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Bede Griffiths: a Marriage of Wisdom and Prophetic Traditions

This year we celebrate the birth centenary of Fr Bede. His contribution to the spiritual evolution of humanity is very important. I would like to say that the contribution of Fr. Bede is the marriage of Wisdom and Prophetic traditions, which is very important for the world peace. This is not a scientific paper. It is only an outflow of the wisdom and grace that has gone into me from my encounter with Fr. Bede. I would like to reflect personally on who Fr Bede was to me and on his influence on my spiritual journey. Fr Bede became my spiritual master before I met him. When I was studying my theology in St Peter's Seminary (1979-84), Bangalore, I happened to read an article of his on Christian advaita. Fr Bede wrote saying that many Christians are dualists. They think that God and we make two. This cannot be so. God is the only absolute reality and we are only relative reality. This brought a revolution in my understanding of my relationship with God. I began to feel that I am walking on God and living in God. It was the experience of universal presence of God. It led to an unconditional surrender to God as a choice less choice. This experience made me look into the teaching of Christ in a new way.

CHRISTIAN ADVAITA

The concept of advaita or non-duality is difficult to explain. In the *Upanishads* the word *advaita* means to reveal that there is only one absolute reality without the second. God is one without the second. It means that there are no two Gods but only one. It also means that God and creation are not two independent realities. God is the only absolute reality and creation is not another reality apart from God. God is like the earth and creation is like a tree on the earth. The earth can stand on by itself but the tree cannot stand on its own. It is hundred percent dependent upon the earth. The earth and the tree are not two (*advaita*) independent realities. The earth is the symbol of the infinite and the tree is the symbol of finite. Later the three *acharyas* Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva proposed three systems of philosophy called *advaita* (non-duality), *visistaadvaita* (qualified non-duality) and *dvaita* (duality). In the *advaita* system of philosophy one can grow in his/her spiritual journey to the point where one can say "I am Brahman" (I am God). Creation is considered as an illusion or *maya*. In the qualified non-duality one cannot say that he or she is Brahman but one might be able to say "I am the body of God" or "I am in God and God is in me". Creation is conceived as the body of God and God as the soul of creation. In the *dvaita* system one can only say that God is greater than I.

This experience can be compared to the three states of a woman: before pregnancy, during pregnancy, and after delivery. Before pregnancy she is only one without the second. When she becomes pregnant then she is not one and not two. She is not one because there is a child in her womb and she is not one of the two because the child is not

outside its mother. After delivery she becomes a mother. Now there are two. When the child is outside the womb of its mother it has a dualistic relationship with the mother, as if they are two separate beings. When the child is in the womb of the mother she has qualified non-dualistic relationship with the mother. The child is not independent but nourished by the mother intimately in the womb. Before pregnancy the child was eternally one with the mother. *Advaita* refers to the experience before the creation came into being. In this God is experienced as a woman before she became pregnant. *Visistaadvaita* refers to the experience after creation where human consciousness is still in the womb of God. *Dvaita* refers to the experience where human consciousness feels that it is outside God and independent of God.

In the story of the Garden of Eden we can find these three experiences. Before God created people they were one with God. After the creation God placed them in the Garden of Eden. The Garden of Eden is the womb of God, where humanity lived in God and God lived in them. God was like a pregnant woman. This is the *visista-advaitic* experience. When human beings ate the forbidden fruit they were sent outside the Garden of Eden. They lost that intimacy with God. They felt that they were outside of God. The human consciousness in its spiritual evolution begins with the dualistic consciousness thinking that it is outside of God. Then it moves into the *visistaadvaitic* experience where it experiences that it is in God and God is in it. Then finally it moves into the *advaitic* experience and says that it is one with God or it is God.

Fr Bede was saying that Christianity was a dualistic religion, which limited the possibility of God experience to the dualistic level and may be to the *visistaadvaitic* level to the mystics, but closed the door to the *advaitic* experience to her followers, limiting that experience only to Jesus. Jesus opened the door to the possibility of non-dual experience to the humanity but Christianity closed it. The vision of Fr Bede was that Christianity should rediscover this non-dual experience and open it to her followers. This brought a revolution in my way of thinking. It was like dynamite coming close to the fire.

When I then had a kind of spiritual crisis, as I could not relate to traditional Christian spirituality, I heard a clear voice within me saying, "Go to Fr Bede and he will tell you what to do". I wrote a letter to Fr Bede requesting his guidance. He invited me to Shantivanam. The first day I met him and shared with him my spiritual journey and understanding. He listened to me with rapt attention and he just approved it. I felt so liberated and joyful. Suddenly I looked into the face of Fr Bede and I felt that I was sitting in the presence of a holy person. As I was leaving his room I remembered the words of Jesus, "Come to me all you, who labour and burdened of heart I will give you rest". In my nine years of staying with Fr Bede I have seen thousands of people who went into his room and came out with this feeling of liberation and joy. The more I reflect on the spiritual journey of Fr Bede, the more I understand Jesus Christ and his experience. The more I understand Jesus Christ the more I understand his message in the gospels.

