

# The Golden String

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## RADICAL LOVE

**John Martin Sahajananda**

The message of Christ can be described as a message of radical love: The radical love of God and the radical love of neighbour. Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God, which is radical love. The message of radical love is contained in two statements made by Jesus. They are: "I and the Father are one (Jn10:30)." and "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters that you do unto me (Mt 25:40)." Jesus experienced radical love, and he wanted us to experience it too. However, it is a journey, with four stages or stepping stones. We can understand Jesus' message more clearly by seeing how this journey was reflected in four important moments of his own life. .

### The Birth

The first moment was his birth as a human being. His physical mother, Mary, conceived him, protected him, nourished him and gave birth to him as a human being. In this sense, he was a hundred percent human.

### The Circumcision

The second important moment was the day of his circumcision. On the eighth day of his birth he was circumcised and he became a Jew. Later he was presented in the temple. The temple was the symbol of Judaism. It was his spiritual womb. We can say Jesus entered into the womb of Judaism on that day. Judaism became pregnant with him. As a Jew he had to grow in the womb of Judaism. As a Jew he might have said that Judaism was his way, his truth and his life.

### The Baptism

But as he grew in his religion he realized the limitations of it. The first limitation was that his religion divided humanity into two: Jews and Gentiles. It limited God to being only the God of the Jews, and it made humans subservient to religion or the Law. This brought him to the third important moment in his life - his baptism. With this experience, Jesus came out of the womb of Judaism and entered into the universal presence of God. It was the inauguration of the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34), in which God wrote the

*(Continued on page 2)*

## CONTEMPLATION AND DIALOGUE Cyprian Consiglio

What I am mainly concerned with here are, first, prayer and contemplation and how they lead into inter-religious dialogue and, secondly, the dialogue of *religious experience*, in which people share spiritual practices with others of different faiths.

### Perennial philosophy and meditation

I have been formed in the school of thought that believes there is what we call a "perennial philosophy," a common core of teachings about the transcendental essence of religion that underlies the world's authentic religious traditions. Bede Griffiths might refer to it as "universal wisdom," a term I favor as well. This is a term that was coined in the West by the German rationalist philosopher Leibniz (1646-1716), but made more popular by the 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Aldous Huxley. (I want to add that not everyone is a "perennialist," but there is a long tradition which goes back to William James, the author of *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and includes the great scholar of comparative religion, Huston Smith.) My favorite way to describe this perennial philosophy, this universal wisdom, is this: first, there is Spirit (or God, or divine power, however we may name it); second, this Spirit isn't just outside of us, "supernatural"—it is found within, as St Paul says, "the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Spirit living in us." But, third, most of us have no knowledge or awareness of this power of the divine within us because we are living in a world, in a state, that is marked by whatever we may call it—sin, delusion, separation. But, our religions teach us, there is a way out of this state of sin, delusion and separation, and if we follow that way as laid out by our tradition we will have an experience of this indwelling presence of God, which is an awakening, a rebirth, an enlightenment. Ultimately, the main purpose of every religion is the mapping out of this way. Equally important, what is not often articulated in various forms of this perennial philosophy, is that that awakening to this indwelling power of Spirit then manifests itself in love for others as mercy and compassion. As Jesus says, that love of God that is poured into our hearts will then flow out of our hearts like a stream of life-giving water, in love and service, as co-creators, participants in the divine nature, as St. Peter writes.

But, you see, this is a knowledge that only comes out of and then leads to the interior journey, the contemplative path. And it goes hand in hand with the interior way, the way of meditation and contemplation, something

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Inside This Issue

Bede Griffiths and the Place of Truth: <i>Atmajyoti</i>	6
Bede Griffiths' Essential Legacy, <i>Thomas Matus</i>	8
Meath Conlan retreats in Australia	8
News	8
Awakening at Osage Ashram, <i>Elbina Rafizadeh</i>	9

**Radical Love**

*(Continued from page 1)*

Law in his heart: "You are my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." (Mk1:11).

God did not reveal to him what he should do or should not do but who he was. In this experience, the wall between the Jews and the Gentiles was broken down and a new human being was born, the Son of God, in whom the Jews and the Gentiles were united. God was no longer the God of the Jews but the God of the whole humanity and creation. Now the religion, the Law, was no longer the way, the truth and the life. Jesus himself was the way, the truth and the life. This consciousness transcended the Law but included the Law. It did not abolish the Law but fulfilled the Law. Jesus does not replace the Law with himself but he inaugurates a new consciousness in which the truth is within.

**"I and the Father are one."**

The fourth important moment in the life of Jesus was when he said, "I and the Father are one." (Jn 10:30). It was the realization of his eternal identity with God. We do not know exactly when Jesus entered into this consciousness. However, with this realization, the ascending aspect of his spiritual evolution came to an end. In this sense, he was one hundred percent divine in the source and one hundred percent human in the manifestation.

We can call the first of these moments that of the birthing of his individual mind, or consciousness. The second moment was the birth of his collective mind as a Jew. The third moment birthed the universal mind (the son of God) and the fourth moment the unitary mind, or being one with God. Another way of describing it is as a growth from individual love to collective love, from collective love to universal love, and from universal love to the divine love.

