

THOMAS MATUS

BEDE GRIFFITHS AND SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

My contribution to the Bede Griffiths Centenary Conference in California is a rather simple term-paper exercise, sufficient for an undergraduate college seminar. But perhaps my modest term paper might give the participants and readers some interesting leads for an ongoing reflection on Dom Bede's literary, religious, and theological culture.

Let me just say, in a few words, what I consider to be the bottom-line, methodological principle in Bede Griffiths studies: You can't fully understand the books he wrote until you read the books he had read. In other words, you need to take a deep dive into his own cultural ocean if you would follow the currents that led him to India and beyond.

Personally, I would demand rigorous adherence to this methodology from Dom Bede's critics, more than from his sympathizers. As in a court of law, so also in theological disputation, the burden of proof weighs on the accuser. Before accusing Bede Griffiths of breaking with Catholic theological tradition, you have to be quite sure — and prove it — that what he says is not a quotation or a paraphrase of the Bible or the *Summa*, or of some other reliable *locus theologicus*. As I read Dom Bede's writings, I am continually meeting allusions to, and unreferenced quotations from, his favorite authors or his current reading at the moment he writes. So I get the temptation to go back over whatever book or article of his I am studying in order to supply the complete scholarly apparatus that Dom Bede did not consider necessary. But such an exercise would be, as they say, "gilding the lily" — Bede Griffiths' thought stands solidly on its

own two feet, without needing to lean on the crutches of meticulously referenced footnotes and a complete bibliography of primary and secondary sources.

Here, of course, no theological disputation is on the program. I am just doing what the Italians call "forcing an open door — *sfondare una porta aperta*," since all of us here present are attentive readers of Bede Griffiths and, albeit not all academics, we are experts in virtue of each one's "connaturality" with his cultural sources and lived experience. Note that I have just used a term that is common coin for readers of Thomas Aquinas, and sometimes "connaturality" does come up in indices to Dom Bede's books, and synonyms of the word do also.

Bede Griffiths the traditionalist

I might suggest that, as Bede Griffiths was a revolutionary without being a rebel, so he was a traditionalist and not a conservative. Let me tackle the first dichotomy and show that it is neither an oxymoron nor a pure sophism. A revolutionary is one who disobeys the present in order to obey the past, in view of a future that will belong to all, and not only to those of the revolutionary's own persuasion, while rebels disobey present and past and demand future obedience from those who opposed them. Of even greater importance today, in church and civil society, is the distinction between traditionalists and conservatives: the latter are those who seek to keep their own place and position in the present, while the traditionalist tries to recover the gifts of the past in order to hand them on to the future.

Sometimes Bede Griffiths could sound surprisingly conservative. Let me provide an example. One of the common shibboleths of late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century Roman Catholic theology is the ordination of women, or rather, the denial of the possibility of ordaining women to the Catholic priesthood. In 1992 Dom Bede was giving a retreat in England and surprised his listeners with an off-hand remark: "Now, I think,

we are beginning to see that we do not need women priests. That would be putting the priesthood back. We need a diversity of ministries where men and women work together in the service of the kingdom of God. That, I feel, is the model for the Church."

□ [*The Mystery Beyond: On Retreat with Bede Griffiths* (London: Medio Media/Arthur James, 1997), 76.] At the end of the talk he fielded the inevitable question: "Did I understand you to say that women do not have a valid vocation to the priesthood today?" Bede answered, "Oh dear no, I don't think women have a vocation to priesthood at all." □ [*Ibid.*, 82.] The question had been raised earlier at the Ashram, and his answer was the same, not from any instinct of theological self-preservation, but from his vision of a reunited Christianity in which ecclesial structures will not be uniform and ministries will not be reduced to a single model.