FR BEDE; AN ARCHETYPAL SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

I discovered that the life of Fr Bede was an archetype of spiritual journey. If I would like to describe him I shall call him a constant seeker or lover of God or Truth. “First of all seek you the kingdom of God and its righteousness and all things will be given unto you” are the immortal words of Jesus to humanity. The purpose of our human existence is to that eternal will. In that sense I can say Fr Bede was a true follower of Christ, who searched for God and His will. In this search for Truth or God we can find various levels of mind. The first type of mind is the mind of a believer. We are all brought up in the belief structure of our parents. If a believer develops his/her own critical mind he/she might become a non-believer or agnostic. If a person takes his/her belief structure seriously then he/she might become a follower. If believers are like ordinary citizens then the followers are like soldiers who defend the boundaries of their country. They are willing to die for the sake of their religion and even willing to kill others for the sake of their belief structure. A believer and a follower learn only from their belief structure and consider that only their belief structure has the absolute truth. They wish to expand their boundaries and increase their numbers.

If a follower realizes the limitations of his/her belief structure and has an open mind and open heart then s/he will become a disciple. A disciple is one who is learning. S/he has an open mind and an open heart. S/he learns from everyone and everything. A disciple is like a bee, which collects honey from wherever it is found. But s/he does not produce honey. What s/he has is a second-hand wisdom. A disciple functions on the level of the known. When a disciple realizes the limitation of the second hand wisdom, which belongs to the realm of the known, which is conditioned by the past, then s/he becomes an explorer.

An explorer is one who leaves the boundaries of the known and moves into the unknown. It is a very courageous step. It is like Columbus who left the boundaries of his country not knowing where he will arrive. An explorer, when he finds something, becomes a discoverer. We say Columbus discovered America. The discoverer has the first hand experience of reality. He brings the freshness of his/her discoveries from the unknown into the land of known and builds the bridge between the known and the unknown. S/he enlivens the stagnant waters of the known with the fresh waters from the unknown. Truth has two aspects: the eternal aspect and the historical aspect. The historical aspect of Truth is conditioned by the circumstances in which it is revealed. The eternal truth transcends the historical aspect. The historical aspect belongs to the realm of the known whereas the eternal aspect belongs to the realm of unknown. The eternal aspect can never be reduced into historical definitions. No religious definitions can exhaust the eternal truth. It always remains fresh and responds to the present needs and the demands. The eternal truth is like an ever-flowing river whereas the historical manifestation is like a pot of water taken from the river. Though the quality of the river is

present in the pot of water, the pot of water is not equal to the river. One is dynamic and the other is static. We have to begin with the God of history and move into the God of Eternity. It is a journey from the known into the unknown, from the historical into the eternal, from mechanical life into creative life. It is the call of every individual in every generation to outgrow the historical definitions of the truth and move into the eternal truth.

Fr Bede was a wonderful symbol of this spiritual journey. He was born in the Anglican belief structure. He was brought up in that particular tradition. But when his critical mind developed he became an agnostic. From being an agnostic he came back to his belief structure. He wanted to live a dedicated Christian life. He became a catholic and entered into the monastery and lived as a follower of Christ. He said that he had absorbed the catholic doctrine uncritically. Slowly he began to see the limitations of his spiritual tradition. He became a disciple. He began to learn from everyone and everything. He developed an open mind and an open heart. This open mind transformed him into an explorer. He left the boundaries of his land both external and internal and came to India. He said that he came to India to discover the other half of his soul. The other half of his soul was the *advaitic* experience of God, which was not a possibility in the Christian tradition. It was a courageous event in the life of Fr Bede. It was a journey from the known into the unknown.

Finally he became the discoverer of the Unknown, the Eternal, which transcends the limitations of all the belief structures. He tested the original waters of Truth and tried to enliven the path he had journeyed with the freshness of the unknown. The eternal truth is like every flowing river. The historical truth is like a pot of water brought from the river. People are satisfied with the pot of water and lose contact with the fresh waters of the river. The pot of water becomes the historical manifestation and from it religions are born. But as the time goes the pot of water becomes stagnant and people become dissatisfied with it. So we need courageous souls who make the journey back to the river and bring the fresh waters. Not only to bring the fresh waters but also to establish a permanent channel through which people can travel to and from the river. In this sense Fr Bede became to me an archetype of a spiritual journey to follow. It is this journey which Jesus calls searching for the kingdom of God. “First of all seek you the kingdom of God and its righteousness and all things will be given unto you”. The primary purpose of our life is to search for this eternal truth, the ever-flowing river of peace, joy, happiness and fulfillment.