**The tree of life**

We can explain this through the symbol of a tree. A tree has leaves, branches, a trunk and then roots. The leaves are the symbol of our individual identities. There are so many leaves and so many individuals on the tree of life. If each leaf is living for itself, then it is living in individual love. When the leaf realizes it is connected to a branch, it moves into the collective identity and lives for its collective identity. This identity unites us with some and separates from others, just as one branch is separated from another. In this level, our love becomes collective love. We live for our collective identity and may even be willing to die for our collective identity. The trunk is the symbol of our universal mind. All branches and leaves are attached to the trunk, but at the same time it transcends them. Here our love becomes universal love. The trunk lives for all and dies for all. We Christians say that Jesus died for all. It is because he lived for all. There is only one trunk and one universal mind, or one Son of God. The trunk or the universal mind is the mediator between the roots, which represent the unitary mind, and the branches and leaves. The trunk receives from the roots and nourishes the branches and the leaves. It speaks to the roots in the names of the leaves and the branches and it

speaks to the branches and the leaves in the name of the roots. At the level of the roots - the unitary mind or consciousness or God - our love becomes divine, unitary love.

**Jesus the Whole Truth**

Jesus is the whole tree. He is a leaf in as much as he is one physical being. He is a branch in as much as he belongs to the Jewish tradition; he is the trunk in as much as he is the Son of God, the universal person, who lives for all and who dies for all. He is the roots in as much as he is one with the divine.

**The radical love of God and neighbour**

In the universal consciousness, whatever we do to others we do to Christ or God. This is the radical love of God and the radical love of neighbour. Jesus called this experience, symbolically, the kingdom of God. Jesus invited his listeners to enter into this kingdom of God, into this unity of life, to eat the fruit from the tree of life which God had planted in the Garden of Eden.

**One Way, Many Expressions**

The way he proposed is *one*. It is the transition from individual love to collective love, from collective love to universal love and from there to divine love. But he described this **one way** with different words like: repent, rebirth, becoming like little children, interior death, growing into a tree and losing one's self in order to find it. He began his ministry saying, "the kingdom of God is at hand, repent (Mk1:15)." "Unless you are born again you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven," (Jn 3:3) he said to Nicodemus. "Unless you become like little children, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven," (Mt 18:3) he admonished his disciples. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone but when it dies it gives a mighty harvest," (Jn 12:24) he said to his disciples. Jesus described the kingdom of God thus: "The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It is the smallest of all seeds but when it grows it becomes so big that the birds of the air will come and make their nests in it." (Mt 13:31-32). "If you lose your self (conditioned self or ego) you will gain it (unconditioned self). If you gain or hold to your self (conditioned self) you will lose it (unconditioned self)." (Lk 9:23-24).

**The "one way" to God**

All these expressions refer to the same "**one way**". In this "one way", there are many levels. The conversion to which Jesus invited his listeners is not about an individual entering into a branch (religion) or moving from one branch (religion) to another branch (religion). It was an invitation to make the leap in consciousness from the branches to the trunk and from there to the roots.

As the universal mind, Jesus holds all the leaves and all the branches. All individuals and all religions are connected to the universal mind. No one is outside this tree and no religion is outside this tree. There is only one way, one truth and one life. This is the way of the tree, the way of unity and non-duality. This way embraces different levels of

*(Continued on page 3)*



**Radical Love** (Continued from page 2)

truth, the un-manifested truth and manifested truth. Sin consists in fragmenting this tree of life. The tree is one whole. When we fragment this tree into leaves and branches then we fall into good and evil, we fall into duality and violence. This is eating the forbidden fruit from the tree of duality, of good and evil. It is the tree of ignorance. Ignorance — not knowing our essential unity — is the source of violence.

When Jesus said “I and the Father are one,” (Jn 10:30) he did not say anything new, as this knowledge was already in the human consciousness. The same experience had been realized in the tradition of Upanishads five hundred years before him. The sages of the Upanishads had declared: *Aham brahma asmi*, I am Brahman or I am God or I and God are one. However, the Jewish tradition believed in a creator God and experienced the human-divine relationship as dualistic. Jesus had a non-dualistic experience of God. He saw God not as his creator but as his Father. It was revolutionary (and ultimately led to his crucifixion for blasphemy) and was totally new to the Jewish tradition. It essentially elevated the God experience of Judaism to the level of the realization in the Upanishads.

**The Original Contribution**

The original contribution of Jesus in the spiritual evolution of human consciousness was to bring together the radical love of God and the radical love neighbor. In the tradition of Upanishads the focus was on the radical love of God, realizing one’s true self. The love of neighbor in the sense of social transformation was not much stressed. In Judaism there are the two great commandments: love of God and love of neighbor. The love of God was dualistic and the love of neighbor was limited to the fellow Jew. Jesus elevated the love of God from dualistic love to non-dualistic love. He expanded the love of neighbor to everyone. His love of God was complete as he said “I and the Father are one” and his love of neighbor was complete when he said “whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters that you do unto me”. The love of neighbor is the descending aspect of our spiritual journey. In this sense Jesus achieved the radical love of God and of neighbor.

**Jesus Fulfills**

Jesus did not teach something completely new. His mission was to fulfill and not to abolish. Jesus integrated the spiritual understandings that were discovered before him and added his own original contribution. His disciples asked Jesus why a person was born blind — was it because of his sins or sins of his ancestors (a kind of karma and reincarnation theory)? Jesus said, no. He was born to manifest the glory of God. This was a revolutionary answer of Jesus. His vision was that the person who was able to see should see God in the blind person and the blind person should see God in the person who was able to see. For both of them it should be an experience of God. Jesus was telling them; don’t ask the question why this person was born blind. Don’t make your journey with theories but ask the question how this encounter could help you to manifest the divine

attributes, to awaken the divine within you. Human relationships are meant for us to help each other to experience the divine within and manifest divine attributes. God is in the person who is able to see and God is also in the blind person. Karma, reincarnation and caste system theories build a wall between these two. Jesus broke down this wall and established communion between these two. Jesus died for breaking down the barriers, for including everyone in his vision, for actively trying to liberate people from all oppressions, particularly religious oppressions and for inviting his spiritual tradition to grow in divine –human relationship. He died for unity, growth and liberation. His religious authorities refused to accept his call. They interpreted his claims as blasphemous. The result was violence, death on the cross. Jesus died for the radical love of God and the radical love of neighbour. In this radical love, all religions, all spiritualities and all philosophical systems are present. In this sense Jesus message is all inclusive. Our spiritual journey consists in growing into this radical love of God and radical love of neighbour.