However, although my own instinct is to defend Dom Bede and see him as not a conservative, I am left with the uncomfortable sensation that here he is being too traditional a Thomist and is speaking in line with what I consider to be St. Thomas's tragic flaw, his exclusion of women from full humanity. That is, St. Thomas saw the difference between men and women in women's lack of certain attributes — not speaking solely of anatomical attributes — that he considered integral to full humanity. Perhaps for this reason, the Angelic Doctor denied Mary's exemption from original sin, even while Muslims admitted it. I believe that Dom Bede, as he himself recounts, overcame the misogyny characteristic of the English gentleman, reinforced by Aquinas's rationale for male supremacy, and so I conclude that his vision of priesthood was that of a traditionalist who looks beyond the male priesthood's dominant place and position in present-day Catholicism.

Dom Bede's criticism of Thomas Aquinas from an Indian viewpoint

In Justin B. Trapnell's study of Bede Griffiths' thought following the time-line of his life's trajectory, [] [Judson B. Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001).] the author examines a number of references to Thomas Aquinas, and so, in a sense, he has done our work for us. However, I shall do a bit more than simply rephrase Trapnell. I am especially interested in the mind-set that Dom Bede's reading of Aquinas and scholastic-philosophy manuals in a Benedictine monastery formed in him. The Thomistic influence is there, even when he denies its direct relevance to the dialogue with Hinduism; the influence is there even in — I might say, especially in — his contestation of existing, Western-Christian ecclesiastical structures.

Cyprian Consiglio gives us a whole chapter on "Medieval Thought: Aquinas and Eckhart" in his thesis based on Dom Bede's writings [] [Cyprian Consiglio, *The Space in the Heart: Spirit as an Anthropological Element Based on the Writings of Dom Bede Griffiths* (Thesis in partial fulfillment of requirements for the Master of Arts Degree: St. John's Seminary, Camarillo, CA, 1997); there are two important citations of Griffiths' *Marriage of East and West*, but given Consiglio's focus on the anthropological question, we need to consider other secondary sources.

One of the best is Bruno Barnhart's anthology of Bede Griffiths' principal writings [] [Bruno Barnhart, ed., *The One Light: Bede Griffiths' Principal Writings* (Springfield, Illinois: Templegate Publishers, 2001).]. If you run through the references to "Aquinas, Thomas" in Barnhart's index, you meet first with the following critical statement:

"What then do I mean by intuition as distinct from reason, by this feminine power of the mind? This is a question which has been with me from the time when I began to think at all for myself. I tried to answer it when I first began to study philosophy, in two essays on 'The Power of the Imagination' and 'The Power of Intuition.' Both these essays, it may be remarked, were rejected by Catholic periodicals at the time because

they were not sufficiently 'Thomistic.' And indeed, I felt at the time that this is the great weakness of the philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas, magnificent as it is in its own way, that it has no place for the power of intuition. It is true that St Thomas allows in a roundabout way for a power of knowledge by 'connaturality' or 'sympathy', an 'affective' knowledge, but it has very little place in his strictly rational system. For him, as for the Greeks and for modern Western man, knowledge is to be found in concepts and judgments, in logic and reason, in systematic thought. Western science, for all its concern with observation and experiment, remains firmly attached to this mode of thought and as such is an inheritance from Greek and scholastic philosophy. [5] [*Op.cit.*, pp. 38-39, citing Griffiths MEW, pp. 152-153.]

Some of dom Bede's generalizations in this paragraph could be contested by a historian of philosophy as well as by such a Thomist as Jacques Maritain, whom Bede cites as frequently as he does Aquinas himself. There is, I think, an underlying confusion, in Bede's reference to "scholastic philosophy," between the primary sources of the great, medieval, philosophical and theological synthesis (Thomas, Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, and others) and the manuals through which a certain scholasticism and "neo-Thomism" were transmitted in Catholic seminaries and monasteries in his day. Bede is reacting less against Aquinas than against the positive-scholastic manuals he was required to read during his preparation for the priesthood. Maritain, who emphatically called himself a "paleo-Thomist," certainly recognized the ways of knowing intuitively — connaturality and the rest — as more than a roundabout allowance, and Bede himself acknowledges this in the paragraph following the one we just quoted. Be that as it may, one can agree that, in the context of "rethinking Christianity in Indian terms" (using Jules Monchanin's expression, "repenser le christianisme en indien"), Thomas Aquinas' Aristotelianism is non-functional and hence may impede rethinking in the Indian milieu.

