

A Christological Interpretation of “The Golden String” of Bede Griffiths’ Spiritual Journey

by

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Statement of Authorship and Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No parts of this thesis have been submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

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Finally, I can look back and assess the journey of the past few years. While this work is distinguished as an academic accomplishment there are other rewarding features. My sense of the theological community has been especially enriched and deepened.

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At the beginning, I decided to make, with my husband, what we called a "walk in Dom Bede Griffiths' footsteps," necessitating seven weeks visiting monasteries and ashrams overseas in England, Scotland, India and the USA. We must thank Gerard and Tony and also our family for their generous friendship and encouragement with this pilgrimage. I would like also to extend my appreciation to the Administrative Officer in Research Services, McAuley, ACU, Ms Carmen Ivers, who suggested I make a DVD. With ethics approval and due to the hospitality of the Benedictine Abbots, Francis, Gilbert, Yesudas and Robert of the monasteries at Prinknash, Pluscarden, Kurisumala and Big Sur, the prior of Shantivanam,

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Abstract

This thesis explores the Christological focus of the “the Golden String,” the defining image of Bede Griffiths’ spiritual journey while taking into account other images employed in relation to God, the self, and creation itself. Our exploratory narrative schema sets this metaphor in the wider history of Griffiths’ development and places it into the context of his theological articulation of the contemplative vocation and related issues. A key interest is the movement of humankind to a new level of consciousness.

The metaphor “The golden string” that Griffiths took from William Blake’s poem, *Jerusalem*, evoked his sense of vocation arising from a numinous experience during his student days. This symbol of continuity, attraction and spiritual fulfillment expands to its fullest Christological dimensions in Griffiths’ living out of his monastic vocation in response to the divine summons ever to “go beyond,” especially as it led him to India as a Christian *sannyasi*—and thereafter, to his world-wide influence as a spiritual leader.

While acknowledging various concerns raised by others, Christian and otherwise, the dissertation supports the fundamental authenticity of Griffiths’ theology. Accordingly, it offers a critical appreciation of the notion of life returning to its divine Source through an integrated process of transformation. This is supported by a cluster of images related to life as a journey, and in the widening context of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue. It led Griffiths to emphasise the primacy of experience both for himself and for others to achieve the desired personal integration. Yet at every stage and in every dimension, the Christological focus is present.

In promoting inter-religious dialogue, Griffiths interpreted Christian images, symbols and language in new ways, and thereby extended the range of Christology itself. Hence, the full connotation of the Golden String must take in such images, theological and anthropological as the dissertation examines: God of the Journey, Divine Host, the *imago Dei*, Divine Feminine, Divine Lord and Divine Light. From the perspective of his Benedictine monastic vocation, Griffiths “universalizes” fundamental and particular Christian positions. Thus, hospitality inclusive of all has its origin and fulfillment in Christ, and the Holy Spirit stirs in the depths of all human experience to bring into existence a new level of contemplative consciousness; and with it, a “marriage of East and West” in terms of holistic sharing and co-existence. The significance of “the feminine” leads to the more expansive “theology of complementarity,” just as the horizon of Griffiths’ life opens to include an

active interest in the new scientific developments, especially in the areas of cosmology and biology. In short, his mystical theology develops through what is termed in this thesis, a “hermeneutic of encounter.”

While the dissertation is appreciative of the prophetic tenor of Bede Griffiths’ theology and his search for new interpretative models, it acknowledges inevitable elements of inconsistency at some points. Nonetheless, in this period of epochal transformation, his commanding image of Christ, “the Golden String,” is at once the integrating and expansive symbol of his life’s work.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: The Golden String of Bede Griffiths' Spiritual Journey

The Title

A Christological Interpretation of the Golden String of Bede Griffiths' Spiritual Journey, takes, as a given, Bede Griffiths' theology of complementarity. Judson Trapnell has authoritatively shown this to be a culminating development of his mature life in India from a previous theology of fulfillment which could not express his continually evolving experience as a Christian *sannyasi*.¹ My thesis seeks to discern and explore the full meaning the image, "the golden string," has for Griffiths. He applies it to an experience in his student days of divine transcendence. It is Christ, his own journey, the journey of humanity and the journey of the cosmos, the divine Pilgrim, manifest in and through the ordinary, put into his hand and leading him to horizons ever "beyond."

In order to crystallize the project, the main points of this introductory chapter will be presented under the following headings:

1. Current Studies and State of the Question
2. Bede Griffiths' Unique Contribution
3. Methodology or Approach
4. Structure of the Thesis.

Griffiths' use of this, his central symbol, together with other embedded images, reveals an expansive Christology. Although sometimes seemingly at odds with Roman Catholic orthodoxy, it is found to be authentic. The implications for our crucial present times that he works to communicate in his books, talks and various publications are sometimes obvious, at other times subtle. His is an evolving theology clearly dictated by the movement

¹ See Judson B. Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths' Theory of Religious Symbol and Practice of Dialogue: Towards Interreligious Understanding*. The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1993). Trapnell was led to this analysis through Griffiths' own understanding of his position as reported in Jesu Rajan's Doctoral thesis published later as *Bede Griffiths and Sanyassa* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1989). The *sannyasi* in Hindu religious tradition is one who has adopted radical asceticism in pursuit of the contemplative ideal or unity with the Divine

and metamorphosis of his life's journey which, as he affords, takes in all levels of being. It explains how the images he uses either focus on or emerge from his sustained three emphases: the contemplative experience; its communitarian setting; and the Christian historical tradition. For the goal of life's journey, unity, that is ultimate union with God, he gives, as his grounding Scripture, Jesus' prayer in John 17:21-24: "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us."²

1. Current Studies and State of the Question

Since Griffiths has been a pioneer in the contemplative dimensions of interreligious relations, it is not surprising that Christian critics have accused him of relativising Christianity and deserting his own monastic Christian tradition. At the other end of the scale, Indian critics have accused him of merely playing the Hindu and trying to appropriate its vast and ancient spiritual traditions for his own Christian purposes.³

More positively, critical studies have appeared on the development of Griffiths' theology. Judson Trapnell and Wayne Teasdale have explored his ideas and their work is a solid point of reference. There are excellent biographies of Griffiths by Du Boulay⁴ and Spink,⁵ and exploration of Griffiths' inter-spirituality in particular by Judson Trapnell,⁶

² This is in accordance with Bede Griffiths' quotation, *Return*, 143. Otherwise for all Biblical quotations, I use the *New Revised Standard Version*. This verse will ground Griffiths' understanding of a "qualified *advaita*". See footnote 44, page 13.

³ See Judson Trapnell, "Bede Griffiths, Mystical Knowing, and the Unity of Religions," *Philosophy and Theology No 7* (1993): 355-379. This paper was presented for the Catholic University of America, and provides some examples such as the papers by Steven Katz in 1978 and 1983 and the pursuant dialogue with Griffiths. Katz takes the constructivist view, while Trapnell describes Griffiths as a, "moderate constructivist." See also, Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 365 – 372, and 195 – 200. (Henceforward, *Bede Griffiths: A Life*.) See also, Sita Ram Goel, *Catholic Ashrams: Sannysins or Swindlers?* (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1988, 1994). This is the publication of correspondence between Goel and Griffiths over a period of 6/7 months. Goel took exception to Griffiths' symbol, the Omkara [Hindu symbol of the sacred *Om*, combined with the Christian cross] and also Griffiths' wearing of the saffron robe and assuming of *sannyasa*.

⁴ Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness* (London: Rider, Ebury Press Random House, 1998).

⁵ Kathryn Spink, *A Sense of the Sacred*, second ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1989). (Henceforward, *A Sense*.)

⁶ Judson B. Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths' Theory of Religious Symbol and Practice of Dialogue: Towards Interreligious Understanding*. The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1993). (Henceforward *Bede Griffiths' Theory*.)

Beatrice Bruteau⁷ and Wayne Teasdale.⁸ For an analysis of Griffith's search for a Christian *Vedanta* in particular, the work of Wayne Teasdale is a valuable resource. Meath (Douglas) Conlan⁹ has written on Griffiths' relation to the Shantivanam community. What is missing in this research so far is an exploration of Griffiths' use of images of God. This gap might be explained by the need to transcend images in both Christian and Hindu contemplative paths. On the other hand, images abound in the writings of this great contemplative and affect his communication of the goals of the spiritual life and the interreligious dialogue he came to see as so necessary. This study then proposes to examine in depth his use of images in relation to the "journey" which might be termed the "master image" pervading his thought and practice. This, and related images he uses, emerge from, centre on and are directed towards Christ, the Golden String. I therefore define my exploration as a Christological interpretation. Consequently, while profiting from much of the current research, the thesis concentrates on Griffiths' images of God within a larger theology of complementarity.

We begin with the biographies which are basic for placing and understanding his journey and theological method, such as, Shirley du Boulay's, *Beyond the Darkness: A Biography of Bede Griffiths*,¹⁰ and Kathryn Spink's, *A Sense of the Sacred: A Biography of Bede Griffiths*.¹¹ These two works are complementary. Both include photographs and indices and du Boulay's also has a glossary of terms and relevant addresses for The Bede Griffiths Trust, and a superior bibliography. Since it is without footnotes, *A Sense of the Sacred* is less academic and more reflective in character. This in no way detracts from the quality of Spink's biography which includes personal conversations with Griffiths. Because of her own familiarity with India, the author's description of Bede's arrival there is particularly perceptive. The referenced research in *Beyond the Darkness* is more sustainable academically. This, together with such features as the care taken in exploring Griffiths' friendships and the scrupulous referencing make it a valuable resource for this present project. It does not however, treat of our particular area of investigation.

⁷ Beatrice Bruteau, ed., *The Other Half of My Soul. Bede Griffiths and the Hindu-Christian Dialogue* (Illinois: Quest Books. The Theosophical Publishing House, 1996). (Henceforward, *The Other Half*)

⁸ Wayne Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction to His Interspiritual Thought* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2003). (Henceforth, *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction.*)

⁹ Meath (Douglas) Conlan, *The Wisdom of a Prophet* (Illinois: Templegate, 2006).

¹⁰ Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 1998.

¹¹ Kathryn Spink, *A Sense*, 1989.

As well as numerous articles and book chapters described below, the works most valuable for this project are Judson Trapnell's doctoral thesis, *Bede Griffiths' theory of religious symbol and practice of dialogue: towards interreligious understanding*, and his later, *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue*, Jesu Rajan's *Bede Griffiths and Sannyasa* and Wayne Teasdale's, *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction to His Interspiritual Thought*. While these works all assist an understanding of Griffiths' contribution, particularly in the areas of interreligious dialogue and use of image and symbol, this thesis explores the depth of his prophetic contribution in a much more focused and systematic way. In this, it takes particular consideration of his encounter with the feminine as an ongoing thread in his life that is profoundly interwoven in the Golden String, his key image and symbol.

The Other Half of My Soul: Bede Griffiths and the Hindu Christian Dialogue,¹² is a 400 page collection of poems and essays that Beatrice Bruteau compiled in 1996 in honour of Bede Griffiths. We read in the dedication, that Griffiths makes a "significant contribution to interreligious dialogue and the emergence of a new vision of the world." In the Forward, the Dalai Lama reiterates this: "I have much admiration for the life-long work of Father Griffiths for interreligious understanding, and for helping people open their hearts and minds to gain a sense of peace and utility to further the cause of goodwill among all peoples."¹³ In the Preface, Bruteau specifies Griffiths' guiding interest in monastic communities.¹⁴ Wayne Teasdale, in the Introduction, singles out Bede's development of a synthesis which includes myth and cosmic revelation that is supported by his dialogue with Fritjof Capra, Ken Wilber, David Bohm, Rupert Sheldrake, Sri Aurobindo, Abhishiktananda, Raimundo Panikkar "and the mystics of both Christianity and the Asian traditions."¹⁵ Teasdale finds Bede's new vision of reality expressive of this synthesis. He seeks to demonstrate how this follows on from the endeavours in inculturation of Ricci in China and Di Nobile in India and particularly in regard to that aspect of his synthesis, where "the monastic experiment" takes up where "Upadhyaya left off." Teasdale determines that while, "Christianity in its Western cultural expression is really unintelligible and unappealing" to the East, "Bede's ashram has evolved into something capable of reconciling East and West." Significantly, he includes Bede's

¹² Beatrice Bruteau ed., *The Other Half*, 1996.