GOING BEYOND; THE SPIRITUAL VISION OF FR BEDE

The spiritual journey has two aspects: one is ascending and the other is descending. It is like climbing a high hill. When a person is climbing a hill s/he is focused on the top. In this focus one does not give much importance to what s/he sees on the way. When one is climbing one has to travel light with bare essentials or necessities. Once the person

reaches the top of the hill or mountain there the person finds the fulfillment of his/her journey. What we experience on the top of the hill depends at what point of the hill we began our journey. The answers we find on the top of the hill depend on the questions we have asked at the beginning of our journey. Each spiritual tradition is unique in the sense that the questions it has asked or the problems it has faced at the beginning of its journey are unique. We find answers only for the questions we have asked at the beginning of our journey. If we want to know the uniqueness of any religion we have to know the questions it has asked at the beginning of its journey. We can imagine the Truth, as the light, above the hill radiating its light all over the hill. But as the rays move down to the foot of the hill their power is experienced less. The rays of the Truth are present all over the hill but the Truth itself transcends its manifestation. As the people move from the bottom of the hill towards the top of the hill, their experience and the understanding of the Truth grows. They may start from different parts of the foot of the hill. They may not see those who are on the opposite side.

People might stop their journey and build houses on the different parts and different heights of the hill. We can call these houses different religions. They may think they have the fullness of the Truth. But the Truth transcends its manifestation. It is the light beyond the hill but manifests on the hill. The Truth beyond the hill is the Truth, "I am what I am", and the Truth manifested on the hill is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. All the religions belong to the God of history, the God of Abraham. The difficulty with the God of history is that he/she divides humanity. The only way we can bring humanity together is to grow into the God of "I am what I am". "I am what I am" is the goal of our spiritual journey. Religions are like trains or buses or vehicles human beings use to reach the goal. And human beings are pilgrims. Vehicles stop on the top of the hill. One has to get out of the vehicle and move to the eternal Truth. Religions cannot enter into God. The vehicles are like cars that go to the seashore. They cannot enter into sea. One has to get out of the car and walk into the sea. Sea is the symbol of God.

The difficulty comes only when people sit in the vehicles and never want to come out of it. They give more importance to the vehicle than to the destiny. If all people move towards the destiny then there will not be any fighting among the followers of different religions or paths. It is the destiny that unites humanity, and not the paths. There is only one path. It is the whole hill. But people make their own paths on this one path and fragment the truth. The starting point of each individual is unique as they start at the different points of the foot of the hill. The higher we climb the closer we come and meet on the top of the hill. Even on the top of the hill, where we may be together, our experience of Truth will be unique according to our starting points. Only the consciousness that enters into Light above the hill sees the rays of light covering all over the hill.

The spiritual journey has two aspects. One is to reach the top of the hill and discover the eternal Truth, and the second is to bring the freshness of that Truth to the bottom of the

hill again. One aspect is ascending and the other is descending. Fr Bede often spoke of going beyond. It means to grow beyond the manifested aspect of Truth and discover the eternal aspect of Truth, and then give life to the manifested Truth. This is possible only when a person discovers the limitations of the historical manifestation of Truth, which is contained in the sacred scriptures, the source of all religions. Human beings are the bridge between the historical manifestation of Truth and the eternal Truth. If they identify with the former then they imprison themselves but if they discover the latter then they discover freedom. We have said that the Truth that we experience on the top of the hill depends where we begin our journey at the bottom of the hill.

There are two typical spiritual journeys or traditions. I would like to call one (not exclusively) as the wisdom tradition, and the other as the prophetic tradition. The eastern traditions like Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism belong to this wisdom tradition. The Upanishads are the forerunners in this tradition. The religions like Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam belong to the prophetic tradition. There is also wisdom in the prophetic traditions but it is dualistic wisdom, whereas in the wisdom traditions it is non-dualistic wisdom.

TWO SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS

The starting points of wisdom tradition and prophetic tradition are different, so also the answers found in these two traditions. The wisdom traditions begin from the condition of material prosperity. The society was very well organized. There was not much poverty in the society. People had enough time for leisure and reflection. But people did not find fulfillment in their material riches. They realized that something was lacking. They were looking for the deeper purpose of life (they were like some people in the western developed countries today who have all their material needs satisfied, who do not feel the need of God in their lives, but feel emptiness in their inner life). Some seekers of Truth left the towns and villages and entered the forest and established ashrams, which became the laboratories for the search of the Ultimate meaning of life. Buddha and Mahavira, founders of Buddhism and Jainism, came from the royal families. They had enjoyed the luxuries of life but they did not find fulfillment in their material prosperity. They saw the universality of suffering and un-fulfillment, *samsara*. They left everything and searched for the freedom from the bondage of this world, the world of desire.