Having just referred to Monchanin, let me note the observation made by one of the scholars at his centenary celebration at Lyon in 1995.

"Monchanin is a thinker who stimulates thought; he is not a systematic thinker. He is more given to seeking different approaches to, and correspondences between, Hinduism and Christianity, rather than he is to maintaining exclusive consistency. Thus he writes in a letter concerning a Belgian Dominican friar who wanted to come to India: 'However necessary such apostles may be, I suspect that India (twentieth century India as much as the India of Sankara) will not be very receptive to Thomism. Would it not be sufficient to present Christianity as thought by various axes, of which Thomism is only unum inter plura? The language of Aristotle is not the koiné of *Jambudvipa*, and his logic is not his *tarka*. However, let him try his luck!' The position of Monchanin relative to Thomism is clear: *unum inter plura* (one system of thought among many)." [] [Ysabel de Andia, "Jules Monchanin, Apophatic Mysticism, and India", in: *Jules Monchanin (1895-1957) As Seen From East and West (Acts of the Colloquium... Volume I: Lyon-Fleurie; Delhi: ISPCK, 2001)*, p. 75.]

Returning now to dom Bede, we need to consider the evident fact that, in the 1930s, he meant to express his ideas in accordance with, and grounded in, the thought of Thomas Aquinas. For the editors of the Catholic periodicals to which Bede submitted his articles, these may have seemed not Thomistic enough, but Bede himself really wanted to be, in some way, Thomistic. In a book by Jacques Maritain and his wife Raïssa, a poet, Bede discovered the distinction between poetic knowledge and the knowledge that comes by way of a supernatural, mystical experience. The Maritains call the former "a knowledge by affective connaturality" and "a knowledge by mode of instinct or inclination, by mode of resonance in the subject. and which proceeds toward

creating a work [of art]," whereas mystical experience may lead to, but does not require, artistic creativity in order to attain its proper perfection. [] [Cf. Trapnell, *op.cit.*, pp. 60-61.] Trapnell observes, [] [*ibid.*, p. 224.]

"In articles written in the 1930s Griffiths interpreted this distinction in ways revealing of how he might have looked upon his own early experience of God in nature. In his citation of Raïssa Maritain's account of 'the natural mystical experience' where God is found as the ground of one's existence, and in his critique of Mary Webb's 'natural mysticism,' Griffiths reaffirms the existence of a higher mysticism whose object and source are supernatural. ... [I]t is interesting to note that Griffiths has written at some unknown time in the margin next to his description of Christian mysticism as being of 'another order altogether' in comparison to the 'natural mystical experience' of the Eastern religions the following remark: 'I would not now express the division of the natural and supernatural orders in this way.'"

Of course, many other authors during the years immediately preceding and following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1966), including those who drew on Thomistic thought, tried to see the necessary theological distinction as other than a stark dichotomy. Aquinas himself makes this distinction without dividing the natural and supernatural orders, and the same is true when he distinguishes the rational from the intuitive, since both ways of knowing reside in the same faculty of the human psyche. The imbalance in Western thought, the dichotomy between scientific, that is, rational knowledge and intuition, according to which only the former gives access to the truth about nature, is not the fault of Aquinas but of the West's departure from the kind of balance that medieval thinkers sought and achieved. Maritain makes this point, and Griffiths, in spite of his blaming Aquinas' "weakness," ultimately agrees. Trapnell reminds us of the passage of the *Summa Theologiae* (2-2, q. 45, a.2), where "reason is

praised as a means for gaining wisdom whose perfection leads to a kind of knowledge of divine things and right judgments. Jacques Maritain is equally clear that reason holds an important place in the healthy mind, including the mind of the poet. Some degree of rationality is essential to the successful expression of what the poet experiences in a non-rational way. On the other hand, some measure of non-rational or intuitive knowledge is vital to the success of all speculative knowledge, including science and philosophy." [] [Trapnell, *ibid.*]