¹³ The Dalai Lama in the Forward to *The Other Half*, xi. This was written and signed, August 6 1993.

¹⁴ Beatrice Bruteau, in the Preface to *The Other Half*, xiv.

¹⁵ Wayne Teasdale in the Introduction to *The Other Half*, 9-12.

emphasis on “the body,” and also his central image of the Cave of the Heart as the place of fulfillment of the promise of a universal synthesis.¹⁶

Although all the presentations from twenty-two authors in this volume have merit in their own right, a number of articles are pertinent to our thesis. Raimon Panikkar points out the fundamental “something” the three Shantivanam *gurus* had in common – “the *genius loci*” which is “powerful”;¹⁷ Russill Paul de Silver describes the transcendent possibilities of music and Bede’s insistence on the kind of music which evokes a spiritual experience that “penetrates one’s being to the very roots . . . grounded in the body and the earth, making every level sacred and permeated by the consciousness of the Spirit.” D’Silva speaks of such authentic music emerging from a silence which is “full of sound and music” from the “roar of silence.”¹⁸ Pascaline Coff describes the urgent need for a reactivation of the intuitive faculty or an *existential breakthrough*. Included is an exploration and articulation of the value of memory.¹⁹ Wayne Teasdale explores the relationship of Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism bringing together the role of the Church and ideas from Griffiths, Abhishiktananda, Panikkar and Buddhist saints.²⁰ Judson Trapnell describes Bede’s role as an “agent of transformation” and his recognition of the “one Reality” that is the “unconditioned element” in the mystical experience of all religious traditions. He includes Griffiths’ distinction of faith and the wisdom “that is reached in the ‘cave of the heart.’” Trapnell introduces the constructivist reaction to the universalist approach that Griffiths follows and responds with his own “open and critical” articulation of Griffiths’ position with its key symbol, “nonduality.”²¹ Furthermore, he posits an “important implication” of Griffiths’ “multireligious experience” as being an invitation to “the Western philosopher to be open to ways of knowing other than reasoned inquiry” because “only after having appropriated the experience of ‘intuitive knowing’ through sensory, aesthetic, and especially meditative modes will the philosopher . . . be qualified to analyse such experience with reason.” He notes three other implications: Griffiths’ recognition of “plurality within a deeper unity” in the other religious traditions; “the religions as in an intricate relationship to

¹⁶ Wayne Teasdale in the Introduction to *The Other Half*, 19, 20.

¹⁷ Raimon Panikkar, “A Tribute.” See *The Other Half*, 32.

¹⁸ Russill Paul de Silver, “In the Beginning was Music.” See *The Other Half*, 73,76.

¹⁹ Pascaline Coff, “Existential Breakthrough.” See *The Other Half*, 98 – 111.

²⁰ Wayne Teasdale, “Christianity and the Eastern Religions: The Possibility of Mutual Growth.” See *The Other Half*, 126 – 163.

²¹ Judson Trapnell, “Multireligious Experience and the Study of Mysticism.” See *The Other Half*, 198 - 222.

one another within a greater wholeness”; and the necessity of personal self-transcendence through encounter with other cultures and religions.

Michael Von Brück describes Griffiths’ goal “to integrate all aspects of life into one great poem of spiritual transparency.” Von Brück, who translated Griffiths’ commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* into German, presents the communication of *present* spiritual experience as the necessary means of dialogue today.²² In his analysis he extols Griffiths as the model for the kind of “partnership in religion” he sees emerging. This is a “partnership in identity” where both parties change through the process of a common journey. Felicity Edwards sees in Griffiths “an exemplar of . . . holistic feminism” which understands “God who . . . liberates . . . through a fellowship with . . . and in God.” She writes of the necessary use of symbols for God, the distortions that can accrue and the need to transcend all symbols.²³ Her discussion of Old Testament and New Testament symbol briefly surveys ideas from such as Rosemary Reuther and Paul Tillich, Julian of Norwich and Karl Jung, Pauline theology, and Dorothy Sölle.

Beatrice Bruteau in dialogue with the Hindu tradition extends the concept of “The One and the Many” that is, nondualism, into the Ultimate Reality of a nondual community with the cosmos “as its expression.”²⁴ In this sense, “‘God’ . . . is the dynamic of the (divine) Community.” This is further evocative of the Person-Community of “perfect mutual indwelling” which humanity is called to become, but “become” in the sense of recognising through a process of unfolding likened to a rose, its true Self profoundly interrelated and interconnected as represented by Bohm’s hologram image. Similarly, Matthew Fox presents a dialogue that took place in 1992 and quotes Griffiths: “If Christianity cannot recover its mystical tradition and teach it, it should simply fold up and go out of business - it has nothing to offer.”²⁵ Bede here calls for a monastic mentality but with the balance of East and West that includes the place of the body, and Fox includes Griffiths’ detailed description of the significance of the Tantric chakras.²⁶

Griffiths’ discussion of the need to “go beyond ‘a personal form of God’ to the transcendent” is significant. He says, “America . . . is a terribly ego-centred society.” On the

²² Michael von Brück, “Christ and the Buddha Embracing.” See *The Other Half*, 235.

²³ Felicity Edwards, “God as Feminine: Experiencing Wholeness.” See *The Other Half*, 244 – 265.

²⁴ Beatrice Bruteau, “The One and the Many: Communitarian Nondualism.” See *The Other Half*, 268.

²⁵ Matthew Fox and Bede Griffiths, “Spirituality for a New Era: A Dialogue.” See *The Other Half*, 316.

²⁶ Matthew Fox and Bede Griffiths, “Spirituality for a New Era: A Dialogue.” See *The Other Half*, 328.

other hand, says Griffiths, “the search for a deeper reality is stronger here than anywhere.”²⁷ Rupert Sheldrake describes how the mystical and scientific ways should complement each other. He quotes from Bede’s commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, pointing out the “field of energies” of the “whole world of nature,” and the Spirit as the “knower” of the field which is the “principle of consciousness” in the universe, “the body of Christ.” He describes various “fields” of rhythms and intelligibilities, and the reality of energy, light and spirit.²⁸ Thomas Berry speaks of the task before us of telling the Great Story in a new voice.²⁹ This has implications for the images Griffiths used.

Kuruvilla Pandikattu, in *Religious Dialogue as Hermeneutics: Bede Griffiths’ Advaitic Approach*, follows Griffiths’ pursuit of nondualism.³⁰ His thesis in his own words endeavours to follow “the pilgrim way taken by Griffiths towards an authentic meeting between religions.” In this he analyses “the method, procedure and philosophical presuppositions of Griffiths’ pilgrimage.” Pandikattu sees interreligious dialogue itself as “hermeneutic encounter.” I understand Griffiths’ journey as a whole in terms of a “hermeneutic encounter.” Pandikattu’s thesis centres on *advaita* as “the hermeneutic key in the inter-religious dialogue as carried out by Bede Griffiths.” I find his work generally supportive of my own insights and conclusions. Apart from the well-documented argument, the author provides excellent background for the Hindu concept of *advaita*, an explication of Wilber’s evolution of the consciousness from *The Atman Project*, a list of the main events in Griffiths’ life, a glossary of Sanskrit terms, an excellent index and a comprehensive bibliography. I show how “encounter” itself, for Griffiths as a Christian, complements and articulates his “qualified” *advaita*.

Bede Griffiths and Sannyasa, the work of Jesu Rajan, has a related focus, “the contemplative dimension of Christianity,” but pivots on Bede Griffiths’ particular interpretation of Indian *sannyasa*.³¹ Griffiths in his Forward to the book, which he finds “a very thorough study of the concept of *Sannyasa* in India and . . . its relevance to the life of the Church today,” adds that “unless the external works are sustained by an inner life of

²⁷ Matthew Fox and Bede Griffiths, “Spirituality for a New Era: A Dialogue.” See *The Other Half*, 332.

²⁸ Rupert Sheldrake, “Mysticism and the New Science.” See *The Other Half*, 336.

²⁹ Thomas Berry, “The Ecozoic Era.” See *The Other Half*, 356.

³⁰ Kurivilla Panidikattu, *Religious Dialogue as Hermeneutics: Bede Griffiths’ Advaitic Approach*, *Indian Philosophical Studies*, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series 111B, South Asia, Volume 3. General Editor, George F. McLean (Washington D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2001).

³¹ Jesu Rajan, *Bede Griffiths and Sannyasa* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1989).

prayer (and contemplation) they have no ultimate value.” The basic relevance for Christians is that *Sannyasa* “is the sign of the transcendence of all created being, the opening of the heart to the absolute transcendence which is the ultimate ground of all religions.”³² The book does not have an index, but it does have an excellent translation and pronunciation key at the beginning and an equally helpful glossary and full bibliography. Rajan includes comprehensive summaries of the Christian *sannyasis*, Roberto De Nobili, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, Sadhu Sunder Singh, Abbé Jules Monchanin, Dom Henri Le Saux and Dom Bede Griffiths. He articulates well finer points of difference such as that between, *Brahman*, *Atman* and *Purusha*. However, he has some difficulty with Griffiths’ presentation of the comprehensive synthesis he finds in the later *Upanishads* and especially in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Bede seeks to show how these demonstrate the same kind of evolutionary process of coming to know the divine that can be found in all religious traditions. Importantly for our purposes, Rajan picks up on the challenge of the *sannyasic* life as interpreted for lay people. Because of Griffiths’ exploration of the symbol of “the universal monk” in relation to *sannyasa*, Rajan’s exploration of a Christian *sannyasa* is both informative and helpful.

Meath Conlan studied with Bede Griffiths in India over a number of years. His little book of 2006, *Bede Griffiths: Friend and Gift of the Spirit*,³³ is deceptively simple, only 126 pages, and contains a number of cameo insights, the treasured recollections of an intimate friendship. This short book centres on the last ten years of Bede’s life with the central theme, the symbol of *advaita* which extends into the occasions of dialogue between Griffiths and extraordinary personages such as the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan lamas, Aboriginal Elder Gaboo and Ian Gawler. The book discloses the beauty of image and symbol as understood by Griffiths.

Bede Griffiths: An Introduction to His Interspiritual Thought, by Wayne Teasdale, is based on his 1985 doctoral dissertation for Fordham University, *Toward a Christian Vedanta: The Encounter of Hinduism and Christianity According to Bede Griffiths*.³⁴ This revised edition adds “further development in Bede’s thought . . . and an expanded bibliography.” In the Forward, Griffiths states that the “real subject” of this book is the challenge for Christianity “to become as deeply rooted in the culture of India as it once was

³² Bede Griffiths, in the Forward to *Bede Griffiths and Sannyasa*, xii, xiii.

³³ Meath Conlan, *Bede Griffiths: Friend and Gift of the Spirit: A Spiritual Journey with Meath Conlan* (Springfield, Ill.: Templegate, 2006). (Henceforward, *Bede Griffiths: Friend and Gift*.)

³⁴ Wayne Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2003).

in the culture of Greece and Rome.” He quotes Henri de Lubac’s words to Jules Monchanin: “You have to rethink everything in terms of theology and rethink theology in terms of mysticism.”³⁵ Teasdale describes “interspirituality” as “the activity and process of exploring other traditions in more than an academic sense.” His book describes Bede as “a master of interspiritual wisdom.”³⁶ Teasdale’s exploration of Griffiths’ endeavour to reconcile *advaita* and Trinity, in terms of a Christian *Vedanta*, make his book a veritable grammar for other interested parties. Apart from the usual helpful academic appendage, he includes a number of areas of interest: an historical context for *sannyasa* which includes, de Nobili, Upadhyay, Monchanin and Abhishiktananda; a “brief consideration of the feminine dimension of the Godhead,” as Bede’s “notion”; Griffiths’ metaphysics as being “almost” wholly in agreement with his reading of Seyyed Hossein Nasr; Christian and Hindu intuitive insight and the role of myth; Bede’s concept of a Christian *Vedanta* which is dealt with in the central Chapter 5; the role of Christian *sannyasa*; and the future of the Church. What Teasdale misses in depth of analysis, he makes up for in breadth. Understandably, Rajan’s analysis of Bede’s approach to *sannyasa*, for example, is much more probing. My thesis explores Griffiths’ prophetic thrust in a way that Teasdale does not. I respond to Teasdale’s critical question to show how Griffiths’ adherence to Catholicism goes “beyond,” yet in such a way that sharp critique is always through committed membership from within his beloved tradition.