The prophetic traditions begin from the condition of oppression and bondage. The Jews were slaves in Egypt. They needed a savior who would redeem them from political oppression. Moses was chosen by God to liberate them. God led people from slavery to freedom through his prophet, Moses. Jesus was born in a condition of political oppression. His country was under Roman occupation. Probably he was born in a poor family. His father was a carpenter, a daily laborer. Or he might have seen poverty, misery and oppression and death by crucifixion. Jesusâ€™ spiritual journey began from this condition, where people were expecting a messiah from above who would liberate them

from the Roman occupation. So the experience, which Jesus had on the top of the hill, was unique just as the experience of the *Upanishad* sages and the Buddha was unique.

The ground reality, in which Prophet Mohamed had his call, might have been different from the Hindu tradition, the Buddhist tradition, Jewish tradition and Christian tradition. The revelation that came to Prophet Mohamed was an answer to the social realities and the needs of that particular time. As the human conditions change the understanding of the will of God changes. There cannot be a last word in the manifested aspect of Truth, though there is a last word in the ultimate experience of God. So we have two spiritual traditions: the wisdom and the prophetic.

In the wisdom traditions the search is to find the ground of one's existence, the permanent house, where we can find our true rest. One tries to find God or one's true self in the ground of one's existence. Its search is to find what God is or who God is. What is that by knowing which we know everything? What is that by finding which we find everything? The *Upanishad* sages asked these questions. The answer they found was Atman or Brahman or God. Atman is the foundation of individual consciousness and Brahman is the foundation of the universal consciousness, and at the end both are identical. Buddha perceived that there was suffering in the world. There was unfulfillment in the life of becoming and worldly achievements. He realized that the cause of suffering or unfulfillment was desire. Freedom from suffering is possible only when there is freedom from desire. He gave the eight-fold path in order to free oneself from desire. The *Upanishad* sages were philosophers, lovers of truth. Their focus was on knowing. Their path was the path of enquiry, knowledge and self-realization. They also saw the suffering or un-fulfillment, but they realized that it was due to ignorance, not knowing one's eternal self. Only by knowing the truth, one's eternal self, one can be free from ignorance and thus from suffering, *samsara*.

Buddha was more a physician than a philosopher. He diagnoses the sickness and gives the medicine. His path is the path of practice. He saw desire as the sickness of human beings and he gave them the medicine of the eight-fold path to cure the sickness and discover the realm of freedom, *nirvana* and wisdom, and to manifest that wisdom in the life of compassion towards all sentient and non-sentient beings.

In the wisdom tradition the main theme is that of people reaching out for God. In the *Vedas* God does not speak. We have only the discovery of eternal truths by the sages. In Buddhism there is no mention of God. But in the prophetic traditions the main theme is that of God reaching out to people. God always speaks through the prophets. He dictates verbatim to Prophet Mohamed through an angel. The search in the wisdom traditions is very personal and sometimes very individual. This search tends to neglect the world and human beings relationship with one and another. These traditions tend to consider the life in the world as negative. To be born in this world is considered *karma* or bondage. The

purpose of life in this world is to free oneself from the effect of this *karma* or *samsara* through an act of compassion.

The prophetic traditions present God as the creator of this universe as such the creation is good. Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and so they are very good. The purpose of life is to be fruitful and multiply. The prophetic traditions emphasize the love of God and the love of neighbor, relationship with God and relationship with human beings. Who is God in relationship to me, and who is God in my relationship to my neighbor, would be their question. In this tradition God is experienced as creator, liberator and protector. To be born in this world is not an effect of *karma*, not a sin, but is a gift of God. Life in this world is meant to experience the blessings of God. People have to take responsibility for their neighbors, particularly those who are marginalized in the society, the widows and the orphans. This world is the place where we experience the providence and the blessings of God.

But humanity out of ignorance desired to become like God, though they were already created like Him, and fell into life of suffering, which is to go outside the Garden of Eden. Through the obedience to the divine will they can reenter the Garden of Eden and find inner peace. The wisdom tradition (I limit myself to the *Upanishad* tradition) speaks of identity with God whereas the prophetic traditions speak of communion with God. The wisdom traditions open the door to the possibility of non-dual experience of God whereas in the prophetic traditions only a dualistic experience is possible. The wisdom traditions give much importance to the theory of *karma*, cause and effect, believes in many lives and the theory of reincarnation. They tend to believe in the absolute nature of cause and effect and propose an impersonal God or no God at all. One who does not, or cannot, interfere with the wheel of cause and effect. The prophetic traditions believe in a creator, personal, loving and merciful God. He is greater than cause and effect. He can interfere with the wheel of *karma*. If people sincerely accept their bad actions and ask God's forgiveness, he can free them from their *karma* in this life alone. So there is no need to be born again. So they believe in one life and do not believe in reincarnation.

The wisdom traditions do not believe in eternal hell and eternal heaven. *Moksha* is freedom from birth and death. The prophetic traditions believe in eternal heaven and eternal hell. The wisdom traditions emphasize the achievement of freedom whilst one is alive, whereas the prophetic traditions speak of freedom only after death. The prophetic traditions present a moral and transcendent God, whereas the wisdom traditions present an impersonal God, or no God at all. The wisdom tradition gives importance to self-realization (realized person), whereas the prophetic tradition gives importance to moral perfection (saints). The wisdom traditions appear to be passive in the face of social realities whereas the prophetic religions manifest a sense of activism. The wisdom traditions tend to consider the world as *maya* or illusion and it has no importance at all. The prophetic traditions look at the world as the ground to realize and manifest the attributes of God in human relationship.