**The Parable of the Four Boatmen.**

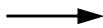
A parable illustrates this message. Once there were four boatmen, living in a small village, who would take people from one side of the river to the other side. Every day they used to get around 50 persons and they charged Rs. 5 per one passenger and they earned Rs. 250 per day. At the end of the day each one prayed. The first boat man prayed to God; O God, I am very grateful to you for sending 50 tickets to day so that I can earn Rs. 250. Please send more tickets tomorrow so that I can earn more money and become rich. Thank you for Rs. 250.

The second one prayed to God: O God, I thank you so much because today I could take 50 of my countrymen from this side to the other side. I am so happy that I can be at the service of my people. Please send more of them tomorrow so that I can serve them. Thank you for giving me Rs. 250 to maintain my family.

The third one prayed to God: O God, I am so happy today because I could take **you** from this side to the other side 50 times. Please come more times tomorrow so that I can serve **you** more. Thank you for giving me Rs.250 to take care of my family.

The fourth person prayed: O God, please forgive me for making this prayer. I realize that you alone exist. You are in me and you are in the others. It is you who are taking yourself from this side to the other side. It is you, living in me, who do all the work. I am blessed to be your instrument. Thank you for giving me Rs. 250 to take care of my family.

All the boatmen did the same work and earned the same amount of money but their motives were different. The first boatman lived in the individual love, the second boatman lived for the collective love, the third boatman lived in the universal love and the fourth boatman lived for the divine love. Our spiritual journey is to grow from individual love to the divine love which is the kingdom of God. ■



**Contemplation and Dialogue** (Continued from page 1)

beyond our normal religious life of ritual and activity, and even of study and teaching. It is a journey to the depths of our own beings to have conscious contact with this Spirit in the cave of our own hearts. It is for this reason that so many of us have studied the great mystical texts of other traditions “which have sought union with God in prayer,” so as to find new ways of expressing this experience. Furthermore, since these traditions have also pointed out ways to achieve that union, and since “the Catholic church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions,”<sup>1</sup> neither should these ways with which other great religions have sought to achieve union with God in prayer “be rejected out of hand simply because they are not Christian,” as the CDF wrote. On the contrary, one can take from them what is useful; “these bits and pieces should be taken up and expressed anew” in the light of the Christian understanding of prayer and our ultimate end.

A few concrete examples — first, a beautiful practice that is common in our ashram and others throughout India is the reading of non-Christian sacred texts at the beginning of the liturgy or just before the liturgy begins. The original proposed Indian rite after Vatican II (which was never fully adopted) had suggested using Indian Scriptures within the liturgy itself, at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Word and not *before* the liturgy. The explanation of this practice given in the introduction to the *pro manuscripto* version of the Indian rite taught that even if we recognize “only ‘seeds of the Word’ in these scriptures,”<sup>2</sup> the final manifestation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ “did not render these ‘seeds’ pointless and irrelevant,” since Jesus came to fulfill, not to destroy, just as the New Testament did not abolish the Old but helped us to discover richer and deeper meaning in it. The non-Christian scriptures, “even if they represent only a cosmic revelation, still form part of the dynamism of the Word and are better understood when placed in this context.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, as Jacques Dupuis explained, we do not and cannot consider other traditions to be equal to the preparation of Israel for the event of Jesus Christ, because those other religious traditions do not have an identical meaning in the history of salvation to that of Judaism, or the same relationship with the “Jesus Christ event.” Nevertheless, all these other scriptures were already oriented to that same event and for that reason those other Scriptures are seen as not just pre-Christian but “pro-Christian.” “They are all authentic ‘evangelical preparations,’ even if in an indirect way, and as such are *destined by God*, who directs all of human history to fulfillment in Jesus Christ.” He is even bold enough to say that they “represent *true personal interventions of God* in the history of the nations that point them towards the decisive intervention of God in Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

With that in mind, one might also rightly question the use of the word “only”: as in “*only* seeds of the Word” and “*only* a cosmic revelation”! What is not mentioned is that not only are these scriptures “better understood when placed

in the context of the Bible,” but the Bible too may be better understood when placed in the context of the cosmic revelation and these “seeds of the Word,” helping us to see our own tradition as an expression of a larger movement of the Spirit in humanity.

**telos/scopos**

I found a useful distinction in the writings of John Cassian, the great 4<sup>th</sup> century chronicler of the desert monastic tradition. He and his friend Germanus are in the desert of Egypt to engage in a long series of conversations with the old men of the desert, which are passed down to us in a work called “The Conferences.” Their very first recorded conversation with “the most experienced of fathers of the monks” is with Abba Moses who points out to them that every art and discipline has both a *scopos* and a *telos*, Greek words meaning “a goal” and “an end.” For farmers, for instance, the goal is to cultivate the land and till the soil toward the end of having a rich harvest and an abundant crop. A good modern example might be any kind of sporting event: the goal is to score points, but the end is to actually win the game. And Abba Moses says the monastic profession has both a *scopos* and a *telos*, a goal and an end as well. When he asks Cassian and Germanus, “What is your goal and what is your end?” they say that they “bear all things for the kingdom of God.” Indeed Abba Moses says, that is the end, but you need a goal first, but Cassian and Germanus cannot figure out what that goal is. So he tells them: “The end of our profession... is the kingdom of God... but the goal or *scopos* is purity of heart.”