The works of Judson Trapnell explore the whole area of Griffiths’ understanding and use of myth, image and symbol with very assiduous research and detailed analysis. Trapnell’s thesis³⁷ describes Griffiths’ “holistic pursuit of truth” through “integral dialogue.” He describes Bede’s intellectual journey which takes him from a theology of fulfillment to one of complementarity. Finally, Griffiths can confidently use the image of the one light of truth as the one reality which shining through the whole of creation, the whole humanity and every culture, is perceived as a “refracted light” or as the multiplicity of rainbow colours diffused from the one pure light. Naming some of the areas dealt with shows this document as being supportive for our thesis: the necessary role of the image; pilgrimage to the divine as a universal; Rahner’s insight into intrinsic divine multiplicity/plurality; the need for the West to rediscover the use of the imagination and symbol; the role of rational and non-rational approaches in the Church; retrieval of the Patristic model of analogical expression

³⁵ Bede Griffiths, in the Forward to *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction*, x.

³⁶ Wayne Teasdale, in the Preface to *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction*, xv.

³⁷ Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths’ Theory*.

of the divine; *advaita* as present at the root of Christian experience and Griffiths' use of metaphors to defend the Christian *advaitic* experience; Eckhart and creation as mirroring God; the universal embrace of transformative love; the image of horizon; the holographic model; Teasdale's "ontological continuum" or "spiral of realization"; the Golden String and *sannyasa* and the world of signs; comparison of Griffiths' and Lonergan's schema; and Griffiths as a "culture-bearer". Once again my argument, when touching on similar areas, sharpens the point of Griffiths' prophetic thrust. My focus on Griffiths' mature theology of complementarity allows for further, deeper exploration of the Hindu/Christian comparable symbols. This brings into better clarity the importance of the feminine reality which includes Griffiths' relationship with special women in his life.

Trapnell's next book, *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue*,³⁸ is described in the Forward by Kenneth Cracknell as, "an overview . . . of Griffiths' work as a 'culture bearer.'" The book includes a comprehensive chronology of Griffiths' Life and has gathered together Trapnell's earlier research and included later developments, such as the last profound insights of the dying monk. Fully referenced with index and bibliography, this work focuses more on Griffiths' journey of encounter. Trapnell also describes instances where Griffiths is the butt of harsh rebuke from Hindu and Christian quarters. It contains particularly good chapters on intuitive wisdom, God through symbols and God beyond symbols. Unfortunately, Trapnell relies almost entirely on sources by men and does neglect Griffiths' interest in the human dimension of the feminine. My thesis takes up this lacunae.

There are a number of recent publications which include Griffiths' ideas, such as Bruno Barnhart's *The Future of Wisdom: Toward a Rebirth of Sapiential Christianity*.³⁹ With a special focus on the relationship between non-duality, the Incarnation and personhood, Barnhart's consideration of Griffiths' position is important.

I complete this literature review with the hope that this work when completed will also be helpful to others. Because my thesis reveals "the Golden String" (together with related images) as such an efficacious Christological symbol for Griffiths, it will assist those seeking to understand his use of images for the Divine and to reconcile this with his insistence that ultimately we must go beyond all images to experience God. So, too, it may

³⁸ Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2001).

³⁹ Bruno Barnhart, *The Future of Wisdom: Toward a Rebirth of Sapiential Christianity* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007).

advance the cause of scholars wishing to determine the breadth and depth of his prophetic authenticity and influence.

2. Bede Griffiths' Unique Contribution

In the burgeoning field of Christian theology and interfaith dialogue, Griffiths occupies a distinctive place, with his special emphases on, contemplative experience, community and historical particularity.

Griffiths considered contemplative experience a necessary dimension of Christian life, and, indeed, all human life. Contemplation, he understands to be a non-rational means of acquiring knowledge, equally authentic as rational thought. His approach had a special urgency in that he considered the great religions of the world to be in a state of stagnation, and in urgent need of renewal. A prime source of renewal would be through the cross-fertilisation on the level of contemplative dialogue. In fact, he considered interreligious dialogue in our era to be a vital duty, not an option. Christianity as a religion, he says, "cannot grow today . . . unless it is willing to abandon its Western culture and its rational masculine bias and learn again the feminine intuitive understanding that is characteristic of the East."⁴⁰

The theory and practice of the contemplative dialogue that Griffiths envisaged cannot be detached from a communitarian setting. An all-inclusive contemplative community had long been his goal, though he had not been able to implement it in his own country. Central, is his focus on the feminine principle, which he identifies with the East. After arriving in India, at Shantivanam he eventually enjoyed the freedom to form the kind of contemplative community he intended, even if it proved more difficult to achieve outside the setting of the Indian ashram.

While his theology of complementarity and contemplative interreligious dialogue expanded increasingly into global proportions, he remains located within a specific Christian history and faith in Jesus Christ. A symbolic recognition of this is found in his adoption of the

⁴⁰ Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West: A Sequel to The Golden String*, 2nd ed. (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1983), 198, 199. (Henceforward, *Marriage*.) Teasdale further elaborates Griffiths' viewpoint. He describes Father Bede's belief that the Greco-Roman system on which Canon Law and Church government is based "has reached the end of its usefulness; it is no longer either meaningful or beneficial, save for those who have a vested interest in preserving it along with their own power." Indeed, "the present system has imprisoned the real Church, which is totally of the Spirit." Wayne Teasdale, in the Introduction to *The Other Half*, 18.

religious name, “Bede,” with all its significance in the history of English monasticism. In what follows, I shall refer to our subject by his chosen religious name, not only for convenience, but also to highlight the historical particularity of his Christian calling. (For stylistic considerations I alternatively refer to him as Griffiths.) He would go on to insist that all religions need to return to their originating experience if they are to contribute to a common contemplative journey.⁴¹

There are then three aspects of the Dom Bede’s “complementary theology.” The images he employs are directed not only to serve a contemplative awareness of God, but also presuppose an appropriate community experience, while asserting fidelity to a particular historical religious experience — Christian and monastic in his own case. These three aspects illumine the different phases of his “journey” as it moves forward in an awareness of the acute spiritual crisis experienced in the present global era.

3. Methodology

Research into the images that Griffiths employs must be wary of imposing too static and abstract a pattern. His theological expression tends always to be related to religious experience — to that degree he is not writing as a professional theologian governed by academic criteria and theoretical types of analysis. Our aim, then, is to discern and explore his primary image and the others he uses in the experiential context of his development — or, as he would have it, in relation to the phases of his “journey.”

Griffiths’ journey led by the Golden String is characterized by openness to the “beyond,” to difference, newness, change and fresh starts that evoke the life of the Holy Spirit and ultimately, the *advaitic* reality. On the one hand this lends his message a sharply prophetic edge. On the other hand, ambiguity and change of thought are also found. I argue the authenticity of his Christology and Catholic commitment despite the issues raised by

⁴¹ A summary of Griffiths’ ideas on this can be found in *A New Vision of Reality: Western Science, Eastern Mysticism and Christian Faith* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1992), 286 – 296. (Henceforward, *A New Vision*.) Griffiths reasons from the Trinity as the ultimate Reality “seen as . . . Being in love.” Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation in Christ: Christian Meditation and Community* (Springfield, Ill.: Templegate, 1992), 56. (Henceforward, *The New Creation*.) See also, Bede Griffiths, *Universal Wisdom: A Journey Through the Sacred Wisdom of the World* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 9994), 7 – 8 (Henceforward, *Universal Wisdom*.) See also, *Marriage*, 200, *A New Vision*, 48, 55 – 56, Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life*, 188.

Christian theologians as Wayne Teasdale⁴² and Jacques Dupuis.⁴³ Certain tensions surround his faith based in his constant deep awareness of a layered reality that is understood and lived as a journey. For example, questions of theological method and spiritual discernment surround his appreciation of a movement to different levels of consciousness. The exploration therefore includes related tangents: the motive is Christ, the Golden String who leads; the goal is *advaita* or union with God; the way is based on openness to encounter. Griffiths understands encounter in this present life always as being with Christ who is representative of humanity and by extension all creation. It induces a new way of seeing. This includes an appreciation of difference, even though in Hindu terms *advaita* is generally understood as simple unity - being "one with the One."⁴⁴

My thesis demonstrates that Griffiths' contemplative use of images of God does not detract from the journey to "the beyond," that is, the goal of transcendent unity. Sensitivity to this movement of growth makes his use of images dynamic. Furthermore, his theology and method are centered in and flow from his day by day Benedictine monastic habit. In order to faithfully convey this, and also to assist my own exploration, I use a narrative structure.

To be true to his "voice" this takes the shape of a pilgrimage, an especially evocatively-defined journey. This image looms large in his life registering an ambiance through which his ideas receive a certain texture, credibility and power to convince. It is shown as nucleus and nebula from which particular related images emerge and in which they converge. According to the structure imposed, the sections are named figuratively to represent the whole thesis adventure including planning and preparation, the arduous trip

⁴² Benedictine lay-brother, Wayne Teasdale, who was a friend and student of Griffiths for a number of years, questions whether Griffiths, in his self-identification as Christian *sannyasi*, has adequately determined and explained the Christian formal religious adherence in comparison with the call of *sannyas* always to "go beyond." See Wayne Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction*, 158, 160, 170, 190.

⁴³ In the chapter 4, "God of the Journey," in section 4, Journey as a Common Goal, I elaborate how the Jesuit theologian, Jacques Dupuis questions Griffiths' theology in respect of the Godhead and the Trinity.

⁴⁴ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 28. See also, the *Bhagavad Gita: The Yoga of Discriminative Wisdom*. 44. Griffiths shows that Christian mystical experience speaks ultimately of unity in multiplicity. God is One, but holding all within that oneness. The experience is unity in distinction, or a "qualified *advaita*." In respect of Eastern mysticism, Griffiths distinguishes between the "total *advaita*" of Ibn al Arabi which includes all distinctions and the "pure *advaita*" of Shankara which does not. See *A New Vision*, 153, 159, 160. See also, Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 190. *A New Vision*, 169, 220-226.

and end review. The sections are: PLOTTING THE WAY, EXPLORATION, and REFLECTION ON THE JOURNEY.

The aim is to clearly elaborate Griffiths' emphasis on the central importance of right use of image and symbol in the spiritual journey which includes encounter with other faiths and other disciplines, in particular the "new" science.⁴⁵

As will appear, his theology appeals primarily to the Christian mystical tradition and respects its considerable diversity. He will make reference, for example, to sources as diverse as the mystical dimension in the work of such systematic theologians as Thomas Aquinas and Karl Rahner, and to mystics such as Julian of Norwich, John Ruysbroeck, and Meister Eckhart and to Gregory of Nyssa — a notable exponent of the mystical theology of the early Christian East.

Secondarily, he draws on Eastern and non-Christian spiritual classics, especially the Hindu classics, the *Vedas*, the *Upanisads*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. On the other hand, his theological basis is Trinitarian, and this he elaborates in reference to Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Karl Rahner and Raimon Panikkar⁴⁶ while maintaining dialogue with representatives of the Indian spiritual classics such as Sri Aurobindo.⁴⁷

His openness to major world religions does not preclude an interest in native spiritualities, notably that of indigenous Australians. On two separate occasions, while on lecture tours in Australia, he had the opportunity for dialogue with Aboriginal elders.

⁴⁵ In future this will be simply written as, the new science. In the opening chapter of *A New Vision of Reality* Bede Griffiths describes this as a "new understanding of science," especially in the case of physics which is presented in Fritjof Capra's seminal works, *The Tao of Physics*, 1983, and *The Turning Point*, 1983. Proponents such as physicists, Capra and David Bohm and the biologist, Rupert Sheldrake, advocate a new scientific approach that accepts the whole of reality, macrocosm and microcosm, as a dynamic interrelated and interdependent unity.