It is interesting to consider the fact that Bede Griffiths' initial discovery of the thought of Thomas Aquinas came by way of a suggestion of professor C.S. Lewis, his mentor at Oxford. Lewis had earlier suggested that he read Dante's *Divine Comedy* and St. Augustine's *Confessions*, adding, "Of course you will read it in the original." [] [GS 57.] Griffiths accepted the challenge and did so, and a short time later heard his mentor speak of a friend who, after reading Dante, went on to study Aquinas, [] [GS 62.] and Griffiths eventually did the same. He writes:

"I recognized in the ordered structure of Dante's thought and the comprehensiveness of his vision something of the grandeur and immensity of a great cathedral. I had still only a very imperfect conception of its real significance, but my mind was moving now towards the thirteenth century as the supreme period of European art and philosophy, and already I began to see the Renaissance as the initial stage in that decline of culture and spread of 'civilisation' of which we were witnessing the last stages at the present day." [] [GS 62-63.]

Writing at a later date after twenty years of monastic life, Dom Bede admits that he is projecting the ultimate state of his mind on the beginnings of its formation, and he recognizes that his first readings of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Dhammapada*, and the *Tao Te Ching* were no less influential upon him than his first exploration into the thought of

Aquinas. However, it is significant that he approached the thought of the Angelic Doctor through poetry and understands its structure by analogy with Gothic architecture. This convergence of the arts and philosophical thought is even more explicitly affirmed in the following passage of *The Golden String*. [] [GS 92-93.]

"I then first began to read the *Summa Theologica* of St Thomas Aquinas. This had been at the back of my mind ever since I had read Dante, and it came to me as a wonderful new adventure in thought. I concentrated especially on the twenty-first questions on the nature and attributes of God. This brought back memories of Spinoza. There was the same rigorously logical method and the same fascination of a perfectly lucid mind. I was now finding the complete philosophical justification for Christianity. It was not so much any particular element in St Thomas's doctrine which impressed me as the sense of a comprehensive mind which had faced all the most difficult problems in regard to the existence and nature of God and could present a reasoned judgment on them. I was particularly struck by the fact that the anthropomorphism of the Old Testament presented no difficulty to the mind of St Thomas. The wrath of God, for instance, which presented such a difficulty to a logical mind, was simply explained as a metaphor.

"My first impression, as I have said, was rather of the greatness of the whole. It was like entering a great Gothic cathedral. One might not understand all the principles of its construction but one could not doubt that it was a masterpiece of the human genius. Height upon height opened up, displaying the endless variety of the most subtle intelligence as all the resources of Greek philosophy were brought to bear on the problems presented by Hebrew revelation. I knew now what I had surmised before, that the art of Dante and Giotto and the great cathedrals was based on a solid structure of philosophy and theology, to which the modern world could show no parallel. The range of the human intellect had reached its highest peak in the thirteenth century and what

we had mistaken for the peak in the sixteenth century was really the first level of a continuous descent."

During a period of transition, having begun to receive the sacraments in the church of England and after the year-long experiment in community living with his university friends Hugh and Martyn, Griffiths retired to a small cottage in the hilly parts of the Cotswolds, taking with him not only the Bible and a few volumes of the Fathers but also the *Summa* of St. Thomas. [] [GS 113.] His reading of Newman's *Development of Christian Doctrine* posed a drastic question.

"The problem was how could one reconcile all the developments which have taken place in the Church of Rome with the primitive simplicity of the Gospel. What was the connection between the religion of the Gospels and the complete structure of Catholicism as seen, for instance, in Dante or St Thomas or a Gothic cathedral? That the religion of Dante and St Thomas was a corruption of the Gospel I could not believe. The polemic of the Reformation had ceased to have any meaning for me. I knew that it was the modern world which was corrupt and decadent, and that Dante and St Thomas marked one of the pinnacles of human greatness." [] [GS 120.]