The wisdom traditions emphasize the importance of renunciation and ascetical practices whereas in the prophetic traditions these do not have much importance. The wisdom traditions emphasize meditation as a means of freedom whereas the prophetic traditions propose prayer and personal relationship with God. There is a deep sense of community in the prophetic religions whereas in the wisdom traditions the emphasis is on the individual search and individual progress (though Buddhism speaks of *Sangha*, the community of believers). In the wisdom traditions human effort plays an important role whereas in the prophetic traditions it is the love and the grace of God, which brings salvation. Human beings are asked to surrender to the will of God revealed in the sacred scriptures. The prophetic traditions believe in the grace that comes from above, whereas the wisdom tradition speaks of grace inherent. In the wisdom traditions we have the precepts of the sages, whereas in the prophetic traditions there are commandments of God. In the wisdom traditions reason, thinking and individual effort play an important role, whereas in the prophetic traditions it is grace, faith and belief in the revelation of God, which play an important role. In the wisdom traditions time is understood in a cyclical way, whereas in the prophetic traditions time is understood as a lineal movement moving towards a final fulfillment. The prophetic traditions tend to be more dogmatic, whereas the wisdom traditions are less dogmatic and free for enquiry. The prophetic traditions show a sense of absolutism and believe in the missionary activity, tend to be intolerant and violent to expand their numbers, whereas the wisdom traditions are nonviolent, more tolerant and have less or no missionary activity. In the prophetic religions there is a strong hierarchical institutional structure, and in the wisdom traditions it is less institutional and hierarchical. In the wisdom traditions we have sages, gurus and avatars, whereas in the prophetic traditions we have Popes, Archbishops, Rabbis, Imams, priests and prophets.

A SAGE AND A PROPHET

The person who reaches the top of the hill becomes a sage. S/he finds fulfillment on the top of the hill. A sage has nothing to do, nothing to accomplish. S/he finds fulfillment in the ground of his or her existence. A sage feels no obligations to the world or to anyone. S/he does not have any unfinished work. It is like someone who flies above the clouds. S/he sees only the unity of infinite sky and the sun radiating its light. S/he sees the unreality of the clouds, the impermanence of the clouds. He does not interfere with the clouds. A Sage sees that everything has been saved. But to a prophet the world needs to be transformed. For him there is work to be done. The world does not reflect the will of God. The world needs to be redeemed. He tries to establish the kingdom of God on this earth.

A sage appears to be passive while a prophet is active. A sage is peaceful while a prophet can be aggressive. A sage teaches through silence whereas a prophet uses words. A sage does not interfere while a prophet interferes. A sage does not disturb anyone so no

one disturbs him/her. A prophet disturbs others so others also can become violent towards him/her. People come to see a sage whereas a prophet goes to the people. A sage lives on the hill rather alone whereas a prophet lives on the plain among the people. A sage can be unconcerned with the outside realities whereas a prophet can be very sensitive to the surrounding realities. A sage finds fulfillment in his being whereas the prophet finds his fulfillment in transforming. A sage finds fulfillment in his or her silence whereas a prophet finds fulfillment in his or her action. A sage has disciples whereas a prophet has followers or faithful. The terms, sage and prophet, are not exclusive. They are states of consciousness. A person may be called just to be a sage and another person may be called just a prophet, and another person may be called to be both. It is God who decides the call of each person.

JESUS, A SAGE AND A PROPHET

Jesus said: "The queen of South will rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the Wisdom of Solomon but indeed a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the Judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here" (Lk.11, 31-32). Jesus was a sage. He was greater than Solomon. The wisdom of Solomon represented dualistic wisdom whereas the wisdom of Jesus was non-dual. With all his wisdom Solomon could have never said that God and he were one, but Jesus did. Thus Jesus was greater than Solomon. Jonah was a prophet who spoke in the name of God but Jesus was the Son of God. He did not speak in the name of God but he spoke on his own. A prophet might say, "Thus says the Lord", but Jesus said "I say unto you". His authority was more than the authority of a prophet. The preaching of Jonah was a call to conversion from immoral life to moral life. But the call of Jesus was a conversion from both immoral life and moral life. "Unless your righteousness transcends that of the Scribes and Pharisees you cannot enter the kingdom of God", said Jesus. The sinners, prostitutes and tax collectors were considered immoral, as they did not keep the law. The Scribes and Pharisees considered themselves morally good as they kept the law. But they looked down upon the sinners. They had no relationship with them. Jesus had a very unique consciousness. He had love and compassion for the sinners, prostitutes and tax collectors. He was angry with the Scribes and Pharisees for their hard-heartedness. He was neither righteous according to the standard of the Scribes and Pharisees nor unrighteous like that of the prostitutes, tax collectors and sinners. His righteousness transcended both. A sage is one who goes beyond good and evil, beyond what is moral and what is immoral, beyond what was done and beyond what is not done. S/he goes beyond all dualities. A sage lives eternity in the present. He lives in the eternal now. A prophet calls the psychological time to submit itself to the eternal present.

