

UNIFIED CONSCIOUSNESS

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Father Bede Griffiths

I believe humanity began with a unitary consciousness. And we all come out of it. When we were in the womb of our mothers, we were in that unitary consciousness, totally one with nature, one with humanity, one with the Supreme Spirit. Every night we go back into that consciousness, we return to the Source. The next stage is the dream consciousness of the myth and folklore. And finally we come into the mental consciousness where we all are living.

The first millennium before Christ saw the awakening of mental consciousness. It came in India with the Upanishads and the Buddha, in China with Lao-Tsu, in Persia with Zoroaster, in Greece with the Greek philosophers, Plato and Socrates, and it came with the Hebrew prophets. With the mental consciousness you begin to divide and it is a necessary stage. You have to awaken to discriminative consciousness, and all our science is simply an extreme development of this mental consciousness.

Today the mental consciousness has reached its absolute limits. Science has gone beyond anything anyone could imagine before and our whole rational society is divided at every level - in religion, in philosophy, in race and in language and in personal self-consciousness. We now have to go beyond this mental consciousness, that is our calling today. But we have to realise how far it has taken us.

There is something in us which is urging us to return to the One, to the unity. In the middle ages there was an extraordinary growth of this unitive consciousness, not only in Christianity, in Islam also, the Sufis, and the Jewish tradition, and in India and China. So everywhere the mental consciousness evolved but it was preserved within a unitive consciousness. And the great cultures of the world, the Indian, the Chinese, Greek, the Medieval, Islamic, all these developed mental

consciousness, great philosophical systems, all unified in contemplative awareness, a spiritual awareness. At the Renaissance in Europe there was a tremendous reaction. Of course many superstitions belonged to the consciousness of the middle ages, there were tremendous problems. The whole thing was breaking down and humanity had to break out of that. We began this scientific revolution. And that is when the mental consciousness finally took over.

All the great scientists were theists, they believed in God, whoever they were, Newton or Descartes, but they went to study the physical universe around us by strict mathematical law and they developed this wonderful system of mathematical science which we've inherited today. This is the mental consciousness taken to its limit. The great division is Descartes, where the split between the conscious human being and the physical universe became final. It was present before, people learnt to distinguish themselves from the world around them, but there was still a certain unity. But Descartes broke that up. For him the physical universe was 'extended matter', outside yourself, and science consists in the thinking mind examining this dead matter. That is how science began. It's the extreme limit of this divisive consciousness, man separated from the physical world. And we've all inherited that.

Newton brought that to perfection with his wonderful system of mathematical law governing the whole universe. But Newton was an extraordinary and interesting person. He left a lot of writing, I believe they are unpublished, and mostly in the occult. He believed that God was the source of time and space. So there was something very profound behind Newton, but his followers left out God and simply concentrated on the physical universe

and its mathematical laws, and that has gone on to the present day. But we cannot stop with that divisive, mental, abstract, scientific consciousness. It has to be transcended. No human being can simply live on the scientific level. We have this inheritance now of a mental consciousness developed to this absolute extreme. And when you reach an extreme, you are always on the way back. The Chinese were speaking of the yang and the yin; the yang is this masculine, analytical, light consciousness, and that's developed to the limit. The moment you reach that, the yin - which is the dark, intuitive, imaginative consciousness - begins to take over. And we are in that state now.

I know very little of science personally, except what I learnt from Capra's 'Tao of Physics', which had a very deep impression on me, and more recently David Bohm's 'Wholism - The Implicate Order'; it strikes me as something immensely profound. What has happened is that scientists divided everything and got everything down to atoms, and atoms could not be split. Those are the building blocks of the universe and it is all mathematically ordered. Then came the splitting of the atom, the discovery of particles, electrons and protons in the atom, and finally the breakthrough with quantum physics where they discovered that the particles dissolved into waves. This is where we are now. We no longer believe that there are simply solid particles of matter in space and time. The universe is a field of energies and within that field are all these different structures. David Bohm has this wonderful understanding that the universe we observe scientifically is the explicate, the unfolding, but behind the unfolding is the implicate; it's all come out of an original unity. We structure all these different aspects of the universe in our minds, we can no longer separate the human mind, the observer from the matter which he is

observing. We only see of nature, of the universe what is accessible to our senses, our instruments and our mental consciousness.

I like to use this concept of a symbol. All human knowledge is symbolic. A symbol is a sign by which reality becomes present to human consciousness. We never know THE reality, we know it through the symbols, through the signs. All scientific theories are symbolic structures by which we organise our experience of the universe. And it gets more and more elaborate and

more and more profound, but it always remains a symbolic structure, we never know the reality. The same applies to our art, our poetry, we create symbolic forms to interpret the universe around us. All our theological systems, all our religious systems are symbolic structures. No one can say what God is. God is beyond all our symbols, all our structures. These systems point towards reality, they open our minds to it, but God always remains beyond.