I think this is a very useful distinction, especially when we are dealing with comparative religion. I think it’s safe to say that we describe the end, the *telos*, in different ways. So, the Hindu *advaitan* might say that the end is to awaken to the fact that I am Brahman, that nothing is real except Brahman, and that this awakening destroys ignorance and we are freed from the endless cycle of birth and death. A Buddhist might say the end is to awaken to the fact that there is no abiding “self” of God or of any human being, and that all things are in a constant state of flux; to accept that fact and to surrender to it is the state of *nirvana*, supreme bliss. For a Christian (a Jew and a Muslim might also agree) that *telos*—end is often described as a kind of mystical marriage, a sublime experience of the Absolute in personal relationship. So, we do describe the *telos*—the end of the spiritual life in very different terms.

But what we discover to our amazement along the way is how similarly we describe the *scopos* — the goal — and the way to that goal! Let me give you an example. I ran into this beautiful phrase that I think is a wonderful brief universal description of the goal of the spiritual life: “To learn oneself is to forget oneself.” Before I tell you where that comes from let me give you some examples from other traditions.

Of course, Jesus says (in Matthew 10:39, among

(Continued on page 5)

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## The Golden String

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### Contemplation and Dialogue (Continued from page 4)

other places):

Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life... will find it.

From the *Tao Te Ching* #7:

The self is realized through selflessness.

From the *Katha Upanishad*:

By study of the yoga of the self, the wise know that which is hard to see, that which is deeply hidden, which lies in a cave of the heart and rests in the depths, the ancient deity—and pass beyond joy and sorrow.

From the *Bhagavad Gita* Chapter 4:

All the actions get dissolved entirely of those who are free from attachment and have no identification and no sense of *mine* with the body, whose minds are established in the knowledge of the Self, and who work merely for the sake of sacrifice.

From the writings of the Sufi mystic Abu Hamid al-Ghazali:

You are created by two things. One is your body and your *zahir* — your outer appearance — which you can see with your eyes. The other is your *batin* — your inner forces. This is the part you cannot see, but you can know with your insight. The reality of your existence is in your inwardness. Everything is a servant of your inward heart.

And of course the first one I mentioned was from the 14<sup>th</sup> century Japanese Buddhist master Dogen, who is considered the founder of Japanese Zen:

To learn the Buddha Way is to learn one's self. To learn one's self is to forget one's self.

Or, as a modern Zen teacher, Yamada Koun Roshi, said,

The practice of Zen is to forget the self in the act of uniting with something—*Mu*, or breath-counting, or the song of a thrush . . . Concern about me and mine disappear.

So, what these traditions agree on is the goal, the necessity of going beyond the small self, what Islam calls the *nafs* (that is the great *jihad*, by the way, the *jihad al-nafs*, the conquering of the self), or what Merton called the “false self,” what we usually identify as the self, to experience this deeper reality—perhaps we could call it our real self, hidden with Christ in God, or our spirit, our Buddha nature. And let's at least mention the fact that also at the level of ethics we find quite a common articulation of the fundamentals of morality among the great traditions, especially some form of what we call the Golden Rule: *do not do to others what is displeasing to yourself*.

It could very well be, as the ‘theology of acceptance’<sup>5</sup> would posit, that we not only articulate the end-*telos* differently, but that the many religions actually *have* different ends. The teacher whom I have studied most extensively on this is Bede Griffiths, himself a great master of comparative religion and dialogue; he says it in a startling but — not surprisingly — personalist way:

The Buddhist *nirvana* and the Hindu *moksha* are not the

same, not are they the same as the Christian vision of God. So the Buddhist, the Hindu, the Muslim and the Christian are all experiencing the ultimate Reality but experiencing it in different ways through their own love and through their own traditions of faith and knowledge... In a sense, the experience of the ultimate truth is different for each person, since each person in a unique image of God, a unique reflection of the one eternal light and love.<sup>6</sup>

And yet, amazingly, we have a similar notion as to what the goal is, the way, even practical applications of that way, and we can share with each other wisdom about that way. Ultimately, that is the purpose of every religion: to make this known and to map out the path of return.<sup>7</sup>

This is what I mean by the perennial philosophy and universal wisdom, that there is a common core of wisdom to the spiritual life, in some way a wisdom that both precedes and goes beyond our dogma and doctrine, our ritual and language, because it grows out of the experience of union with the Divine or Absolute Reality. When we read the mystical literature especially of the contemplative traditions, we find this resonance. Here is Bede Griffiths' view (as summarized by my confrere Fr. Bruno):

Not only is the Mystery present in a different way in each tradition, but *we are to learn from all of them*, from the primal, tribal religions as well as the highly developed traditions of Hinduism and Christianity. The way to the realization of the Self, however, is simple: *it is the way of surrender* [hence, “to learn oneself is to forget oneself”]: a surrender which proceeds through ever more interior stages. The personal way must also correspond to the traditional wisdom, according to one of the great traditions, of faith. The great religions begin with a mystical experience and then develop into complex systems of thought. It is necessary, if we would know the Mystery, that we *penetrate through the exterior shell of the rationalized system* to realize within ourself the original experience: that is, to participate in the divine life which has been shared among human beings. This is the kingdom of God and the essential message of all religion. (Emphases mine.)