Jesus, in his experience of God, brings these two traditions together. His spiritual search was not only to find God in the ground of existence, but also the relevance of that

experience to the social, economical and political problems of his time. "I and the Father are one", and "whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters that you do unto me", are the two pillars of his teaching. He was a sage who climbed to the top of the hill and realized his identity with God, and he was also a prophet who came to the plains to transform the human relationships with his non-dual experience. In him the non-dual wisdom and the prophetic spirit are married. He saw the universal Truth shining like the sun both on the good and the bad, and at the same time called the people to discover this unconditional love through repentance or rebirth.

Jesus was born and brought up in the prophetic tradition. He was a believer and follower of Judaism. He might have become a disciple and come into contact with other spiritual traditions (wisdom tradition), either traveling to those places or meeting people well versed in them. We clearly find in Jesus' teaching the elements of wisdom traditions. Jesus asked the rich young man to go home and sell everything he had and give it to the poor and come and follow him. He tells his disciples, "Unless you renounce your father, your mother, your wife, your husband children, you can not enter into the kingdom of God". "Enter by the narrow gate", he admonished his disciples. In the Jewish spirituality there was no place for renunciation. There was no renunciation of material prosperity, which was the sign of God's blessing. There was no individual path. It is a journey of a people of God. So these are typical elements of wisdom traditions.

This contact with the wisdom tradition might have enlarged his spiritual vision. Even that also might have not satisfied him, as it might have been only theoretical second hand knowledge and perhaps he might have seen the limitations of the wisdom tradition also, which was world denying. This might have made him into an explorer, and he had direct experience of God at his baptism, which might have made him an original discoverer of the eternal Truth, "I am what I am". He transcended the God of history and discovered the God of eternity. He could say boldly that "before Abraham was I am". Jesus did not speak from accumulated knowledge but spoke from first hand experience of God. He spoke with an authority coming from within.

Jesus discovered the ground of our existence, where we find our inner rest and permanent peace, and from where all our actions come. He said, "Come to me all that labor and burdened of heart I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy; and my burden is light". This is the core message of the wisdom traditions. "My father is working so I am also working", he said. Here is the marriage between rest and actions. Rest manifests in action and action comes from the rest. God is ever restful and ever active. He observes eternal Sabbath and eternal action. The purpose of our life is not only to find God in the ground of our existence but also to manifest that experience in our relationship with our fellow human beings.

Jesus grew in the dualistic relationship of his prophetic religion but outgrew it when he discovered the non-dual relationship with God. He said "I and the Father are one". This experience was the achievement of the Upanishadic tradition five hundred years before Christ. But it was a revolution in the Jewish tradition. He was brought up in the tradition of creator God and grew into God who was his father. "God is not my creator but God is my Father" he declared. His tradition could not accept this revolutionary message. So his good news to people was that they are not creatures of God, but sons and daughters of God. Jesus opened the door to the non-dual experience of God in his spiritual tradition.

Jesus did not teach belief in one life, or in many lives, or reincarnation, but he taught eternal life. Eternal life is none of these, but living each moment of our life as eternal life. It is living in the eternal present moment, which is freed from the past and the future. Reincarnation belongs to the realm of continuity but the kingdom of God belongs to the realm of discontinuity. Jesus'™ conception of time was not cyclical or lineal but transcending psychological time. "The time is fulfilled", was the first statement of his good news. It means that the time has come to an end and eternity is here and now. The kingdom of God is not a belief in eternal hell and eternal heaven. It is the experience of the universal presence of God, where there is no eternal hell and eternal heaven but they both belong to the stage of purification, purgatory. Heaven and hell are two sides of the coin of purgatory. Some are purified in heaven and some are purified in hell. According to Jesus the kingdom of God is not a state into which we enter after our death but we have to discover it in this life through rebirth, or repentance. "Unless you are born again you cannot enter into the kingdom of God", he said to Nicodemus.

Jesus taught the path of continuous surrender and ever wakefulness. "Watch and pray", he told his disciples. Wakefulness or mindfulness is the continuous state of meditation and prayer is an act of continuous surrender of the present moment or situation to the creative source within us, which we call God. Jesus taught the unconditional love of God and invited his listeners to discover this unconditional love of God. He was a great missionary. But his mission was not to expand his boundary and increase his numbers, but to break down all the boundaries and say that God has no boundaries and that everyone is in God. His mission was not to make people into his followers but to proclaim the dignity of them all. We each have the potential to outgrow the religious boundaries and declare like him, "I am the way, the truth and the life". According to Jesus no one can come to that state unless they go through the same way as him. "No one comes to the Father except through me", he said. This way was rebirth, which was to come out of the womb of religion and enter into the universal presence of God.