There is no need to belabor the point that Thomas Aquinas represented for Griffiths both an authentic elaboration of the Gospel in all its simplicity and generally a high-point of culture as well. But it was always "St. Thomas and Dante and the Gothic cathedrals" — it was the thought of Aquinas as a conceptualized expression of the esthetic of poets and architects and other artists who realized his thought in rhyme and visible form and, if you will, in the nascent counterpoint of Pelotin and the School of Paris. So was Aquinas' thought indeed so weak, that it had little place for "intuition and

the feminine power of the mind"? The Bede Griffiths who wrote these words in *The Marriage of East and West* may momentarily have forgotten what he once judged to be an authentic Christian answer to the decadence and corruption into which Western industrial civilization fell, once it had lost this culture that in fact integrated masculine and feminine, at least insofar as it integrated the conceptual and the esthetic, the intellectual and the intuitive faculties of the mind.

Of course when Dom Bede wrote his first autobiography, he could not yet imagine that he would, a year after its publication, leave the abbey of Prinknash in the Cotswolds for India, there to meet, as he said, "the other half of my soul." But it was in the abbey that his "Western" soul was prepared for the meeting, and it was there that he re-read the *Summa* of St. Thomas in the harmonious context of monastic wisdom, rooted in the rhythms of prayer and labor, and watered by the melodies of Gregorian chant. Auxiliary reading during Dom Bede's studies preparatory to ordination included works by Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, E.I. Watkin, and the historian Christopher Dawson. His reaction to the latter writer, now most often cited by conservative Catholics, is surprising.

"It was partly through the influence of Christopher Dawson and partly through contact with several friends who shared my interest, that I later took up again the study of oriental thought. I realized that a Christian civilisation could no longer be of a merely European character. ... I had, as I have said, read some of the classics of Eastern thought long ago, but I now began to study the history of Chinese and Indian philosophy systematically, and to obtain all the texts which I was able to do in English translations."

□ [GS 170-171.]

Hence Bede Griffiths' preparation for his new life in India came through his global appreciation for the philosophical, theological, and artistic synthesis of medieval Christianity and his reading of an integrally Catholic historian.

Aquinas in Griffiths' Indian writings

After he had been in India ten years, Bede Griffiths gathered a number of articles he had written and published in various reviews in England and India into the book whose current title is *Christ in India*. In the introduction Griffiths shows that the question of "non-duality" is in the foreground of his personal research into Hindu thought. He finds a near shore in Aquinas for a dialogue from a Christian standpoint. Central to this consideration of Thomistic doctrine in dialogue with Hindu *advaita* is the use of Aquinas' "Platonism" in affirming the presence of all creatures in God as "ideas"; these ideas, says Aquinas, are essentially identical with the very being of God, and so created being as a whole is inseparable from divine Being, who alone essentially *is*. [] [Cf. CI 35; 78-80; 204.] In other words,

"It is, in fact, precisely this spiritual tradition of the East, coming to us through Plato and Plotinus, which lies at the heart of our Catholic theology. When Aquinas introduced the exact method of Aristotle into theology, he did not discard this Platonic tradition; on the contrary, he incorporated it. His theology is a synthesis of Plato and Aristotle based on the original Hebrew-Christian revelation.

"St Thomas' conception of God is identical with that of eastern tradition, as we have described it. ... We have, then, the right to say that this spiritual tradition is an integral part of Catholicism. It is, in fact, nothing but that perennial philosophy, that universal metaphysical tradition, which is the basis of all religion, both eastern and

western. To this tradition Catholicism gives a precision which is generally lacking in the East. It firmly upholds the absolute transcendence of God, while admitting his immanence in all creation. It asserts the reality of the material creation while allowing that this reality is wholly relative and dependent on the absolute being of God. Above all, it brings the whole of this tradition into relation with the doctrine of the Incarnation ...