Bede says further that external religion, with its rites, dogmas and institutional structures, as important as it is, only exists to bring us to the personal experience of this mystery. All the external forms, all the ‘language’ of religion, can and must be revised over and over again so that we can communicate the mystery to the people of a new age. But we first have to acknowledge that the mystery “already dwells in the heart of every human being.” First of all “the church must awaken to this ‘universal revelation.’”<sup>8</sup>

What many of us have found is that, instead of challenging our belief in Christianity, this approach actually strengthens our belief because we see how our own tradition is an expression of this universal call, this universal wisdom.

(Continued on page 6)

*Contemplation and Dialogue* (Continued from page 5)

While we're on that note, I find quite often when dealing with people of other traditions I am involved in a kind of apologetics. But not the kind of apologetics we usually think of in this day and age — not limited to trying to defend this or that particular dogma or doctrine of Christianity — but trying to show that *Christianity is itself a legitimate expression of this perennial philosophy!* Because I meet many people who have decided it is not.

But not only that: as I already mentioned, not only can we benefit from reading and meditating of sacred texts from other traditions, as the CDF put it in the letter concerning meditation; other traditions which have sought union with God in prayer have also pointed out marvelous ways to achieve it. Since we reject “nothing of what is true and holy in these religions”<sup>9</sup>, neither should these ways—ways with which other great religions have sought to achieve union with God in prayer—be rejected out of hand simply because they are not Christian. On the contrary, we “can take from them what is useful so long as the Christian conception of prayer, its logic and requirements are never obscured. It is within the context of all of this that these bits and pieces should be taken up and expressed anew.”<sup>10</sup>

To give a practical example, I may quibble a little bit with how *ashtanga* or eight-limbed yoga describes the *telos*, the end of the spiritual life (or not...), but there is nothing that I have found in the eight limbs of ashtanga yoga that militates against it being used as a useful spiritual practice for me as a Christian: the restraints, the disciplines, the postures and breath control practices, the sense withdrawal and the three limbs of concentration, meditation and samadhi. Or we may not agree with Buddhism on our words to describe the *telos*, the end, but how many folks have benefited greatly in the past decades from the mechanics of meditation out of the Zen tradition, to the extent that one of the finest books written on the history of Zen Buddhism the world over comes from a Jesuit, Heinrich Dumoulin. (to be continued)

Notes:

1. Decl. *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2.
2. This term (*semina verbi* in Latin) comes from Justin Martyr.
3. New Orders of the Mass for India, CBCI Commission for Liturgy, National Catechetical and Liturgical Center, Bangalore, 1974, p. 13-14.
4. Jacques Dupuis, *Gesu Cristo incontro alle religioni*, 162-163.
5. The ‘theology of acceptance,’ according to Paul Knitter, holds that there are many religions which have different ends. In his *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Knitter distinguishes this theology of acceptance from ‘replacement theology,’ ‘fulfillment theology,’ and the ‘theology of mutuality.’
6. Bede Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, 130.
7. Bede Griffiths, *Return to the Center*, 99ff.
8. *The One Light*, ed. Bruno Barnhart, 396.
9. *Nostra aetate*, n. 2.
10. “Letter.” V.16. ■

## Bede Griffiths and the Place of Truth *Atmajyoti*

In the documentary of Bede Griffiths’ life, often shown at Shantivanam, there are two comments which Fr. Bede made which I found particularly striking. One is that the Truth is found where two opposites meet. The other is that the most effective ways of transcending the ego are through meditation and falling-in-love. The paradox in the first comment begged consideration. The second comment was both mildly amusing and also rather reassuring. Meditation required discipline, but it was nice to think that in the totally undisciplined and involuntary experience of falling-in-love, there is a chance of enlightenment!

In viewing the Atman as a bridge, as described in the Upanishads, we can make a connection between these two comments made by Fr. Bede. In the Chandogya Upanishad the Atman is described as: ‘a bridge which, holding the two worlds together, keeps them apart and joins them’ (Ch. Up 8.4.1). The Atman (the True Self) is the bridge between the phenomenal world (the material world of objects) and *Brahma-loka* (the world of God, the Absolute). The phenomenal world consists of name and form plus the Absolute (*Sat-Chit-Ananda*:Existence-Consciousness-Bliss). In meditation and falling-in-love, we move beyond the phenomenal world and our mistaken belief in the Reality of name and form, and towards the True Self; the veil of ignorance is lifted and the Light of the Absolute is revealed. We discover the Truth. Opposites meet here, in the sense that they merge into one, the One beyond all *dvanda* (pairs of opposites). ‘Day and night do not pass that bridge (of the True Self) ...’ (Ch. Up. 8.4.1). The world of objects and opposites disappears as the Light of the Absolute radiates over and above our preoccupation with name and form. Such is the aim of meditation and such is the magic of falling-in-love.

The context within which this meeting place of opposites occurs and where Truth is found is in silence and solitude. There is much noise and clutter in the phenomenal world, but the divine bridge is marked by a silence and solitude which is not of this world; no-one is there, and yet everyone is there. The language of the Absolute is silence. How apt Christ’s response when asked ‘What is the Truth?’