When Jesus had his God experience, God said; "You are my beloved Son". This is the inauguration of the new covenant. In the old covenant God gave Ten Commandments, through which he says what we should and should not do, but in the

new covenant God reveals who we are. Jesus did not come to establish his rule among the people but to make people free. He washed the feet of his disciples to show that he came to serve and not to be served. He came to liberate and not to enslave. He did not demand the submission of human will and intellect but to give them back as these were taken by religion. He gave a great mission to his disciples to go into the whole world and preach the good news of human dignity, that we are greater than religions, God is greater than religions and Truth is greater than religions. Religions are meant to be at the service of human beings and not human beings at the service of religions. He taught that the purpose of human existence was to be fruitful in human relationship and according to the human need. He did not teach an impersonal God, but loving God who is greater than the laws of *karma* and who can liberate human beings from the effects of *karma*. God is beyond the realm of cause and effect. When people asked him about a blind person whether he was born blind because of his sins or sins of his ancestors, he replied that he was born to manifest the glory of God. If this blind person awakens in others love, compassion and sharing then he is awakening God in them. The blind person sees God in those who are well and those who are well see God in the blind person. The answer of Jesus transcends the theory of *karma*, cause and effect. It breaks down the wall built by the theory of *karma* and establishes a communion between the two different sections of the society. Jesus reveals a God who is searching for humanity, like a shepherd who searches for his lost sheep or a woman who searches for her lost coin. His experience was that not only human beings search for God and find him, but also God searches for people and finds them. The parable of the prodigal son was a beautiful summary of his good news. The son returns to the father and father finds his son back. Humanity finds God and God finds humanity.

Jesus was a sage in his realization of oneness with God, and a prophet in his surrender to God. He allowed God to work in and through him. “The works which I do are not my own but the Father who dwells in me does his work”, he said. Jesus was the symbol of marriage between wisdom and action, a sage and a prophet. If we take the first three letters of sage, which are SAG and the last three letters of prophet, which are HET, then we have a new word, SAGHET. So Jesus can be called a SAGHET.

In the spiritual classic *Bhagavad-Gita*, a new phenomenon appears. The Vedic sages were preoccupied with wisdom. In the Vedas God is silent. It is the sages who make profound statements about the eternal truths. But in the *Bhagavad-Gita* we have God incarnate, Krishna, speaking. He speaks eighteen chapters like the God of the biblical tradition. We do not have a sage probing into the mysteries of life but Arjuna, who is depressed, dejected and confused. We have a person who surrenders to a personal God, who answers his questions, removes his doubts and shows him the path to liberation. Arjuna does not say, *Aham brahma asmi*, “I am Brahman or God”, but, “Thy will be done”, which is closer to the prophetic tradition. The *Bhagavad-Gita* reveals a God who is ever active. Krishna says to Arjuna, “There is nothing in this universe. O Arjuna, that I am compelled to do; nor anything for me to attain; yet I am persistently

active. God is both rest and active. He is in eternal rest because he has nothing to become or achieve. At the same time he is very active. This action of God can be called unfolding. So in the *Bhagavad-Gita* we find the marriage between wisdom and action. Krishna is the symbol of wisdom, the Sage who is passive. He does not fight. He only gives advice. Arjuna is the symbol of a Prophet, the actor. The Fighter. His actions come from the inaction of Krishna. His actions come from wisdom. The action of Kauravas are prophetic but without the guidance of Krishna, the wisdom. So they are futile. They have lost the battle. Wisdom without prophetic action is ineffective and prophetic action without wisdom may end up in failure. Krishna without Arjuna and Arjuna without Krishna are ineffective. They are eternally together. *Bhagavad-Gita* speaks of three paths. *Karma marga*, the path of action, *bhakti marga*, the path of devotion, and *jnana marga*, the path of wisdom. But *karma* action without wisdom and devotion is fragmentary. These three constitute one whole. Wisdom and action are joined by devotion or love. Devotion is the magnet that keeps wisdom and action together. There is an action, which leads to wisdom and devotion. There is devotion, which leads to wisdom and then action. And there is wisdom, which leads to devotion and action. These three together constitute the essence of divine and human being. In Indian spirituality God is described as *Saccidananda*. *Sat* is to be, *cit* is to be conscious, to be active, and *ananda* is love, the bliss, the magnet, which unites *sat* and *cit*. *Ananda* is the essence of divine and *sat* and *cit* are two sides of this coin of *ananda*.