⁴⁶ Raimon Panikkar is a world-reknowned Catholic priest, theologian and philosopher who has studied and taught in Spain, Germany, Italy, India and the US. He is the author of a great many books and published articles and widely regarded as being in the forefront of creative and insightful thought in interreligious and intercultural dialogue. In 1955, in his reports to England on the "Indian Foundation" Griffiths described Panikkar as "a brilliant scholar . . . the ablest theologian I have ever met . . . even more revolutionary than I am . . . most stimulating . . . with as deep a love for India as I have." See "Father Bede Griffiths and the Indian Foundation," Installment 2, April 17, 1955, and Installment 3, July 10, 1955, pp 4 and 2 respectively. Available from the Pluscarden Archives. Panikkar passed away at the age of ninety-two in 2010. Panikkar may be alternatively referred to as Raimon, Raimundo or Raymond Panikkar.

⁴⁷ Introducing him as "the sage of Pondicherry," (*Marriage*, 50), Griffiths attributes to Sri Aurobindo, (1872 – 1950) new insight into the deeper psychological meaning of the *Vedas*. Sri Aurobindo, though born in Calcutta was sent to England to be educated from his childhood. Returning after Cambridge University, Aurobindo discovered Indian spirituality.

Furthermore, he has shown considerable interest in new scientific areas and trans-personal psychology. Increasingly this became a dominant interest, so much so that he finally envisaged living for six months of the year in the US where he could be involved in what he saw as a growing dynamic theological-scientific exchange. The three main figures of importance for him in this area are Rupert Sheldrake, Ken Wilber and Fritjof Capra.

All of these elements shape the background against which the symbol of his unique journey, the Golden String, and all that it encompasses, is elaborated.

The structure is sensitive to and overtly represents Bede's emphases in theological method. My methodology, thus, takes into consideration the kind of personal change and transformation inherent in theological research and is cognizant of Lonergan's urge for a therapeutic return to the subject.⁴⁸ The expectation is that the thesis develops and unfolds in an organic way from the surface towards deeper and more detailed levels of understanding. Such a method has been compared with peeling an onion.⁴⁹ Hopefully, the project will stimulate a more insightful appreciation of the synthetic imagination which Griffiths perceived to be important for his own life and thought and necessary for human advancement generally.

On a more personal note, I must mention that this project unfolded, not only because of my academic interest in this area, but in a more intensely involving way.⁵⁰ I had the opportunity to visit most of the places and communities that shaped Bede's long life, and some of the communities in India and elsewhere that have been inspired by his work. This gave me a personal familiarity with the milieu in which the images of God were shaped in Bede's experience and imagination. Thus I was able to better appreciate his interpretation of the story of humanity and his unique contribution, through the encounter of a personal lived experience. I include a brief account of this pilgrimage⁵¹ as an heuristic dimension, a demonstrable consciousness of a particular lens which on the one hand

⁴⁸ Vernon Gregson, *Lonergan Spirituality and the Meeting of Religions* (MD: The College Theology Society, University Press of America, 1985), 23.

⁴⁹ At the start of my research for the dissertation, Scripture scholar, Dr Margaret Hannan SGS, with her background in Benedictine spirituality and to whom I am indebted for assistance with the thesis subject, described this holistic method as particularly appropriate.

⁵⁰ Although I had never before been to India, my mother, who passed away in 2004, was Anglo-Indian.

⁵¹ The full text of this "Contemplative Pilgrimage," which is also named as "a Walk in Dom Bede Griffiths' Footsteps" is found in Appendix 1 along with the DVD made, which is Appendix 3. It reappears appropriately tailored, in *God of the Journey*, in Part 2: PLOTTING THE WAY. It evokes the structure and determination of the thesis.

imposes limits but which can also be a means of achieving and communicating deeper insights.

Also important for this method, is engagement with Journals such as the *Australian Ejournal of Theology* (AEJT) and organisations such as the Association of Practical Theology in Oceania (APTO), whereby papers and articles based on thesis material have been published and discussed in a theological exchange.⁵²

In the thesis I have implemented Bede's request to Thomas Matus that all future quotations from his talks and writings make the necessary changes for inclusive language. I will make such adjustments without the use of (*sic*).⁵³ As well, I am using Griffiths' method of differentiating God as transcendent other with a capital "G", and the "gods" with a lower case "g" as attributes or manifestations of the One.⁵⁴ I maintain Griffiths' writing of the *Upanishadic* concept of "being," "consciousness" and "bliss" for the Absolute with variable spelling. The term can be spelt either *saccidananda* – emphasizing the compound form, or *satcitananda* with the emphasis more on the elements: *sat* - being, *cit* – consciousness, *ananda* – bliss.

In selecting and assessing the content and role of particular images as they appear in Griffiths' writings—or, in some cases, as expressed in his history—I have developed the following set of questions: What is the image and its field of evocation? When and in what context did it emerge? (This could for example be in a monastic or interfaith situation or in dialogue with secular or scientific concerns.) What is its relative importance? (Does it, for example, endure as a point of reference?) What is its contemplative resonance? What is its theological significance? What is the significance for interreligious dialogue?

Generating a large body of data in this way, I will be increasingly able to address the question underlying this project, that is the persuasive authenticity of his defining image and the others embedded in it, and understand the developments in Dom Bede's religious and contemplative journey. This will entail a close reading of his writings, and attention to the sources he explicitly refers to, theological, mystical, scientific and so forth. This will

⁵² I entered these organizations through the advice and encouragement of Assoc. Prof. Gerard Hall. Hall is one of the founding members of APTO, and the creator and the previous Editor of the AEJT.

⁵³ Thomas Matus, *Bede Griffiths: Essential Writings*, in the *Modern Spirituality and Masters Series*, selected with an Introduction by Thomas Matus OSB Cam (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 23. (Henceforward, *Essential Writings*.)

⁵⁴ Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation: The Hindu Way To God* (Springfield, Ill: Templegate, 1983), 19. (Henceforward, *Cosmic Revelation*.)

enable a further contextualisation of the research in relation to other theological and interfaith writers such as Panikkar, Dupuis, and Bruteau especially when they have similar familiarity with the mystical tradition of India. In terms of the collaborative method underlying interfaith relations, the methodological writings of Bernard Lonergan⁵⁵ are a source of valuable clarifications—especially in treating such topics as conversion, the differentiation of consciousness, and the realms and carriers of meaning.

By conducting this research into the life and times, the faith and the imagination of Bede Griffiths, I aim to contribute towards a better appreciation of what he understood to be the “new consciousness” to which humanity is being called and raised. This is the focus of the prophetic tone of his mature theology and the basis for a Christological interpretation of the Golden String of his journey.

Accordingly, this project is presented as three journey sections with nine chapters. I provide here an indication of the content according to the figurative structure.

4. Structure of the Thesis

While Chapter 1 takes in the Introduction, the following three “Parts” which include the remaining chapters form the narrative structure.

PART ONE: PLOTTING THE WAY

Chapter 2: Structure of the Journey

Although the thesis focuses more on Griffiths’ mature theology of complementarity in the later period of his life, attention here to his early autobiography provides the means to introduce his defining image, Christ, The Golden String, hidden in the ordinary. I introduce Alan Griffiths’ motive and describe the five sections into which the chapter is divided: Alone with nature; Discovering the Word; Monastic community in England and Scotland; Moving to India; The Ever-Larger community. Each section is then dealt with in turn to show the overall movement of his journey. Singular ideas and concerns introduced in this early stage of his monastic career will later achieve greater emphasis and/or urgency. As Part One, suggests, this chapter, along with the next two, functions as a map. Furthermore,

⁵⁵ Griffiths expressed some disappointment with Lonergan whom he believed put too much emphasis on common sense and not enough on intuitive knowledge. In Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths Theory*, 496-521. On account of his own focus on intuitive knowledge he therefore mentions Lonergan only in passing. However, I have used Lonergan’s insights for my own purposes of clarification because much of the criticism directed at Griffiths is due to his method of communication which others sometimes find ambiguous or unclear.

importantly, this early section surveys Griffiths' life in a manner which chronologically situates significant events and publications.

Chapter 3: Companions for the Journey

I compare and contrast aspects of Bede Griffiths' life and vision with five relevant figures. These are: Raimon Panikkar and Sri Aurobindo, in particular their Trinitarian perspectives that define their sense of community; Karl Rahner, with the emphasis on his theological assessment of self-transcendence and his vision for new human communities; Gregory of Nyssa who is a familiar figure in Bede's works, not only on account of his apophatic theology but also because of his particular use of images especially in relation to the journey; Lonergan I include as a challenge, because Griffiths has criticized his method as being too fixated on "common sense" without enough emphasis on image, myth and imagination. Beside Trapnell's point that there are real similarities with Griffiths' approach, certain aspects of Lonergan's "intentionality analysis" help facilitate the narrative approach which has a moderate heuristic dimension. Concepts that recur in Griffiths' mature use of the selected images are found here such as: Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary consciousness and integral wisdom; Panikkar's "cosmotheandric" principle; Rahner's "absolute future"; Gregory's passion for God, and Lonergan's sustained questioning and the "limit horizon.

Introducing these "journey companions" in this way considerably widens the approach to Griffiths' use of the selected images.

Chapter 4: God of the Journey

The basis for this section, the heuristic aspect which makes up Appendices 1 and 2 provides a fitting background texture for Griffiths' exploratory theology that is reflected in the overall organic structure of the thesis. The chapter focuses on the central image of God in relation to the spiritual journey, especially Griffiths' understanding of life and the universe. Furthermore, it is proposed that the thesis itself is a journey of pilgrimage. The inclusion of some rhetorical analysis of this focal image allows for greater clarity. The chapter explores journey as a universal, important in founding myths. Here, "The Golden String" recognizes Christ as pilgrim and pilgrimage, the origin of the journey, the way and the goal, and values also the primacy of experience. Griffiths' emphasis on openness to a new level of consciousness is seen to allow special insight into transformative process. The human movement of life which is a pilgrimage means that change is inevitable and necessary. It introduces the new science concept of life as "a dynamic web of interdependent relationships" along with the centrality of a re-appropriation of the feminine principle. It

also introduces important concepts central to Griffiths' use of image and symbol, such as: Christ as absolute symbol; a universal wisdom; and Christian paradox.

PART TWO: EXPLORATION

This comprises five chapters, each a deeper more detailed exploration of another image related to or emerging from "the Golden String" image. Each finds relevance in the theological vision of his "journey partners," his dialogue with India, and encounter with the feminine and the new science. In this central part of the thesis, I situate original interpretation of Griffiths' motives, means and method.

Chapter 5: Divine Host: God as all-encompassing out-flowing generative love

The chapter, Divine Host, finds a balance in the tension between the One who is "beyond" yet intimately near. It draws heavily on Griffiths' familiarity with the *Vedas*. The image emphasizes Love-in-relationship – the I/thou relationship and the Trinity. It recommends right balance for the sake of healing which includes an incarnational divine familial love, and the incarnational dimension in architecture and environment. Griffiths' work here demonstrates a profound correspondence between Western mystical tradition and the East in the image of divine superabundant love and cosmic diversity. The themes of holism, healing and beauty are central and flow from Griffiths' monastic ideal. He pursues a radical hospitality and humility, key virtues in Benedictine spirituality. The issues of complementarity and lay contemplative communities are also evident. In this context, the overarching and emergent journey includes the idea of personal integration with the experience of wholeness, self-giving sacrifice, and integrative sexuality.

Chapter 6: The *Imago Dei*

This explores the history of the perennial philosophy together with the evolutionary process in history to examine Griffiths' hope for a new way of being, a new consciousness that is profoundly integrative. It is intended for all humanity and by extension for all creation – and is a process of becoming a communion of persons in love. It owns a psychic capability. The integration of East and West is the logical, necessary preliminary step. The chapter explores the evolutionary process of development of the *imago dei*. Like the perennial philosophy, the *imago* is an interweaving of experiential and conceptual aspects which, on relational, universal grounds demand dialogical articulation. Bede's use of this image suggests that Intercultural and interreligious dialogue are not only vital but also profoundly related to the new science.