In silence, solitude opens within us as we let go of attachment to objects. Identification and attachment with objects creates a sense of union with the phenomenal world, but this sense of union is false, for the objects are not real. Realizing the futility of attachment uncovers a tremendous and awesome inner solitude; a type of emptiness. It is the solitude of God. Yet, so gracefully, in this inner solitude there is intimacy with the Divine; in the emptiness of seeing the unreal aspect of objects of experience, we discover the fullness of the eternal Truth; in being detached from objects as name and form, there is union with the essence of the

(Continued on page 7)

***Bede Griffiths and the Place of Truth*** (Continued from page 6)  
object (*Sat-Chit-Ananda*); in seeing what is unreal, the Real is revealed.

As Jules Monchanin, one of the founders of Shantivanam wrote, in ‘sharing the solitude of God’ one is ‘called to a vision which will make him forget all things previously seen...God is sufficient.’ One ‘forgets all things previously seen’ for in seeing the Truth of all objects, that is in seeing beyond the name and form of objects to the essential essence, the appearance of the phenomenal world changes. Whereas once it was dominated by the unreal – objects with a beginning and end – it now becomes a place that shines with the all-pervading and eternal presence of the Absolute.

With this realization, the Atman serves to bridge the two worlds. The Light of the Absolute shines through the True Self dispelling all darkness. There is now the freedom to move in all worlds without limitation. Knowledge of the Real means that the phenomenal world can no longer bind the soul. The words of Lord Jesus ring out: ‘The Truth will set you free’ (John 8:32); or in the words of an old church hymn: ‘God sent me to bring the good news to the poor, tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more, tell blind people that they can see, and set the downtrodden free, and to go tell everyone, the news that God’s Kingdom has come.’ We find a beautiful link between the gospel message and the Chandogya Upanishad: ‘Therefore he who has crossed that bridge, if blind, ceases to be blind; if wounded, ceases to be wounded; if afflicted, ceases to be afflicted...’ (Ch. Up. 8.4.1,2).

The Kingdom of God and its righteousness has come when we discover the True Self within. We discover our Self as the Light of God, completely free and shining in all worlds. As Swami Abhishiktananda wrote, when the True Self is discovered, ‘man has discovered himself in the world of Brahman’ (*The Further Shore*, p.122). The Light of the Absolute dissolves the veil of ignorance and allows us to experience our Oneness with God. There are no opposites, only Truth.

It is here that Fr. Bede’s two comments tie together. Fr. Bede said that it is in meditation and falling-in-love that we can transcend the limitations of the ego, which is to be rid of the veil of ignorance which thrives on name and form. Meditation takes us beyond the phenomenal world, for it takes us beyond name and form. We are able to experience the True Self in meditation. We enter into the silence and solitude of God. That requires discipline and the grace of God.

Falling-in-love also ultimately takes us beyond the phenomenal world and yet requires no discipline – hence the sensation of ‘falling’ – we are out of control. Certainly though, we feel the grace of God. This falling-in-love need not necessarily be of the romantic or sexual kind; it is a mysterious feeling that can also occur in other relationships such as between guru and disciple, a parent and babe, or

even soul-mates. Falling-in-love can also be an experience which goes beyond human relationships, such as with the culture of a country or a particular landscape. The recently published compilation of letters by Fr. Bede (edited by Adrian Rance, 2006) is entitled *Falling-in-Love with India*. In all cases, what we fall in love with is the Spirit which is beyond name and form; essentially we fall-in-love with God. We experience a level of union which is beyond all the normal oscillations and tensions of pairs of opposites. We discover peace. We discover Truth.

As in meditation, in falling-in-love too we experience, in a painfully joyful way, the great silence and solitude of God. In the true experience of falling-in-love, there is no ‘I’ of the limited ego, there is only surrender to a greater force; nor is there any language to express such a divine experience. Through falling-in-love, we sense something greater than the phenomenal world; we are overwhelmed by something greater than ourselves. We are in-Love. Love is beyond name and form. Who has ever been able to adequately describe love? In Love there is union of opposites, there are no opposites: ‘Love bears all things’ and ‘endures all things’ (1 Cor. 13:7). God is Love.

What do Fr. Bede’s statements on Truth and transcending the ego mean on a practical level? Falling-in-love takes on a sacred significance and we may reflect in gratitude on such experiences, whether they led to permanent union with another or not. Such experiences take us into the solitude and silence of the Divine and Eternal Truth. On a daily basis, falling into the silence and solitude of meditation will surely allow us to discover the Kingdom of God and its Truth within us. Through the realization of our True Self, we become One with the Light of the Absolute, free and beyond all darkness, beyond all pairs of opposites. ‘When that bridge has been crossed, night becomes day indeed, for the world of *Brahman* is lighted up once for all’ (Ch. Up. 8.4.2). Truth is found where two opposites meet...

(In the previous two issues of *The Golden String*, *Atmajyoti* (Carrie Lock) contributed articles on the Hermits of Sacchidananda. Originally from Australia, *Atmajyoti* lives as a contemplative in India.)  
[aum.atmajyoti@gmail.com](mailto:aum.atmajyoti@gmail.com) ■

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### **The Golden String is Online!**

Each issue of The Golden String is now being posted — complete — on the Bede Griffiths website, [www.bede.griffiths.org](http://www.bede.griffiths.org) Back issues, from the beginning of the Bulletin in 1994, will also be found on the website. The format is .pdf, which requires that Adobe Reader be installed on your computer. This program is available free at [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com) — a link to this site will be found on the Bede Griffiths website. Many of our subscribers, now that they can download The Golden String from the website, have found it unnecessary to have the paper copy mailed to them. ■