Sometimes God is presented as the union of masculine and feminine: Shiva and Shakti, Vishnu and Lakshmi and Brahma and Sarasvathi. In some traditions masculine is passive and the feminine is active or feminine is active and masculine is passive. There are pictures where Shakti is dancing over Shiva. In the imagery Shiva is passive, rest or wisdom and Shakti is action. It shows that reality is not a monad but the union of two opposing principles. They are complementary.

In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna is wisdom and Arjuna is action and they are joined together by love or devotion. Love is the essence of the divine. "God is love", says the New Testament. Love is the magnet that keeps wisdom and action together. Where these two are, there is victory and success. It is like the mystery of the Trinity in Christianity: the Holy Spirit is the love, the magnet, that holds the Father and the Son together. The Father is to be (*jnana*), the Son is to act (*karma*), and the Holy Spirit is the relationship, the bond (*bhakti*). Wisdom is feminine, the action is masculine and love is the magnet. Every person wants a house to rest, a place to work and a person to relate with. The house is the wisdom, the place from where we go out and to which we come back. The outside is the place where we go to work and the other human beings are those with whom we relate. All our actions and relationships have to be based on wisdom. Otherwise they will not have eternal value. Just as the nature of divine essence is to be, to act and to relate so also the essence of our human existence is to be, to act and to relate. This is the mystery of God and the mystery of our human existence. In the life of

Jesus, Krishna and Arjuna have become one. Jesus, as the incarnation of God, is Krishna and as a human being, he is also Arjuna. He is both divine and human.

Fr Bede tried to bring these traditions of wisdom and action into one, to bring Krishna and Arjuna together. He was a sage who meditated on "I am what I am", but he was also a prophet who worked for the transformation of the world. He took the stand in support of the marginalized in the society. In him the marriage of wisdom and prophecy has taken place. In this sense he was a real follower of Christ.

Fr Bede was a person of integration. He tried to integrate various aspects of human life. We all have various aspects like material, sexual, social, scientific, philosophical, psychological, theological and mystical. These aspects are like various points on the hill. When a person is climbing to the top of the hill s/he has to go beyond them as wisdom is beyond them. But when a person is climbing down s/he has to transform these aspects with the original non-dual wisdom. S/he has to bring that non-dual experience to the bottom of the hill, the material level. Fr Bede was able to dialogue with the communists, the social workers, the scientists, psychologists, theologians and mystics. At the end of his life he spoke of how one has to transform sexuality into sacred. He quotes D.H. Lawrence, who describes sexual union as non-dual experience, two become one. One has to look at sex not something natural or sinful but spiritual or sacred.

He also had tremendous love for the poor and suffering. He always supported the social welfare activities around the ashram and he participated in them. He had deep love for the poor and the marginalized. There was a touching incident, which I remember well. There was once a drug addict living in the ashram. He was causing nuisance to the visitors and to the community members. So the community had a meeting and discussed whether the drug addict could be sent out of the ashram. I could see tears rolling down from the eyes of Fr Bede when he said; "At the end of my life, if Jesus asks me, 'I came to you hungry, thirsty, and homeless', what answer can I give?" We were all moved by his compassion and we had to stop discussing the topic.

Fr Bede was very youthful in his capacity to learn. He was a voracious reader and had a photographic memory. He enjoyed reading the *Tablet* after dinner. One day after dinner I was passing by his hut and saw him not only reading but enjoying it as if he was eating a delicious dish. I felt jealous of him. After a minute he recognized my presence and called me inside saying, "come along", his usual expression. I sat at his feet and said; "Father I felt jealous of you. You see, you are 82 years old and have such a desire to read, but I am not even thirty-five and have no such desire to read." He felt somewhat uncomfortable and said; "You see, I do not feel that I am 82, I feel that I am only 18." It was true that at the age of 82 he was only 18 and at the age of 35 I was already 82.

There was another incident, which I remember well. We used to read in the dining room during the lunch and dinner. One day Father Bede asked a layperson, who was in the ashram at that time, to read during the lunch. His pronunciation and accent were so bad that I thought that Fr Bede would stop him on the second day. But Fr Bede heard him the whole week without the slight feeling of discomfort. I felt myself ashamed of my judgment.

Fr. Bede was in embodiment of humility. We, all the brothers, gathered at his bed few days before his death and we told him; "Father, we will continue your spirit". He felt a little uncomfortable and said immediately, "not my spirit but the Holy Spirit", pointing his finger to the sky.

The peace in the world depends on the marriage of wisdom and prophetic traditions. The wisdom traditions focus on the love of God and take it to the highest degree. The prophetic traditions focus on the love of neighbor and take it to the highest degree. In Jesus Christ this hundred percent love of God and love of neighbour are realized, when he said: I and the Father are one and whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do unto me." Jesus Christ was the marriage of these two traditions. Thus he became the prince of peace. He proclaimed peace. He broke-down the wall of division and created one God and one humankind. But Christianity is still very far from this vision of Christ. Fr. Bede is the marriage of wisdom and prophetic traditions. He brings Christianity very close to the vision of Jesus Christ and contributes for the world peace.