Chapter 7: Divine Feminine

This chapter expresses Griffiths' hope that, eventually, the details of human life will reflect the kind of integration to which humankind is being called. The exploration of the divine Feminine in this chapter firmly states Griffiths' conviction that movement to the next level of consciousness is only possible through a turning towards and integration with the feminine principle which is integral to the whole of reality. The interwoven threads of Griffiths' own experience and his special relationships are evaluated. Various challenges are articulated such as the place of the body and Bede's growing discomfort with a male-dominated Church and a need to resist exclusively-male terminology and symbolization for God. The Tibetan *Dzogchen* tradition is introduced as an important late development for Griffiths' appreciation of the goal of non-dualism or a Christian qualified *advaita*. It includes Griffiths' contention that central for our times is to know God as both "Mother" and "Father." Here, comparison of the work of Nassr and Wilber are related to this, as is Bede's interest in Tantric yoga. Osage Monastery in Sand Springs, Oklahoma, is shown to represent for Griffiths a budding forth of his new vision.

Chapter 8: Divine Lord

This chapter exemplifies change through an evolutionary process based in dialogue (in contrast to one that is revolutionary and dialectical) and, most importantly, is overtly centered in surrender to a God of love in a movement with a goal both immanent and infinite. It interprets what we have named as Griffiths' "hermeneutic of encounter" in respect of this image. It includes sin and the demonic and the psychic realm. Griffiths' dialogical exploration of the relationship between a personal God and the way of contemplation in action for the goal of universal justice and peace is demonstrated as being rooted in self-surrender. Included is his identification of exponents of such practice, for example, Mahatma Gandhi and Ernst Schumacher. Other important persons in Bede's process of encounter and dialogue reappear, such as Panikkar, Bohm, Sheldrake and Capra, Sri Aurobindo, Teilhard de Chardin, Ken Wilber, and also Julian of Norwich. In this light, Griffiths' image of divine Lord is presented as a symbol with cosmic significance. Bede insists on the need to go beyond even the personal symbol of "Lord" to the fullness of the Godhead, the divine "fruitive embrace."

Chapter 9: Divine Light

Griffiths shows how in all religious traditions, this image evokes the goal of life. In both Hindu and Christian traditions, divine Light is especially evocative of unity. It is especially significant for India where “religious tradition ‘sees the divine image’ (*darshan*) rather than ‘hears the word of God.’”⁵⁶ For Bede, it is most relevant for a Christian *advaita*. It brings together the different strands of exploration of the previous images. While Griffiths believes that the experience of ultimate truth is different for each person, nevertheless, it is the one Light of Truth which is experienced.⁵⁷ This section connects with his grounding scripture, John 17:21-24. To be “one” in the Lord is to be one with the Light. This is appropriate as we find how, in this chapter Bede’s dialogue with the East is informed by the image of divine Light. The chapter shows how Griffiths’ central image, the “Golden String” is the light of Christ and illumines each stage of the journey, his own and also that of humankind and the cosmos. It is profoundly connected with a particular understanding of “listening” related to the contemplative mode of being.

My selection of the five images in Part 2, Exploration, was dictated by my reading of Griffiths’ major works. These chapters are firmly based in an assessment of Bede’s own experience and his theological reflection. They, and a wealth of other associated images, overall evoke his focal image of the pilgrimage journey and the next stage, with which we are now confronted, towards a new level of consciousness. While I have enforced a logical sequence, in reality it will become clear that one image in particular comes to the forefront in importance for our times.

PART 3: REFLECTION ON THE JOURNEY

Chapter 10: The Import of Bede Griffiths’ Images of God: The Implications for our Times of Christ the Golden String

This chapter represents “Journey’s end” which is a taking stock of the enterprise. As a summary of the whole it respects the conceptual changes that have taken place in the thesis pilgrimage. It contains the implications of Griffiths’ thought drawn from the chapters and a final comprehensive conclusion.

The overtly heuristic element is included in Appendix 1, the “Pilgrimage in Bede Griffiths’ Footsteps”; Appendix 2, the ethical forms required for the DVD; and Appendix 3,

⁵⁶ Georges M. Soares-Prabhu, *The Dharma of Jesus*, Francis Xavier D’Sar, ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 264. Soares-Prabhu refers to Diana Eck whom he quotes, in Diana L. Eck, *Darshan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Chambersburg, Penn.: Anima Books, 1981).

⁵⁷ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 130.

the DVD made of this pilgrimage with interviews of the heads of the various Benedictine communities encountered.

Conclusion

In this introductory chapter I have provided a view of the scope of research being done into Bede Griffiths' spiritual and theological contribution so far and the direction this thesis intends to take. I have provided an outline of his principal emphases and theological themes explaining that my approach intends to bring central points into clearer definition and provide new understanding of his prophetic role. We now move to Part ONE: PLOTTING THE WAY. This comprises three chapters. The first is: Chapter 2, Structure of the Journey.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ All Biblical references in the thesis are from the New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.

PART ONE: PLOTTING THE WAY

Chapter 2

Structure of the Journey

Introduction

Bede documents the unfolding of his life's journey in *The Golden String*, a title he borrows from a verse of William Blake's poem *Jerusalem*:

*I give you the end of a golden string;
Only wind it into a ball,
It will lead you in at heaven's gate,
Built in Jerusalem's wall.*

William Blake

The metaphor above he defines as Christ¹ drawing him to union with the God as his final destiny.² *The Golden String* endures as a 20th Century classic story of conversion. With Bede's Forward of the second edition, the Prologue, the Epilogue with its gathered insights, along with the Publisher's Note, it contains in a germinal form, insights that he will explore further in much later writings and lectures. It should be noted that *The Golden String* was written in 1954, during the latter period of Griffiths' Western monastic experience and published the year before he left for India. In this account, there are peak moments described in some detail: the revelation of God in nature, the "failed"³ experiment in the Cotswolds through which he "discovered" the Bible,⁴ his conversion and entry into the monastery.

He will build on this account after his move to India, and following the later experience of being "overwhelmed by love"⁵ during his stroke. Each of these events resulted in a deeper awareness of a greater and more inclusive reality. Finally, as a *sannyasi*

¹ Bede Griffiths, *The Golden String* (Springfield, Ill.: Templegate, 1982), 184. (Henceforward, *Golden String*.)

² To take the string and follow it means a personal choice; however, in *The Golden String* Griffiths describes how in the prior events of his life God's providence preceded the time of choice.

³ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 13.

⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 13.

⁵ Bede Griffiths, *A Human Search: Reflection on My Life* (Ligouri, Missouri: Triumph Books, 1997), 89. (Henceforward, *A Human Search*.)

in the Ashram he welcomed thousands of people, communicating his basic message in an immediate form of witness.

While the message overall has a central focus – journey into God - it is also evolutionary, finding clarification, different emphases and even different conclusions. The demands of process came to form a continual exercise in humility which, joined with a spirit of obedience in regard to the movement, direction and daily times and places, are for him as a Benedictine monk the hall-marks and “the basis of the monastic life.”⁶

In Shantivanam ashram, Bede’s message is also his own life with the striving towards an ideal which becomes less an absolute than a diversity of ways centered in the image of Christ beyond which he insists is the utter mystery of God.

With his autobiography as a basic resource, the chapter surveys Griffiths’ life and publications under the following headings:

1. Alone with nature
2. Discovering the Word
3. Monastic community in England and Scotland
4. Moving to India
5. the Ever-larger community

1. Alone with nature

A secure family life mainly lived in the safety of the country-side was a prelude to Bede’s life-changing numinous experience. Born Alan Richard Griffiths on December 17, 1906, he had three older siblings, Dudley, Laurence and Barbara. His father had been cheated by a business partner when Alan was a child of four, and forced into retirement. His mother, Harriet Lilian Frampton-Day, whose father had been a London City Alderman, had however a private income. Out in the country near Hampshire, the children grew up free, happy, and secure, though poor. They were self-reliant and lived peacefully despite the Great War. Bede remembers both parents as religious and kindly. The family attended regular Sunday services at the local Church of England. The country parson was a learned man and a “lover of nature”⁷ whom Griffiths always remembered with admiration and affection. Yet the

⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 135.

⁷ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 20.

Griffiths' family life was touched by deep and vague sadness; Walter Griffiths soon came to suffer from a debilitating illness. His son reports that he remained generous and gentle but he lived on past memories and argued incessantly over politics. Much later in his sixties, Bede Griffiths confided to a friend, "I never had a real father . . ." ⁸

Such early influences engendered in the young Griffiths an enjoyment of the quiet English countryside. It may well have helped him survive the tyranny of the married couple who ran Furzie Close, the preparatory school he entered as a day boy. At his next school, Christ's Hospital, a charity school with a means-test, his enjoyment of nature was encouraged by the new headmaster, a layman, W.H. Fyfe, who arrived when Griffiths was thirteen. Scholarly, humane and forward-thinking, Fyfe came as a great relief compared to the previous, severe regime of the Protestant clergyman, Dr Upcott. He impressed his gifted student, ⁹ who was not particularly interested in religion at the time, with sermons that emphasised the humanity of Christ. Significantly, after Griffiths became captain of his house and won a Scholarship to Oxford, Fyfe excused him from the games periods so that he was free to cycle or walk round the countryside at Newbury where the family had moved. ¹⁰ An avid reader, he immersed himself in Thomas Hardy's novels which evoked a sense of companionship with the natural beauty of the area. By the end of his school days, despite a healthy interest and participation in school sport, ¹¹ he was attracted to literature of a political tenor and to the aesthetic beauty of Swinburne's poetry. But what most inspired him was the nature-poetry of Shelley and Wordsworth.

In his last term of school, Griffiths experienced a "mystical exaltation" which became a guiding "impulse." He declared it to have been "one of the decisive events" of his life. ¹² He describes this transforming experience in the Prologue of *The Golden String*:

I walked out alone in the evening and heard the birds singing in that full chorus of song, which can only be heard at that time of the year at dawn or at sunset. I remember now the shock of surprise with which the sound broke on my ears. It seemed to me that I had never

⁸ Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 4.

⁹ The entrance examinations to Christ's Hospital were very strict. Griffiths passed first out of 100 students and his score permitted him to skip the first forms so that he entered as a "broady," wearing the broader girdle. See Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 12, and Kathryn Spink, *A Sense*, 39.

¹⁰ Fyfe must have formed a good impression of Griffiths. In 1955, when as a Benedictine monk, Bede left England for India, awaiting him on board was a telegram from the now Sir William Fyfe which read: "Arch-Magisterial blessing. Fyfe." In Bede Griffiths, the 1st Instalment of, "Fr Bede Griffiths and the Indian Foundation," April, 1955. Available from The Pluscarden Archives.

¹¹ He did well at boxing, played rugby and enjoyed following the cricket.

¹² Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 10, 11.

heard the birds singing before and I wondered whether they sang like this all the year round and I had never noticed it. As I walked on I came upon some hawthorn trees in full bloom and again I thought that I had never seen such a sight or experienced such sweetness before. If I had been brought suddenly among the trees of the Garden of Paradise and heard a choir of angels singing I could not have been more surprised. I came then to where the sun was setting over the playing fields. A lark rose suddenly from the ground beside the tree where I was standing and poured out its song above my head, and then sank still singing to rest. Everything then grew still as the sunset faded and the veil of dusk began to cover the earth. I remember now the feeling of awe which came over me. I felt inclined to kneel on the ground, as though I had been standing in the presence of an angel; and I hardly dared to look on the face of the sky, because it seemed as though it was but a veil before the face of God.¹³

Griffiths understood this intensification of consciousness as a graced moment which initiated him into the awareness of a transcendent dimension to life. It was an experience both of self-discovery and self-transcendence, an initiation into a profound harmony and unity. After this, nature appeared “sacramental” connecting him with “the presence of an unfathomable mystery . . . drawing (him) to itself.” He now believed Blake’s “golden string” had been revealed to him as “grace . . . given to every soul, hidden under the circumstances of daily life.” To attend to this graced moment - to take up the string and begin to wind it into a ball in the midst of “the labyrinth of life,” meant for him “the beginning . . . of a long adventure” he could never have imagined possible.¹⁴

2. Discovering the Word

Besides the beauty and mystery of nature, another major influence on the young Alan Griffiths came from his reading. Harriet Griffiths’ youngest child was gifted—and generously acknowledged by the family to be her favourite. She had him taught French when he was four years old, and by the age of seven he was fairly proficient at Latin. A friend of Harriet’s also made him learn the Beatitudes and the 10th and 14th chapters of the Gospel of John by heart. In High School he was remembered as modest and intellectual.¹⁵ Besides his affection for the Romantics, he entered passionately into the world of Shakespeare, whose works he considered, adopting the phrase of Matthew Arnold, a “criticism of life.” His wider reading, including Tolstoi’s *Kingdom of Heaven*, Giovanni Papini’s *Story of Christ*, along with the plays

¹³ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 9.