### Thomas Matus on Bede's Essential Legacy

Bede Griffiths authored a large number of books and articles, plus many unpublished manuscripts and taped conferences, which he left at his death. Much time and reflection will be necessary in order to evaluate their contribution . . . But all his readers have noted one characteristic of Bede Griffiths' thought: its continuity and inner consistency. In the closing chapters of his 1954 autobiography, *The Golden String*, he developed two themes . . . to which he returned continually in the books and articles which he authored during his Indian years (1955-93). The first was his vision of a cosmic revelation and redemption, to which he gained access through his participation in the daily rhythms of monastic prayer; the second was his way of meeting other religions and their adherents at the "inner center of prayer . . . In the presence of God." It was there, at the heart of life, of being, and of love, "behind all words and gestures, behind all thoughts and feelings . . . Beyond time and change," that Bede Griffiths sought to understand the religions of India, their deepest and most universal meaning, that which they have in common with Christianity and those points in which they differ. . . .we must recognize in [Bede Griffiths] above all the mark of the prophet, of one whose very existence as a Catholic monk in India proclaimed and evoked that "wholeness" and that "universality" which are intrinsic to the notion of Catholicism and which must become the distinctive marks of the Church in India. [From Thomas Matus' Introduction to **Bede Griffiths: Essential Writings**, (Modern Spiritual Masters Series), Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 2004, p. 11-12, p. 18.] ■

### Meath Conlan directs retreats in Australia

- Weekend Retreat, May 15-17, 2009:

#### **The Cross and the Lotus: An Insight Meditation Workshop for Personal and Spiritual Growth.**

During this weekend we shall explore through meditation and shared reflection the Christian and Buddhist paths that lead to fullness of life. Our guides will be Jesus of Nazareth, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and the Buddha.

Dr. Meath Conlan has had wide experience of both traditions and for many years has been involved in inter-religious dialogue in Australia and elsewhere.

The weekend retreat begins at 8:00 pm on Friday and ends on Sunday at 4:00 pm.

- One-Day Retreat, May 9, 2009:

#### **Beyond the Darkness: a Celebration of the Life and Teachings of Dom Bede Griffiths.**

Dr. Conlan has been in the forefront of promoting the teachings of Dom Bede Griffiths, who was himself an outstanding promoter of interreligious dialogue. Through his writings and lifestyle, Bede Griffiths has touched the lives of thousands, and his message continues to be fresh and challenging. Bede wrote that he went to India to find "the other

### NEWS contributed by Sr. Pascaline Coff

- **Australia** – Hakan Sandgren from Queensland sent a copy of his *River of Compassion* thesis submitted for Honors Degree at the University of Queensland Nov. 16, 2006. Hakan researched "Some Responses to Fr. Bede Griffiths' Thoughts and Teachings on Meditation, Interfaith Dialogue and Contemplative Lay Communities in Australia." It is 80 pages plus a comprehensive bibliography. Yes, he gave more than honorable mention to Meath (Doug) Conlan.
- **Russia** – Maxim (Mark) Demchenko sent a complimentary copy of his first East/West publication in Russian entitled "*The Path of Saccidananda*" – *non-dual Christianity*." The Sannyasi orange cover is quite attractive with Fr. Amaldas' Shantivanam *trimurti* glowing from the center.
- **Oakland, California** **Sophia Center** at Holy Names University has initiated a new publishing venture with an inaugural volume, *Crossing Points of Wisdom: Toward a Mutually Enhancing World*. It is a collection of essays, poetry and musings, proclaiming the beauty and wonder of Earth, the goodness of Creation and the dream of a future filled with hope. The Sophia Program is founded on the dynamics of the universe and the principles of a living cosmology. We obtained permission years ago to make audio copies of Fr. Bede's talk at the Open Center in N.Y. on *The Sacred Earth*. Sophia has included this talk in the Wisdom section of this first of their publications, along with contributions from many other contemporary authors.
- **Orlando, Florida** Jerry Hoke, a Benedictine Oblate, and Sr. Pascaline continue to transcribe Fr. Bede's many *Shantivanam Homilies* from 1988, when time permits. ■

half of his soul," and in doing so he discovered a spirituality that continues to inspire many people.

The one-day retreat begins at 10:00 am and finishes at 4:00 pm. Lunch is provided.

Both retreats will be held at the Sancta Sophia Meditation Community, which is directed by Kathleen Murphy, O.P. and Ken Petersen, O. Carm..

Address: "Karith" , 50 Riverturn Lane, Warburton 3799

PO Box 53 Warburton, Victoria, 3799, Australia

Tel/Fax 0359662120 ; Email [info@sanctasophia.org.au](mailto:info@sanctasophia.org.au)

Web. [www.sanctasophia.org.au](http://www.sanctasophia.org.au)

Warburton is 70K from Melbourne.

To reach Sancta Sophia turn left over the bridge after the main sign indicating Warburton Township and then turn left into Dammans Road. Continue to the end of the road to Riverturn Lane which will lead you into our property called Karith. *Melways map 289 H3*

*Dr. Conlan takes small groups to Shantivanam and other ashrams in India each year. [www.diversejourneys.com](http://www.diversejourneys.com) ■*





## AWAKENING AT OSAGE Elbina Rafizadeh

Hours before dawn, a flash of light through the window, a pause, then the roar of a thunderclap pervaded the cabin room. The wind howled through the trees, shaking and rustling the leaves of this forest where once lived the Osage tribe. Abruptly awakened from dream world images of my own distant past, I peered into the darkness and my eyes acclimated, as forms of the room became more visible. Shadows of the rocking-chair by the window reminded me that I was in Okalahoma, at Osage Ashram, Forest of Peace. Another flash of lightning briefly illuminated the room to reveal that the wooden door had swung open.

