darshanas* in the generally accepted chronological order are Samkhya, Yoga, Pūrvamīmāṃsā, Vedānta, Vaiśeṣika and Nvaya.
8. *Yinsights*, 156-157; Sanskrit Diction-ary, 415.
9. Perhaps it is more accurate to say they are *attributed* to Patanjali.
10. *Shankara’s Crest –Jewel of Discrimination*, transl. Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 70.
11. “Integral Yoga and Its Sadhana,” in *The Penguin Sri Aurobindo Reader*, 165.
12. Between substance and solipsism?
13. John Peacocke (*Tricycle*, Fall 2008, 47.) He writes further that in the formation of certain Mahayana ideas he sees the irresistible tendency to “essentialize” phenomena, for example when Buddhism arrives in China and in Tibet: “In some cases I see them almost smuggling the atman in through the back door somehow. For example, if you talk about Cittamatra philosophy, then you’re talking about the alaya vijñana, or “store of consciousness.” In some interpretations this sounds very much like a self. When you talk about, say, *rigpa*, the notion of pristine awareness — awareness without an object, the only true knower — it sounds very much like Advaita, which defines *Brahman* as pure consciousness and the only knower.”
14. From *Return to the Center*, quoted in *The One Light*, 276.
15. Corey W. de Vos, acting as scribe for the conversation between Ken Wilber and Mokshananda on <kenwilber.com>, November 5, 2008. ■