¹⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 10, 11, 12.

¹⁵ Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 12.

of Ibsen and Shaw, produced in him sympathies that were at once, humanist, socialist, pacifist¹⁶ and avowedly anti-industrialist.

At Oxford, his first choice was New College, but he was rejected. However he was later accepted at Magdalen to begin in October 1925, dependent on a scholarship,¹⁷ and interested in aesthetics rather than athletics. Apparently, this college well deserved its denigration by Chesterton, as “the playground of the idle rich.”¹⁸ Nonetheless, the surroundings were beautiful, and he chose to study English literature, specifically the Romantics, rather than take courses in philosophy. At Oxford, he met two idealistic men who were to become life-long friends, Hugh Waterman and Martyn Skinner. Both shared his passion for a natural way of life in which to exercise the imagination and creativity. Consequently, some months after Griffiths left Oxford in April, 1930, these three began their “experiment in the common life” to escape “from the whole system of mechanization.”¹⁹ For Griffiths, industrialisation was a scourge destroying the quality of life; it had robbed honest people of their self-respect and polluted the environment. He diagnosed the source of this evil as the Enlightenment - especially Cartesian philosophy. The mechanistic objectification of life he considered soul destroying, for it eroded the very civilisation that had been so much in evidence during the 17th century in the creativity, strength and stability of its art and literature.

One other person at Oxford who became a life-long friend was C.S. Lewis, Griffiths’ tutor.²⁰ He eventually persuaded the younger man to extend his reading to the philosophers; and in the months after Oxford and before the Costwold experiment, Griffiths thus exerted himself, “like a man climbing a mountain.”²¹ He searched desperately through Spinoza, Marcus Aurelius, Berkley, Hobbes, Locke and Hume, and Kant. A significant resource emerged in the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, poet and philosopher. It

¹⁶He and three other friends were granted exemptions when they refused on principle to join the Officers’ Training Corps. See Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 25.

¹⁷ He was however, given a Classical Exhibition (Scholarship) of £50.00 a year, which the School increased to £100.00. GS, 30.

¹⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 25.

¹⁹ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 65.

²⁰ Bede belonged to C.S. Lewis’s *Inklings* group with Tolkien, Williams and Barfield. In David S. Toolan, “The Other Half of our Soul: Dom Bede Griffiths.” Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust, 1993.

²¹ Griffiths reports that the intellectual effort at this time was so intense, his longing for insight so great that the habit remained throughout his life “as part of a living process of thought.” See *Golden String*, 63.

offered a synthesis which helped him to reconcile reason and imagination, and affected his appreciation of the theological value of images. As he wrote, “The pure idea which alone is truth and equally (as Keats had seen) ‘absolute beauty’ is communicable in this present reality when embodied in an image as a living symbol of ultimate reality.”²² In his reading of Augustine, in the original Latin, he came to appreciate the integration of experience, imagination, intellect and will in the search for truth.²³ This discovery excited in him an intense “passion of religious love.” It also put the Catholic Church “on the map of life” for him.²⁴ In Dante, too, he found a mind of immense moral and intellectual power. Around this time he was further influenced by three books given him by a theosophist friend of his mother, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Buddha’s Way of Virtue* and the *Sayings of Lao Tzu*.²⁵

His intellectual and spiritual search gained momentum, and led a year’s experiment of alternative living with his friends from Magdalen, Hugh Waterman and Martyn Skinner, in the Cotswold hills, near Gloucester. They had planned the purchase of a farm house in the Cotswolds where they had been accustomed to retreat during their student lives, to ease the “profound sense of discontent with the world in which we were compelled to live” that Oxford had bequeathed to them.²⁶ He recalled this time twenty-six years after publishing *The Golden String*, in his 1980 Prologue to the second edition, where he deemed their attempt at the simple life and its routines that was designed as a flight from the industrialised world a “failed experiment.” Compromises were inevitably made and their ways began to diverge.²⁷

Furthermore, there were totally unforeseen religious developments. Hugh, Martyn and Alan had begun to read the Bible together merely out of literary interest. But this led to their sharing experience of a deeply religious nature, with the practice of common prayer and ascetical discipline. The Word of God in Scripture now informed all of Griffiths’ thinking,

²² Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 55.

²³ Griffiths was indebted to C.S. Lewis who maintained a correspondence with him, and challenged him to read in the original language which he found put him into a relationship of such immediacy with the author that he continued this painstaking way ever after. See Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 57.

²⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 59.

²⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 59-64.

²⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 46. Griffiths later returned to “a lonely desolate spot” in the Cotswolds by himself at the time of conflict in the midst of his conversion. *Golden String*, 112, 113.

²⁷ Particularly Hugh and later also Martyn were interested in marriage, something which disappointed Griffiths who was becoming increasingly ascetically religious. This Prologue, however, was composed prior to Griffiths’ “experience of the feminine” during the 80’s and from this later vantage point he may have been less willing to use the term, “failure.”

and went beyond anything he had previously discovered in his reading. Especially in the Gospel of John he encountered a decisive summons to faith, while the Letters of Paul revealed to him the significance of the Church, as “the great sacramental mystery,” while her dogmas and sacraments were “the ramparts of Jerusalem’s Wall.”²⁸

I saw now that underlying that seventeenth century culture which I so much admired lay the solid strength of the Christian tradition. It was in rejecting this that our civilisation had gradually fallen from its original greatness to its present state of decay.²⁹

On his return home, Griffiths had decided to take orders in the Church of England. His religiosity and change of demeanour strengthened the bond of affection between him and his mother while he relentlessly continued his asceticism and searching reading including the mystics William Law and Jacob Boehme. By now, though, he was something of a fish out of water. A short stint working at the Oxford Mission at Bethnal Green only deepened unbearably the inner conflict he suffered:

The life of prayer and austerity which I had been leading had increased my sensibility to an extreme degree, and I felt the presence of the surrounding world as a violent oppression. It was not simply a matter of sensibility. The life around attracted me; I felt that here was the human world which I loved; . . . But . . . I felt . . . a giant force opposed to all that I loved, ceaselessly beating against the doors of my mind, breaking down my resistance and driving out the spirit of prayer.³⁰

Griffiths describes in detail the remaining profoundly spiritual final steps of his conversion. We can read these as desolation of soul, the inspiration to repent, guidance by an interior voice and by Providence to an Anglo-Catholic retreat, confession, the surrender of the autonomy of his reason, continued unrest leading him to the works of the mystics, Tauler, Suso, Molinos and Hindu and Buddhist, all of which brought him back to live alone in the Cotswolds. Here, he learned to distinguish between the life of a solitary and that of a hermit and at this time, he was guided towards the former.³¹ His continuing conversion led into the depths of spiritual experience, and further self-renunciation.

²⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 186.

²⁹ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 90.

³⁰ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 101.

³¹ Barbara Millard whom he met at this time remained a good friend after her marriage and return to South Africa and Griffiths kept up a regular correspondence until her death a few years later from a horse-riding accident. See Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 119.

However, it is important to note that while Griffiths', Hugh's and Martyn's lives had permanently changed after their Cotswold experiment, which for Griffiths had meant regular reception of communion at the Church of England, the written word was also central to his conversion. Reading Aquinas' *Summa* introduced him to the "solid structure" of philosophy and theology and he was inspired by further reading of Augustine, John Chrysostom and T.S. Eliot. Finally, however, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of England* and Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*³² helped him overcome the "monster" that was his fear of the Catholic Church. Prayer had led him to the Anglo-Catholic retreat with the Cowley Fathers but Newman's *Development of Christian Doctrine* provided the bridge (along with the mediation of the Catholic priest of Winchcombe, Father Palmer) to nearby Prinknash Priory³³ and finally into the Catholic Church on Christmas Eve, 1931. A month after his entry into the Church,³⁴ Griffiths was received into the Prinknash community as a Benedictine novice and, significantly, chose the name Bede after the holy historian.

His choice of this name represents his appreciation of the historical process as a whole illuminated by Christ to be seen in the development of Christian thought and the inspired thought of other traditions throughout the ages. It is significant for his later proclamation of a new consciousness that includes the need for lay contemplative communities.

3. Monastic Community in England and Scotland

Prinknash gave Alan Griffiths the peace he had longed for.³⁵ He expected prayer in common, and the balanced life of the community centered on the daily sacrifice of the Mass to go on being for him along the ignominious lines he imagined as Jesus' hidden life at Nazareth. Art

³² The reading of these last two books introduced Griffiths to the history of the Catholic Church in England and induced him to conquer an ingrained fear of Roman Catholicism and visit the Catholic church at Newbury, though the experience was so alien, it served only to increase his fear. See Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 95 - 97.

³³ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 92 – 129. Prinknash Monastery was the Order of St Benedict, Subiaco Congregation following a "cenobitic" or communal life of prayer, work and hospitality.

³⁴ Alan's family were generally sympathetic in regard to his radical choice; his mother stoically accepted what he later admitted had wounded her. See Kathryn Spink, *A Sense*, 91.

³⁵ His brief experiment with the Cistercian Order on Caldey (from a continuing interest in extreme austerity) was a lesson for him in the meaning of humility and obedience and he never felt drawn to it again. See Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 134.

and music were not absent from the monastery,³⁶ and his correspondence with his friends, Hugh, Martyn and C.S.Lewis continued. A year after entry, he made his simple profession with the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and three years later, on 21st December, 1936, his final vows of stability, conversion of life and obedience in accordance with the Rule of St Benedict. About a year later, his mother, with whom he had kept up a close correspondence, died after a road accident in a car driven by one of his brothers. Griffiths describes how his focus on prayer with the goal of deep communion was at this time a source of spiritual consolation.³⁷ He took up further theological studies and in due course was ordained a priest on 9th March, 1940.³⁸

In his first 15 years of monastic seclusion, Griffiths was not entirely cut off. He enjoyed his conversation with the outside world as guest master. At the same time his reflection on Fascism, Nazism and Communism - as being an affirmation of community and a rejection of individualism, while denying to human beings the essential dignity of being an end in themselves - demonstrates his continued interest in world affairs.³⁹ He saw clearly that while (profoundly for him as a monk) "the community represented Christ," neither could "the individual . . . be sacrificed to the community."⁴⁰ On the other hand, he understood the essence of monastic life as love, "the total giving of oneself to another."⁴¹ And while monastic life was ordered to contemplation, he perceived contemplation as "the true end of every Christian life."⁴²

Throughout this time, Griffiths maintained his interest in the mystical traditions of other religions. The Hindu *Vedanta* in particular was an interest he and C.S. Lewis had shared, and he continued to investigate this tradition finding the idea of God as *saccitananda* (being, knowledge, bliss) in the writings of Shankara, comparable with that of

³⁶ Griffiths was an accomplished pianist and had also been a bit of an art connoisseur before his entry into the monastery. His taste in both areas of course accorded with his philosophical determination. He found the Plainchant deeply satisfying.

³⁷ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 146. See also, Kathryn Spink, *A Sense of the Sacred*, 98, and Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 78.

³⁸ The distinction between the calling to the monastic life and the priesthood were quite clear in Bede Griffiths' mind at the time. Later in life, he asserted the possible compatibility of the Catholic priesthood and marriage. In Kathryn Spink, *A Sense*, 97, Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 171.

³⁹ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 137.

⁴⁰ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 136, 137.

⁴¹ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 142.

⁴² Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 148. Griffiths understands contemplation here as, "a habit of mind which enables the soul to keep in a state of recollection in the presence of God whatever the work with which we are occupied."