Catholicism thus acts to confirm and strengthen the tradition of the East by giving it its centre in history and making it a dynamic force in the world." [] [CI 81-82.]

In later writings, Dom Bede would of course abandon this excessive optimism about Catholicism's ability to "confirm and strengthen" everything good in everyone else's philosophy. Yet he continued to hold fast to the model of "perennial philosophy" and "universal wisdom" as a golden string threading through humanity's religions and spiritual traditions, leading them away from "dualistic" tendencies toward knowledge of the One that hides under so many different names and essences and yet is beyond them. In spite of what many critics of Dom Bede would say, this idea is about as Orthodox and Catholic as any idea can be.

Basil
John D.

God beyond all names all

Just as he places the *Summa* alongside the Gothic cathedrals and the *Divina Commedia* of Dante, so Griffiths also acknowledges other theological voices beside St. Thomas within the great, medieval synthesis. Now and then he mentions Bonaventure, especially when he proposes his and Aquinas' incorporation of Aristotle and the Islamic commentators into Christian speculation as an example for today's task of incorporating India's vast wisdom traditions into the Church. [] [Cf. CI 72-73.] He even imagines a monastic community in India where these traditions would be read alongside the *Summa* of Aquinas. [] [Cf. CI 84.]

I mentioned before that Bede Griffiths cites Jacques Maritain about as much as he does Aquinas, inasmuch as Maritain was, among Dom Bede's contemporaries, the one whom he thought best read Aquinas in a twentieth-century context. Let me quote

his own quotation from Maritain's book *Man and the State*: "Gandhi's theory and technique could be related and clarified by the Thomist notion that the principal act of the virtue of fortitude is not attack but endurance; to bear, to suffer with constancy."

Maritain, and Griffiths with him, is interested in demonstrating the potential universality of Thomistic thought, its ability to absorb just about every metaphysical concept, rectifying it if necessary in the process, after the manner of Aquinas' own absorption and rectification of Aristotelean metaphysics and method. If Gandhi's theory and technique is true, Maritain seems to say, then it must already be found in some way in Thomas Aquinas. But eventually Dom Bede would see the conservative bias of this procedure, and his liberal-yet-traditionalist instincts would lead him to abandon the attempt. More than Maritain, Bede appreciated the method that the Belgian Jesuit Pierre Johannes implied in the title of his book *To Christ Through the Vedanta*, which for Bede was "the most important work which has been done up to the present time on the subject" of a Christian understanding of *advaita* (non-duality). [] [CI 169.] Bede Griffiths' approach was, like Johannes', to start from the Indian side and later discover the parallels that might be found in Christian wisdom, but ultimately to seek "Christ" — understood as the incarnate Absolute — in every attempt of human thought to go beyond duality.

Perhaps it was Aquinas himself who offered Bede Griffiths a relief from the concern to baptize whatever was not baptized in Hindu thought but could be. The *Summa* responds to the question of the salvation of the unbaptized in Ila Ilae, i, 7, and it presupposes that this economy of salvation will last for a long time, leading us to conclude, by analogy, that whatever implicit conformity may be found between Aquinas and *advaita vedanta* is not prerequisite to a Christian's global appreciation of India's wisdom traditions and their practical applications (the disciplines of Yoga, Gandhi's non-violence, etc.). [] [Cf. CI 247.]

In Lieu of Conclusions

As we saw at the beginning of this paper, by the time Bede Griffiths wrote his "second autobiography," *The Marriage of East and West*, he was more critical and less optimistic about the possibility of incorporating the thought of Thomas Aquinas into his own dialogue with Hinduism. Nonetheless, his own mind retained a way of voicing its thoughts that echoed the medieval voice of Christianity as he had heard it in the *Summa* and in Dante, Giotto, and Gregorian Chant. ~~Regarding the latter, whenever I or another~~ monk who had been trained in the Latin liturgy was present at the ashram, he would always ask us to sing the solemn *Salve Regina* or another chant appropriate to some important occasion. And in *The Marriage of East and West*, he gives a lengthy explanation of the Aristotelean and Thomistic doctrine of "form" and "prime matter," that is, "act" and "pure potency," as metaphysical principles that are "basic to all physical being," and he further links them to the masculine and the feminine aspects of created and uncreated being, something that Aquinas does not do. [] [MEW 53-55.] Dom Bede wishes to see in Aristotle's *nous* and in Aquinas' *intellectus* the same thing as the *buddhi* of the Upanishads, [] [MEW 71.] and later he utilizes Aquinas' distinction between the "active" and the "passive" intellect, again to affirm the primacy of intuition over reason. [] [Cf. MEW 154-157.]