After shutting the door and returning quickly to bed, tucking myself beneath the soothing warmth of cotton bedding, I listened to the symphony of rustling leaves, which created the background melody for thunder's roar after lightning's prelude. Unable to sleep, I listened to more intermittent clamors of thunder. This sudden climate change from the past few days' heat amidst a sunny stillness was a reminder of life's unpredictability. Especially for a traveler who is more accustomed to predictable, temperate, coastal California. Finding the rosary beads that always have a place beneath my pillow, I automatically began the familiar prayers, and my heart's pounding slowed to the regular rhythm of the night.

The following morning, while sipping tea and gazing out the window from the ashram's dining room. I looked out to where a hummingbird feeder hung off the rafter. The morning sun's reflection off the shimmering forest leaves left no hint of the storm the night before, save for the damp ground. Again, I thought of life's metaphor, of the sudden climatic change from stillness to storms, from darkness to light, and from order to chaos. We must always be prepared for those unexpected thunderclaps that arrive in the darkness.

It is now over six months later, and that night of my first visit to Osage Ashram still resonates clearly. Originally named Osage monastery, the ashram was founded by Sr. Pascaline and Sr. Helen of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. Sr. Pascaline founded the ashram after living for months in Shantivanam, the home of Fr. Bede, and the earlier founders, Abhishiktananda and Fr. Monchanin. Fr. Bede had visited in 1989 and blessed the grounds before the first structure was built. Having made two visits myself to Saccidananda ashram in India, where Fr. Bede had lived, it was natural that Osage would be a stopping point and that my first visit would be during the annual celebration of Bede Griffiths' *mahasamadhi*.

When the monastic community was unable to continue, the property was purchased through the kind and generous oblate, Bob, and now management has been taken over by

the young and energetic woman Emily. The name was changed to Osage ashram, Forest of Peace. Sr. Helen has returned to Missouri, and Sr. Pascaline remains until next year.

In the early evening after my arrival Friday afternoon, I ventured to the Zen garden in a small clearing behind the ashram where Fr. Bede had blessed the ground of the forest before the first building was built. As I sat on a rock and closed my eyes, a cool breeze swept gently against my face and neck, which reminded me of a time when I was at New Camaldoli Hermitage, when I passed by Fr. Michael Fish on his afternoon hike along the roadway during a dry hot period one summer. We were both visibly affected by the heat. Suddenly, a subtle breeze swept by us, and I noted this to him. He replied, "the breeze on a hot day is like the Holy Spirit." Up to this day, I have kept that metaphor tucked away in my memory, especially for very hot days.

That weekend was also when Fr. Bruno Barnhart gave a talk, which he has been doing annually for the past 15 years. His first talk on Saturday evening was titled, *Sophia (Lady Wisdom) and Bede Griffiths*. As I leafed through my notes from that weekend, I came across a note about Fr. Bede's conversion, at which point, he recited Ch. 7 from the book of Wisdom. These verses have resonated distinctly, like the awakening from thunder and lightning in darkness before dawn.

The beginning and the end and the midpoint of times, the changes in the sun's course and the variations of the seasons. Cycles of years, positions of the stars, natures of animals, tempers of beasts, powers of the winds and thoughts of men, uses of plants and virtues of roots—such things are hidden I learned, and such are the plain; for Wisdom, the artificer of all, taught me....For she is an aura of the might of God and a pure effusion of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nought that is sullied enters into her.....For there is nought God loves, be it not one who dwells with Wisdom. For she is fairer than the sun and surpasses every constellation of the stars. Compared to light she takes precedence; for that indeed, night supplants, but wickedness prevails not over Wisdom.

Being a lover of poetry, I read the passages over and over. Lady Wisdom, or *Sophia* is the feminine personification of God. The Holy Spirit is God as the Word is God and as Christ is God embodied.

Who is Wisdom? Where is She? Again, from Proverbs 8: 27-31.

When he established the heavens I was there, when he marked out the vault over the face of the deep; When he made firm the skies above, when he fixed fast the foundations of the earth; When he set for the sea its limit, so that the waters should not transgress his command; Then was I beside him as his craftsman, and I was his delight day by day, Playing before him all the

(Continued on page 10)



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## *The Golden String*

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### *Awakening at Osage*

*(Continued from page 9)*

while, playing on the surface of his earth; and I found delight in the sons of men.

For me, Lady Sophia is everywhere, the all-encompassing abyss of Love, God's Love. She is humanity's peace. She is joy and courage in the same breath. She is within and without. She is the wind and the whisper. She is here and she is there. She comes and leaves as she wills, but is always present. She is in our hearts, in our breath, and in our mind.

When I am at the Hermitage in Big Sur, there is a profound calmness within during periods of solitude. When I am in the forest, there is peace in my heart. Whether tilling the soil of my garden, absorbing the vibrant colors of the flowers, sharing heartfelt laughter with friends or receiving a warm smile, joy pervades. While walking through the dark path of grief, clarity and peace arrive after prayers and meditation. In the mundane of life, we struggle through perseverance and then find gratitude for the simpler gifts. Then we awaken to God with us, around us, and even in the mundane. Yes, Sophia is everywhere, with us always. ■

### *Visit*

*the Bede Griffiths Website:*  
[www.bede.griffiths.org](http://www.bede.griffiths.org)

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62475 Highway 1  
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141 Monastery Road,  
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e-mail: [osagemonastery@juno.com](mailto:osagemonastery@juno.com)

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