St Thomas. Nevertheless, he rejected Shankara's understanding of material reality as purely 'maya' – an illusion.⁴³ While Griffiths believed that it required a "new Christian culture which would be able to make use of all the advances in modern science and history" to rebuild civilisation, he saw this in cross-cultural, inter-racial, global terms. Indeed steps which would "place the great philosophical systems of China and India in relation to the Gospel" he assessed as being comparable to the bridge formed between the Hebrew and Greek world-views through the use of the Greek *Logos* by the author of *The Gospel of John*.⁴⁴

Before the advent of the Second Vatican Council, Bede remained quietly immersed in his theological studies; he was already in touch with the biblical, liturgical and ecumenical movements. From the monastery during the 30s, 40s and 50s, articles he wrote on his hopes for Ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue were published in various reviews and periodicals, *PAX*, *Life of the Spirit*, *Blackfriars*, *Commonweal*, *The Tablet*.⁴⁵ In his first book of 1954, his is a prophetic voice. His Forward of the Second Edition carries a contradiction of the hope for a dialogue with science that he expressed in the earlier-written *Prologue* in the same book. Later, in touch with the newest insights in scientific thought, he was to revise this judgment yet again. This attests to his understanding of the integral relationship in his life's journey between experience and theological reflection.

In 1947, Griffiths was sent as prior to St Michael's Abbey in Farnborough.⁴⁶ It receives a bare mention in *The Golden String*. Nevertheless, Farnborough, where his hospitality and personal charism brought guests flocking to the monastery,⁴⁷ clearly demonstrates the kind of leadership he would exercise in Shantivanam. Especially though, this "ever-expanding circle of friends" represented the monastic ideal of an enrichment of

⁴³ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 172. Later, in India, Bede was to revise this estimate of Sankara's insight, becoming more sympathetic and coming to acknowledge a concept that was more subtle, than previously seen. See Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 17.

⁴⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 172 -174.

⁴⁵ Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 88, 89.

⁴⁶ Bede Griffiths was included in the group of twenty-five sent by the Prinknash Abbot, Wilfrid, who described them as "the cream of the community." See Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 84.

⁴⁷ For example, members of an Anglican group, the Taena community came out of interest as guests and were eventually all converted to Roman Catholicism. In the Ecumenical climate today with the sensitivity towards "poaching," this might draw criticism but it is clear that Griffiths exercised no coercion; rather, quite the reverse. See Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 85.

love.⁴⁸ Here he also met an Indian Benedictine, Father Benedict Alapatt, who interested him in the idea of starting a foundation in India.

In the midst of such enthusiasm, his time at Farnborough was cut short by the Abbot⁴⁹ and he was sent as Master of Novices in 1951, to Pluscarden, northern Scotland. The abrupt move distressed him. A letter to Martyn Skinner at this time uncharacteristically expresses deep hurt and that he had always been particularly sensitive to cold.⁵⁰ However, he soon recovered his philosophical demeanour and wrote *The Golden String*. He emphasises the centrality of Christ's sacrifice as "the central event of human history . . . the event which gives meaning to life," completing the narrative with a final emphasis on his commitment "to be alive to the needs of humankind . . . entering by prayer into the heart of that mystery of sacrifice by which the redemption of the world is achieved" and (from the Rule of St Benedict), to "share by patience in the sufferings of Christ, that we may deserve to be partakers of his kingdom."⁵¹

Towards the end of the narrative, he also writes, "We have to pass beyond all the images of the senses, beyond all the concepts of the mind, beyond ourselves, if we are really to find God."⁵² It is an indication of his state of readiness to go with Father Alapatt to India when the invitation was repeated at Pluscarden. Writing from Prinknash, Abbot Wilfred at first questioned the monk's motive. Believing he was "destined to go" to India, Griffiths responded by letter in obedience but also with persistence. Finally Abbot Wilfred agreed, while insisting that the Indian Archbishop would have to take full responsibility for the new foundation.

⁴⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 146.

⁴⁹ The tensions that preceded the transfer according to the next Abbot of Farnborough, Dyfrig Rushton, were on account of the economic instability of the foundation (an instability which existed prior to Griffiths' arrival there) and which demanded someone with a more practical orientation than Bede Griffiths. In Kathryn Spink, *A Sense of the Sacred*, 104. Shirley du Boulay provides a different explanation which accords with the later situation at Kurisumala. She puts the "ignominious dismissal" down to Bede being regarded as something of a cult figure, a leader who attracted too many people. See Shirley du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 94.

⁵⁰ In a letter to Martyn Skinner at this time, uncharacteristically, his feelings surfaced and he wrote of monastic life as, "a kind of crucifixion" and of a "profound disillusionment." See Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 97.

⁵¹ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 179, 184. Du Boulay's evocation of Griffiths' extraordinary charitable leadership with others even from an early stage is witnessed to by the experience the choir novice who suffered from epilepsy, John Ogilvie at Pluscarden. See *Beyond the Darkness*, 98.

⁵² Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 184.

Bede's trust in Providence was further tested. The move to India to set up an independent foundation required him to request formal exlaustration from Rome. This was a painful experience for him and although it amounted only to the expediency of temporary suspension of vows, it was misunderstood by some.⁵³

As well, the Archbishop of Bangalore refused to take responsibility for Bede Griffiths' or Benedict Alapatt's spiritual or material welfare and Alapatt had to apply to the Sacred Congregation for the Affairs of Religious in Rome. Having received this, on the 18th March, 1955, Father Benedict and Fr Bede sailed for Bombay in the S.S. Chusan.⁵⁴

4. Moving to India

For Dom Bede Griffiths, going to the place for which he had "already a deep love"⁵⁵ was "the most important event" of his life.⁵⁶ His established friendships continued over from England;⁵⁷ in India, Griffiths was to meet others who were attracted to his vision and who would become loyal, life-long companions. Community, expressive of communion was always the goal.

The first attempt to start a foundation at Kengeri in Bangalore where Griffiths stayed for two years did not succeed. The local bishop felt there would be competition with the existing Benedictine monastery in his diocese and Griffiths' attempt to point out that theirs would be different as it would be contemplative and self-sufficient did not convince him. As well, the area came under the jurisdiction of the Sacred Congregation for Propaganda in Rome which was advised by the Internuncio in Delhi who opposed the venture for various reasons (it had no mother house – any novices should be sent to Europe for training). Once again, in a spirit of obedience and humility, Griffiths assured his abbot that he was prepared to return to England. On the other hand, Griffiths' response was characteristic of his prophetic sensitivity: he canvassed a number of different possibilities convinced the

⁵³ Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 103 – 106.

⁵⁴ The day they were due to leave, a telegram arrived from the Archbishop of Bangalore, advising them not to come. Bede Griffiths accepted advice to ignore it. See Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 106. (Du Boulay and Peter Anson [who was there to see Bede off] differ on the departure date; Du Boulay has the 9th March.)

⁵⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Christian Ashram: Essays Towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1966), 16. (Henceforward, *Christian Ashram*.)

⁵⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 1.

⁵⁷ The correspondence which has been preserved as an archived resource in England and the US has already helped many scholars of Griffiths' life and thought.

“Golden String” had brought him to India for a purpose other than a soon to be terminated, remarkable (and rewarding) experience. Finally, he and Alapatt joined Father Francis Mahieu, a Belgian Cistercian monk who was trying to make a foundation at Kurisumala in Kerala. Griffiths had reassured Abbot Wilfred that they would be under a different Vatican department – the Congregation of Oriental Rites and that the foundation would be diocesan, neither Benedictine nor Cistercian.⁵⁸ The monastery they began continues today. Back at Kengeri, they had continued to wear the European monastic habit and even though Griffiths had achieved a further degree of asceticism, compared with the Indian poor their lifestyle was still privileged – luxurious. At Kurisumala, they adopted the ascetic tradition of the Indian Ashram.

Mass was conducted in the West Syrian Malankara rite in use in Southern India. Like Hindu *sannyasis* they wore the saffron *kavi*, and as was the custom among the poor, sat on the floor, ate with their hands and went barefoot. In community prayer they included aspects of the Indian contemplative tradition. It was a successful venture, with a large, productive community offering hospitality to many visitors,⁵⁹ to the degree it seems that Father Francis was concerned that the visitors were interfering with the monastic running of the place. After ten years, differences of approach between Bede and Francis resulted in a conflict of authority.⁶⁰ Griffiths accepted an invitation from Abhishiktananda (Henri le Saux)⁶¹ to take leadership of Saccidananda Ashram.

The founders were French priests, Monchanin (diocesan) and Le Saux (Benedictine), who had arrived in India in 1950. They were a model for Bede Griffiths in their pioneering efforts “to adapt monastic life in India to the traditional forms of Indian life and prayer.”⁶² (They were by no means the first. The Jesuit, De Nobili who had come to Goa from Rome, became a Christian *sannyasi* in 1607). For the next 25 years until his death in 1993, Griffiths

⁵⁸ Kerala has a strong Christian tradition dating back to 52AD when it is believed Thomas the Apostle landed at Cranganore and was later martyred in Chenei. The sixteenth century Jesuit missionary, St Francis Xavier, became known as Lord of Goa.

⁵⁹ Numbers increased after *The Golden String* was published. Griffiths’ translation of the Syrian liturgy aroused interest and he was invited to speak at conferences; though he declined the invitation to meet the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. See Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 134.

⁶⁰ Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 144. Kathryn Spink, *A Sense*, 147, 148.

⁶¹ Father Jules Monchanin (also known as Parama Arupi Ananda – “Bliss of the Supreme Spirit”) and Dom Henri Le Saux O.S.B. (Abhishiktananda – “Bliss of Christ”), two French priests, arrived in India in 1950, and founded Shantivanam Ashram. It was dedicated to the Holy Trinity. In 1957, Monchanin died and Le Saux went to live in a hermitage in the Himalayas. See Wayne Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction*, 165.

⁶² Wayne Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction*, 23.

took up his abode at Shantivanam (the Forest of Peace) in Tamil Nadu beside the sacred Cauvery River.

The tension arising from his need to proclaim in his own life and in his teaching, the message of the unity behind all diversity had brought him to India. It had first attracted him in a childhood friendship with Sikh soldiers; later this included the non-violence of Mahatma Gandhi.⁶³ Thirty years before, in *A Passage to India*, Forster's observation of the ambiguous relationship between the English and Indians has him make Fielding observe, "The world . . . is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another."⁶⁴ This sense of the need to "connect" was Alan Griffiths' formative experience with the Sikh friend who called him "little brother" and who felt at ease with him enough to remove his turban.⁶⁵ The inspiration to communicate more deeply beyond material and cultural limitations is a recurring theme, where he explores the purpose, the extent and the limits of image, symbol and sacrament. It is a movement into greater simplicity and transparency. In 1966, ten years after his arrival in the East, and in the immediate wake of Vatican 11, he published *Christian Ashram, Essays Towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue*⁶⁶ which considers the meeting of religions in the setting of India. At this point, he marks the ascetic tradition with its centre in the Ashram that is both basic to Hindu life and also comparable to the Christian contemplative tradition as the essential point of meeting.⁶⁷ Thus may be rediscovered in the West, the sense of the sacred, which is natural to Indian life.

Griffiths considers Raimon Panikkar's, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* significant, in the sense of all religion as being in a state of "continuous development" whereby growth should result from their meeting.⁶⁸ He also discusses the Syrian liturgy as an example of diversity, because its theological form differs from those relying on a Greek philosophical approach.⁶⁹ It is encompassed within the image of the organic whole, the body of Christ, expressive of unity, diversity and collegiality;⁷⁰ the concept of organic interdependency will become a central issue following his introduction later to *The Tao of Physics* and dialogue

⁶³ He always regretted having missed the opportunity to meet the Mahatma in London due to his spiritual crisis at Bethnal Green. See Bede Griffiths, *Christian Ashram*, Intro. 1.

⁶⁴ E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1985), 74.

⁶⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Christian Ashram*, 9.

⁶⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, Forward, 6.

⁶⁷ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 24, 25.

⁶⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 218.

⁶⁹ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 168, 182, 187, 240, 248.

⁷⁰ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 244.

with the new science. In the chapter on non-violence, *ahimsa*, he remembers the gospel of the early Church and the law of the Spirit.

So, from the very start he proclaims the need for a rebirth of civilisation through a meeting of East and West.⁷¹ All his later publications of books and lectures reiterate this message and take up the How and the Where and the Why. His recurring themes are the call of all things to unity in the One, and with it, the call to interior prayer.