I could belabor my point further by cataloguing more references, direct or indirect, to Aquinas and the *Summa* in Griffiths' later writings. Permit me two last citations. In the summer of 1991, less than two years before his *mahasamadhi*, Dom Bede addressed a seminar of Christian meditators gathered in New Harmony, Indiana. "We need today to take very seriously the view of humanity as one body, one organic whole. The Fathers [of the Church] had this strong sense of the Adam who is in all humanity. St. Thomas Aquinas, in a beautiful phrase, said, '*Omnes homines, unus homo*,' 'All men are one man.' We are all members of that one Man who fell and

became divided in conflict and confusion. Jesus restored humanity, not only Jews or Christians or any particular group, to that oneness. In the new Adam the human race becomes conscious of its fundamental unity and of its unity with the cosmos." [] [NCC 48.] Today's hearers will forgive Dom Bede's slipping back into non-gender-inclusive language. He knew as well as anyone that the Latin *homines* does not mean "men" but "human beings, men and women"; when you want to say "men", you write *virī*. In fact, Bede's use of the "man/men" expressions in speaking of humans in general is much less obsessive than that of Thomas Merton.

The last publication prepared by Bede Griffiths before his passing was the anthology of texts from the seven major traditions of humankind, entitled: *Universal Wisdom: A Journey Through the Sacred Wisdom of the World*. The book was not an editorial success, and in fact it irritated some readers. For conservative Christians, it was too "inter-religious," almost tainted with syncretism. For their conservative counterparts in other traditions, it was all too Christian. since the anthology culminates not in historical or logical order, but with Christianity, the four canonical Gospels, and the Epistle to the Ephesians. But Dom Bede in his last literary labor was doing nothing that he would not have done at the time of his first, *The Golden String*. He was not then, nor forty years later in 1992, a syncretist. Ultimately, he was just as Christian and Benedictine and Thomistic as ever. In the introduction to *Universal Wisdom*, he refers one last time to Jacques Maritain, citing the reference in a proper footnote. [] [UW 12; cf. note 4.] And three pages later he quotes Christopher Dawson directly and even names "Aristotle and the Arabian philosophers," although without explicitly mentioning Thomas Aquinas, who had incorporated their thought into his *Summa*.

Let me leave you with the key passage of the introduction:

"The perennial philosophy stems from a crucial period in human history in the middle of the first millennium before Christ. It was then that a breakthrough was made beyond the cultural limitations of ancient religion to the experience of ultimate reality. This reality which has no proper name, since it transcends the mind and cannot be expressed in words, was called Brahman and Atman (the Spirit) in Hinduism, Nirvana and Sunyata (the Void) in Buddhism, Tao (the Way) in China, Being (*to on*) in Greece and Yahweh ("I am") in Israel, but all these are but words which point to an inexpressible mystery, in which the ultimate meaning of the universe is to be found, but which no human word or thought can express." □ [UW 8.]

Dom Bede could not have written this paragraph without remembering the great statement in the *Summa* (IIa IIae, q. 1,2, ad 2): *Actus autem credentis non terminatur ad enuntiabile sed ad rem* — "The spiritual act of a person of faith reaches beyond the expression (*enuntiabile*, words, concepts) to the reality itself (*res*)." □

"It is this which is the goal of all human striving, the truth which all science and philosophy seeks to fathom, the bliss in which all human love is fulfilled." □ [*ibid.*]