We're all dominated today by this mental understanding of the universe, but it's

very limited. We need to learn now how to go beyond. In our human nature there is a longing for that original unity, we're all longing to be back in Eden, in paradise. People take short cuts: alcohol, drugs, sex, occult, all these are developing because people in this multiple universe in conflict and confusion want to get back to the unity. In the book of Genesis it says, "An angel with a flaming sword was placed at the Garden of Eden". You cannot go back there, you see, by any other means. You have to go forward. We have to find a

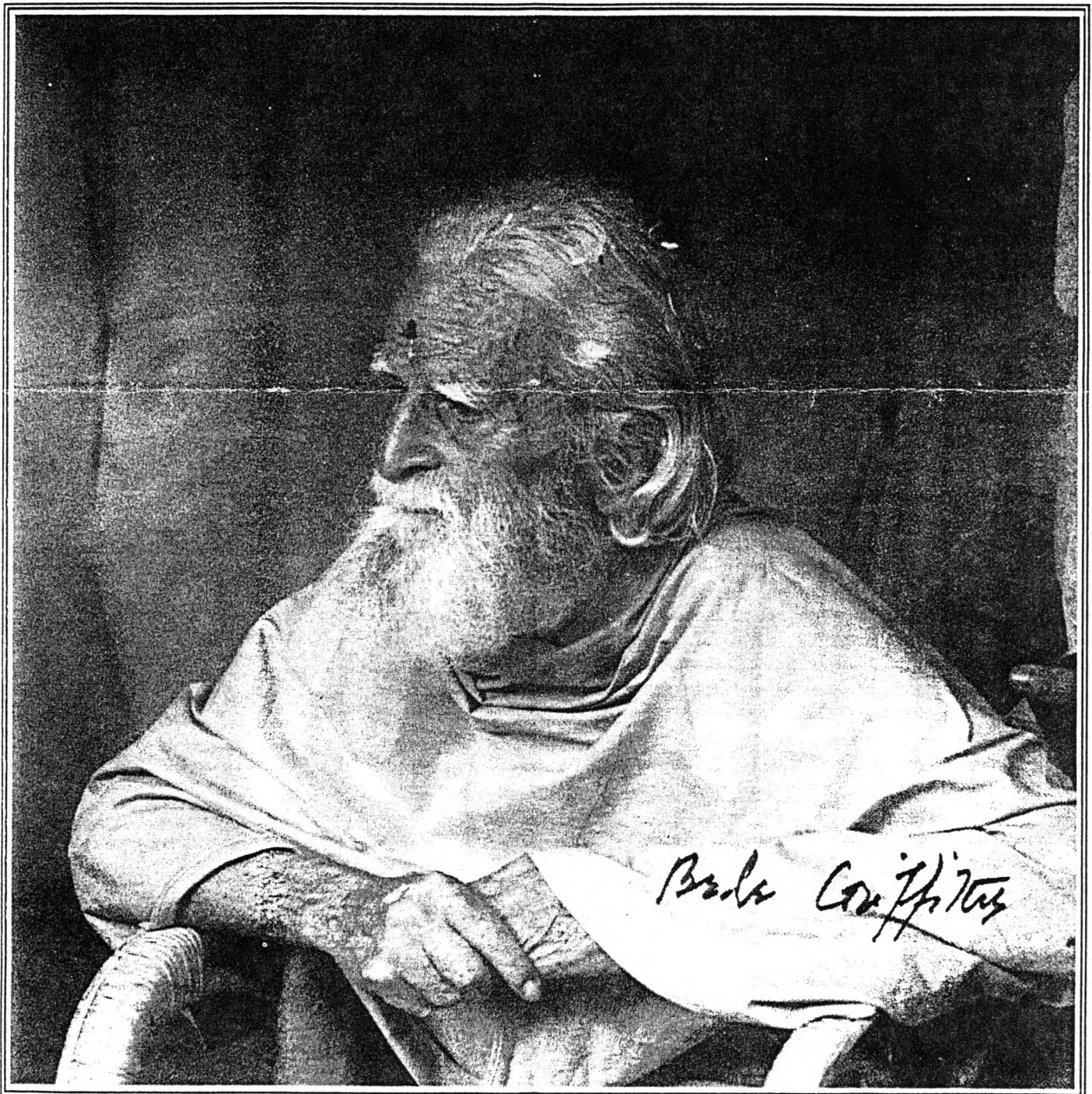


Photo: Roland Ropers

way to transcend our divisive, mental, scientific, rational, logical, analytical consciousness.

Of course poetry, music, drama, dance are one way where the intuitive mind begins to recover the unity. The right brain sees the whole but not the differences, the left brain sees the differences but not the whole, and the two have to work together. So we're being challenged today to go beyond the multiplicity of the universe. We have to recover the unitive consciousness not in an undifferentiated state as before but in a differentiated state.

We now have to go beyond the psyche to the pneuma, the spirit, the atman, and this is the challenge of the 20th century or the 21st century. To transcend the psychological ego consciousness. Once you get beyond your ego, something breaks through in your life and extraordinary things happen. What Jung calls synchronicity. You meet people apparently accidentally and it's just the person you needed at the time and it changed your life. Or you read a book or you come to some place. Then the transformation can take place.

So we are all open to this transformation, at any time it can take you, and I would like to mention that I had a stroke three years ago. In 1989. I was completely knocked out. I was sitting meditating, in the usual way, when something hit me on the head like a sledge-hammer. I went absolutely dizzy. I crawled onto the bed and I thought I was dying. I think I was. After only a week I began slowly to recover. It was an extraordinary experience. I found that this rational, analytical mind had been knocked down and a deeper, intuitive, contemplative spirit had emerged, with a unitive vision. It is still going on, it is not complete at all, but it is there. And I think that an accident like that, a stroke or cancer or Aids or a motor accident, a loss of a child or of a wife, all these things that seem tragedies are all means for a breakthrough, an opportunity to go beyond your limited human ego to a deeper consciousness.

I think everybody, in some way or other, is being called to go beyond this ego consciousness. It comes to all of us in some way, maybe simply through death. And death is a wonderful thing, death is the end of the ego! You cannot take your ego beyond death. I think there is an

intermediate stage; you don't enter simply into the divine. You've got to be freed from your attachments. And there are powers in the after-life which can set you free, then you enter into the divine life, the divine light, pure love.

The other experience I'd like to share is I thought I was going to die. I was quite prepared for it, which is very important. We should be prepared to die, any day, it is going to come for all of us some time. But if we are ready for it it makes all the difference. Well, I was ready to die, but it didn't come! So I felt rather restless and something said to me, "Surrender to the Mother". It came out of the blue. I see now that it was the feminine. I'm like most intellectuals, I'm all in my mind. And the feminine, intuitive, feeling, anima had been pushed down. Now she came up and a flood of love came over me. It was the unconscious which opened and the whole feminine love and surrender absorbed me. It was amazing. Today we are moving from a patriarchal consciousness to a feminine; it is going to be the meeting of the male and female. But we cannot go on with this patriarchy. Israel and the whole of the Jewish culture was patriarchal, and the Muslim is patriarchal, the Christian - we've only got male gods: God the Father, God the Son and even the Holy Spirit is male. There's no female! It's extraordinary when you think of it. We've simply pushed the female down and we've let the male consciousness dominate. That is the rational, scientific consciousness. But the feminine consciousness, the intuitive, poetic, emotional, sympathetic, cooperative consciousness is latent in all of us.

Every human being is male and female. The marriage has to take place within. So we are being challenged to go beyond this masculine, male-dominated consciousness and open ourselves to the feminine and become whole persons. Whole in mind, body and spirit. And the spirit integrates the physical and the psychological. We transcend the limits of the body and the soul and we become aware of this divine light, this divine life, this divine love. Beyond all pain, suffering and death there is this unconditional love. This is the ultimate. We must always be aware of the transcendent, of this contemplative spirit which unifies the whole. It's only in the spirit that the whole person can unify and

that the person is unified with others. We are not separated individuals, we are persons, and a person is being in relationship. An individual is shut up in himself and divided. A person is being in relationship, being in love actually. That is our real calling, to become fully human persons, beings in love. And the ultimate truth is that God himself, or whatever name you give the Supreme, is being in relationship, being in love, that's the best way to describe God, or whatever name you want to give to the Ultimate, it is being in love, and that is what we are all being called to do. We must enter into that being in love, into that interpersonal relationship of love.

It's urgent. We must get beyond these terrible divisions which are destroying humanity. We are destroying the universe around us, the whole planet, and we're destroying it psychologically. We are killing one another. We can never get over it as long as we remain on the physical or the psychological level, but when we open ourselves to the transcendent, to the spirit, then the healing process begins and humanity can be healed. ○

This article is drawn from a talk given by Father Bede Griffiths at this year's Mystics and Scientists conference. Video tapes of both the talks given by Father Bede Griffiths from The Scientific and Medical Network, Garden Cottage, New House Farm, Northington Down, Alresford, Hants. SO24 9UB. Audio cassettes of his talks from Philip Royal of Wrekin Trading Company, Keepers Cottage, 114 Upton Road, Clevedon, Malvern, Worcs. WR13 6PB

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