Vedanta and Christian Faith, (1973 – the title is self-explanatory) was closely followed by *Return to the Centre* published ten years after *A Christian Ashram*. The “centre” is the *atman*, the core of each person, the discovery of which is at once a “return” because it is here that the soul is one with the Ultimate Other. Bede quotes Athanasius, “God became man that man might become God,” and John 17:21: “May they all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us.” He describes such “divinization” as a “work of grace” which nonetheless demands human co-operation.⁷²

Still in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, *Return to the Centre* was generally received very well. People came flooding in to the Ashram from the West. In 1982, *The Marriage of East and West: A Sequel to “the Golden String,”* had mixed reviews.⁷³ In regard to the central ideas expressed, particularly the significance of Hindu symbolism and imagery, the book was well ahead of its time and it was only much later that its value was properly appreciated. Griffiths first establishes the historical narrative link with *The Golden String* from his entry into India and the first venture at Kengeri,⁷⁴ then the move to Kurisumala Ashram in Kerala. He then seeks to convey his message. He describes the genius of the Semitic religions, notably the Muslim and Hebrew traditions, as insights into the utter transcendence of God, rather than God’s immanence in all of creation which is prominent in Christianity and Hinduism. The Christian tradition however conceives of a movement from wholly transcendent to transformation through God’s interpenetration of all creation; conversely the “Oriental” Hindu insight begins with God immanent in creation and ascends to the awareness of God’s infinite transcendence.⁷⁵ The great insight Hinduism has to share is the experience of God in the depths of the soul; the experience of unity in Ultimate

⁷¹ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 13.

⁷² Bede Griffiths, *Return* (Springfield Ill.: Templegate, 1994), 143,144.

⁷³ *Return to the Centre* had an unfavourable review by *The Tablet*, although the journalist later regretted such a negative report. See Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 186.

⁷⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 12.

⁷⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 17.

Reality, *saccidananda*, “being, consciousness, bliss.” The path involves entry into a “unified vision” through “the feminine intuitive awareness” where “the rational mind is no longer the master.” It is a view which Griffiths sees reflected in the modern Physics, where the Newtonian system of objectification has been exchanged for a paradigm of organic relationship.⁷⁶ These are the terms of reference in which the *Vedic* myths are to be understood; for the transforming undivided consciousness to which they give access, Raimundo Pannikar⁷⁷ provides his metonymic- synecdochic key, the “cosmotheandric principle.”⁷⁸

The evolution of the *Vedic* concept of an impersonal Ultimate Reality to the intuition of a personal loving God in the *Bhagavad Gita*, some one-and-a-half thousand years later, is compared with a similar evolution in the concept of God in the Hebrew Bible.⁷⁹ It has implications for Griffiths’ understanding of a “new consciousness” and the changes he sees as being essential for the Church. As images are the means by which the soul communicates with, and is informed from, the deepest spiritual core (Griffiths places the Jungian archetypal images in this area),⁸⁰ religious dialogue at this level is essential. Such a correspondence would enable the Hindu to understand “the real value of time and history” and “the cosmic event” of the Cross, and the Christian “that the Kingdom of God is not of this world.”⁸¹ It is in his rather complex correlation of images from the *Vedic* myth with those used to express the Trinity that Griffiths seeks to plumb the depths of the East West divide and find some firm common ground.

In prophetic voice, in order to avert global destruction in our day, Bede asserts the need for: integration in the West of masculine and feminine principles; the Church to go beyond historically conditioned doctrine and dogma; and interreligious dialogue.⁸²

The Cosmic Revelation is a collection of talks given at Conception Abbey, Missouri, which were intended “as nothing more than a popular introduction to the *Vedic* tradition for

⁷⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 27, 28.

⁷⁷ When he first came to India, Griffiths studied Sanskrit with Panikkar and they formed a deep theological sympathy. See Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 13.

⁷⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 30. See also, Gerard Hall, *Raimon Panikkar’s Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism*. Thesis for the Degree in Doctor of Philosophy (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1993), 349, 353.

⁷⁹ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 108-116.

⁸⁰ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 162.

⁸¹ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 182, 188.

⁸² Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 130, 144-150, 196-191.

those who have no previous knowledge of it.”⁸³ It includes a final chapter, “Christian Revelation,” which is a synthesis of thought relevant for Hindu/Christian dialogue.

The *River of Compassion* published in 1987, responds to the need for such dialogue. Unlike the previous book, though, it is directly the result of talks given to the members of the Shantivanam ashram which were taped and transcribed. It is a Christian commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, intended not as an academic work but “a practical guide . . . to anyone who is in search of a guide on the spiritual path.”⁸⁴ As such, it deals with some concepts more familiar to the lay person, such as *kundalini yoga*, re-incarnation, devotional love – *bhakti*, non-dualism - *advaita*, and work/activity. According to Shankara’s interpretation, because it only appears that Brahman acts, a person must go beyond *karma*, beyond action to reach God whereas in the *Gita* – though eternally inactive, God always acts. As the action in the world comes from One who is immutable, it can be interpreted as sacrifice and clearly this is significant for Christians. As well, it teaches detachment and contemplation. To reach Brahman is to come to the personal God, Krishna.⁸⁵ This concept of sacrifice, in faith, together with the idea of the whole universe as the body of God, provides a basis here for Christian theological reflection.⁸⁶

The last major publication that belongs to this section is, *A New Vision of Reality; Western Science, Eastern Mysticism and Christian Faith*, of 1989. Again, this is the result of transcribed tape-recorded talks given at Shantivanam. To read the list of people whom Griffiths thanks in the brief “Forward” is instructive: Fritjof Capra, Ken Wilber, Rupert Sheldrake, Michael von Brück and Dr Felicity Edwards from Rhodes University.

Griffiths brings together in the concept expressed in this book of a new humanity made possible by change of consciousness, Capra’s reasoning of a paradigm shift in the world of science, Ken Wilber’s⁸⁷ transpersonal consciousness defined as a “spectrum of

⁸³ Bede Griffiths, in the Preface to *The Cosmic Revelation: The Hindu Way to God* (Springfield, Ill.: Templegate). (Henceforward, *Cosmic Revelation*.)

⁸⁴ Bede Griffiths, in Commentary to *River of Compassion: A Christian Commentary on the Bhagavad Gita* (New York: Amity House, 1987). (Henceforward, *River*)

⁸⁵ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 69, 70.

⁸⁶ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 205, 300.

⁸⁷ According to Dr Kenneth Ring, Professor Psychology, University of Connecticut, Ken Wilber provides “a major contribution to our understanding of the development of consciousness.” What Wilber names as “transpersonal” are the subtle and causal realms of consciousness, towards which humankind is growing as a whole and which some individuals separately realize. See Ken Wilber, *The Atman Project: A Transpersonal View of Human Development* 2nd ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Quest Books, 1996). (Henceforward, *Atman Project*.) Griffiths believed Wilber’s work to be equally

consciousness,” and recent exploration by the West of mysticism in Eastern religions. According to the new paradigm, the whole cosmos is understood as a complex web of interdependent relationships. His overview of the development of consciousness from this theological perspective is especially insightful. He considers the role of image and symbol and their relative effectiveness, for example, the “face” of God in relation to the intrinsic connection of revelation and experience.⁸⁸ He explores this image in the Old Testament, and also in Christian mysticism. He finds Ruysbroeck’s idea of the human person as *ikon* of God in an archetypal sense, comparable with a similar teaching from the Sufi mystic, Ibn al Arabi.⁸⁹

We can see how this connects with his defining moment, the early numinous event when he experiences nature as sacramental; and his rejection of the kind of disfigurement that impedes such sacramental experience. He proclaims a vision of a new kind of decentralised society based on communion understood within a spiritual context, rather than the materialism which has undergirded a particular stage - already run down and fast fragmenting⁹⁰ - of humankind’s journey. The kinds of images which can nourish and communicate this vision are holistic; clearly it has ramifications for secular and church organizations. It demands a return to the ancient perennial wisdom⁹¹ and is especially sensitive to “the feminine.”⁹² The prophetic note in *The Marriage of East and West* attains greater urgency.

5. The Ever-larger community

Griffiths had been reading the *Vedanta* before he moved to India. His immediate observation on his arrival of the “swarming mass of humanity”⁹³ convinced him that the vivid colour and spontaneity which most impressed him arose from the unconscious mind uninhibited by the domination of the “animus” as in the West. It confirmed him in the path

significant for today as was Freud’s and Jung’s in their time. See Bede Griffiths, *East and West the Mystical Connection with Father Bede Griffiths*, in an Interview by Michael Toms, New Dimensions Media, 20 September 1983.

⁸⁸ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 204 – 226.

⁸⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 123, 240, 248.

⁹⁰ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 279, 283.

⁹¹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 286.

⁹² Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 46, 294.

⁹³ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 8.

he seemed to be following. It convinced him that: he was still holding the end of The Golden String; and that he was being led by Christ.

Griffiths' leadership of the Ashram involved a continuing tension in his attempt to reconcile the cenobitic and the eremitic monastic life in a single community. As basically a Benedictine community, it had most in common with more modern flexible Camaldolese communities. In 1980, Bede Griffiths became a Camaldolese and the Shantivanam community entered the congregation in 1982. Even then his concept of small contemplative communities which mixed lay people and monastics raised concerns.⁹⁴ Understanding *advaita* in the sense of the many, or the diversity, or the multiplicity being present in the one "in a mysterious way," was "extremely important."⁹⁵ The following words, from interviews by John Swindells in 1992, mark the central theme of Griffiths' thought which becomes pronounced after his stroke and "discovery of the feminine."

The event occurred on January 25th, 1990. He experienced what felt like a blow to the head with a sledgehammer and was diagnosed as having suffered a stroke. To Bede Griffiths, however, it was the hand of God. He described it as a "breakthrough to the feminine"; the experience of being "overwhelmed by love" which followed seemed to be conditionally determined by the sudden suppression of the "left-brain."⁹⁶ Over the next two years, his friends described a change of demeanour, an increase in vitality, energy, personal warmth, of joy. Instead of slowing, aged 84 he was galvanised by invitations to give interviews and talks, into a succession of world trips. In Australia, he was able to enjoy the company of the Dalai Lama who happened to be visiting at the same time. His vision of unity appears to have been realised in his own life as an experience of personal integration⁹⁷ and connectedness with all the world.

While his thoughts seemed to have crystallised, he nevertheless became more impatient with what he regarded as worn out, irrelevant church structures and customs.⁹⁸ He emphasised the Trinity "as key to the understanding of life"⁹⁹ but knowledge of the

⁹⁴ Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 249.

⁹⁵ Bede Griffiths, *A Human Search*, 90.

⁹⁶ Bede Griffiths, *A Human Search*, 88, 89.

⁹⁷ Bede Griffiths, *A Human Search*, 97, 98.

⁹⁸ Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 254.

⁹⁹ Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 91.

Trinity had to be informed by the deep intuitions of Eastern religions – “The problem is to learn to go beyond a masculine patriarchal God, which we’ve still got in Christianity.”¹⁰⁰

In America, at this time, Bede Griffiths together with a group of close friends (or disciples), Russill and Asha Paul d’Silva, Wayne Teasdale and Sr Pascaline Coff, experimented with a form of contemplative community life. Finally, it seems, they opted for what could be called a “community of the spirit” because for such a diverse group, a sustained traditional monastic life was not practicable. He visited Sr Pascaline Coff, Benedictine Sister of Perpetual Adoration who had founded a monastery at Oklahoma modeled on her experience of Shantivanam, and found it a place of peace and solitude. When Dom Bede Griffiths died on the 13th May, 1993, he was in his home at Shantivanam, surrounded by his “family”, Christudas, Sister Marie-Louise, Russill Paul de Silva and other intimate companions.

An exploration and analysis of his images of God must consider the whole thrust of his concern for the unity of East and West and the network of small contemplative communities which he envisages as a necessary corollary.

An outstanding characteristic in Griffiths’ life is his recognition of the contribution of others. Today, where specialisation is unavoidable, celebration of diversity is key. The imposition of uniformity by censure or violence would certainly be opposed to his vision where the goal is unity in diversity, and freedom is at issue.

The simple structuring of Griffiths’ quest gives some indication of his sense of journeying in God. Christ, the Golden String, is at once, the journey, partner and leader. It reveals a conscious movement towards integration and transformation which inspired and motivated him to go beyond the horizon limits, geographical, physical, psychological and spiritual.

Conclusion

Part 1 began by following the narrative structure of Griffiths’ life’s journey. This chapter has chronologically situated the significant events and his main publications and introduced the central image, the “Golden String.” