

**A summary of Bede Griffiths' published books,  
from *The One Light: Bede Griffiths' Principal Writings*  
Edited and Commentary by Bruno Barnhart, OSB Cam.  
(2001, Templegate Publishers).**

Nine books were published during Bede's lifetime. *Universal Wisdom* (1993), a selection which he had made of the scriptures of the great religious traditions, was published after his death.

*The Golden String* (1954) is Bede's account of the 'first half' of his life, from childhood until the time of his departure for India. A beautifully written account of his personal experience, it quickly became a best-seller and is still in print after nearly half a century. We shall present substantial extracts narrating Bede's first spiritual awakening, his conversion to Christianity and entrance into the Catholic Church.

*Christ in India* (1966), a collection of 21 essays, was published just after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council when Bede had been in India for a decade. Focusing principally on the relation of Christianity and the Asian traditions, it contains Bede's major articles on Christianity and the East from as early as 1953. Included are reflections on an Indian Christian monasticism, on Indian Catholicism, on a non-violent society and on church renewal. Written with Bede's characteristic passion and clarity, these pieces bring forth again and again his developing vision of a new Christianity.

*Vedanta and Christian Faith* (1973), the least-known of Bede Griffiths' books, is a collection of three lectures in which he presents a Christian theological vision which has developed in the light of Hindu thought. The three critical questions which he confronts are "The Mystery of the Godhead," "Creation and Incarnation," and "The Ultimate State of Man and the Universe." This small book is Bede's first substantial draft of a synthesis of the two worlds of Hinduism and Christianity.

In *Return to the Center* (1976), Bede's vision has been thoroughly permeated by the unitive light of the Vedanta. The book's orientation, as its title suggests, is back toward the primal Mystery and inward to the unitive core of the person. It is consistently profound and sometimes hauntingly beautiful. Interwoven with this series of theological meditations upon the traditions of East and West is a poetry of personal experience. At this time in his life Bede has been caught and held by the gravitation of the unitive 'center,' which absorbs all differences into itself.

*The Marriage of East and West* (1983) is subtitled 'A Sequel to *The Golden String*' In fact, Griffiths quickly abandons the mode of autobiography in favor of a further, more systematic exploration of the integration of East and West. An introductory section, 'The Discovery of India' is followed by a development in three successive layers: "The Vedic Revelation," 'The Judaic Revelation,' and 'The Christian Revelation: The Rebirth of the Myth.' Dominated by the tension between eastern and western epistemologies, the edifice leans strongly toward the East. Here Bede writes at length of the ultimate sapiential principles which he finds in the Vedanta: nonduality (*advaita*) and the unitive Self (*atman*).

Beginning with *The Cosmic Revelation: The Hindu Way to God* (1983), Bede Griffiths' books will consist almost entirely of edited transcriptions of his recorded talks. No longer shall we experience the same fusion of intuitive sweep and literary elegance. This book is a revision of six talks given in the

United States. As the title indicates, the conferences are a presentation of the teachings of Hinduism - once again, chiefly the Vedanta - and only in the final talk does Bede bring this tradition into confrontation with Christianity: At this point the reader may be surprised to find a sharply critical examination of Hindu religion and theology. Bede concludes by proposing once again the complementarity of the religious traditions of East and West.

*In River of Compassion: A Christian Commentary on the Bhagavad Gita* (1987), a series of talks given at Shantivanam, Bede presents the *Gita* to westerners. The commentary presents the Hindu classic as a series of 'yogas' (integrations or ways of union): principally *karma* yoga, the way of work, *bhakti* yoga, the way of love and devotion and *jnana* yoga, the way of contemplative knowledge. Key verses of the *Gita* are commented at length. There is a frequent confrontation with Christian tradition. *River of Compassion* is probably Bede's most successful demonstration of the affinities and complementarities of Hinduism and Christianity. He is clearly moving toward a broader integration in this book; spirituality returns to the marketplace. We seem to be sitting around him and listening to his living words.

*A New Vision of Reality* (1989) was edited from a series of talks given at Shantivanam around the beginning of 1983. This is Bede Griffiths' fullest attempt at an overall synthesis, embracing not only the ancient religious traditions of Christianity and the East (still principally Hinduism), but the perspectives of contemporary physics, cosmology and transpersonal psychology. Audacious synoptic views of cosmology, anthropology, spiritual theology and the history of consciousness demonstrate Bede's formidable powers of assimilation and integration. In conclusion, he imagines more concretely a 'New Age' both for humanity as a whole and for the Christian church.

*The New Creation in Christ: Christian Meditation and Community* (1992) presents Bede Griffiths' five lectures at the 1991 John Main Seminar in Indiana, together with a transcript of listeners' questions and his responses. Here Bede is concerned with meditation - particularly 'Christian meditation' and the use of a mantra - and with the movement of contemplative life and prayer beyond the confines of monasticism, to people in the world.

*Universal Wisdom: A Journey through the Sacred Wisdom of the World* (1993), published just after Bede Griffiths' death, is a selection of scriptures and spiritual poetry from Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Sikhism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. The general Introduction (about 36 pages) is a dense synthetic reflection written by Bede, who also supplies a brief introduction to each of the successive parts. The collection itself, idiosyncratic and exclusive, gives us another view of Bede's horizons, at the end of his life.

Two small books, edited and published after Bede's death by his friend Roland Ropers, present Bede's personal selections from the Book of Psalms and from various provinces of the literature of East and West. *Psalms for Christian Prayer* (1995), brings together the 95 biblical Psalms which Bede found relatively free of the anger, hatred and desire for vengeance which he found incompatible with sacred wisdom. *Pathways to the Supreme: The Personal Notebook of Bede Griffiths* (1995), with a longer introduction (11 pages) by Bede, contains a series of selections from his favorite authors, ancient and contemporary. The order in which the texts are presented is significant, corresponding to the successive 'ways' of cosmic revelation (here understood as primitive religion), of poetry, of philosophy (the 'perennial philosophy' in its Greek, Chinese, Buddhist and Hindu expressions), of Christian revelation,

and finally the ‘way of mysticism.’

Bede Griffiths, one quickly realizes, was a gifted writer. His elegant prose was not the product of labored revision. Of the writing of his early books, he recalls:

I sat down every day after breakfast for about two hours and began to write. It just came out, just flowed out. I forget how long it took—maybe six months. That [*The Golden String*] was my first experiment in writing a full-length piece. When I first came to India, I didn't write, but I did some translations. When I came here to Shantivanam, I began to write *Return to the Centre*. It is very interesting, looking back now, that this book came out absolutely spontaneously. I wrote it in longhand completely and made no corrections at all. It just came out like that, it's extraordinary. I think *The Marriage of East and West* was probably the same.

Bede's articles appeared in a wide range of journals. Early pieces were published in the English Benedictine *Pax*, then in the progressive American Catholic journal *Commonweal* and the English Dominican *Blackfriars*. Many further articles came out over the years in *The Tablet* and *The Examiner*, and his pungent letters appeared frequently in *The Tablet*. He also contributed to a number of Indian publications and to western monastic journals.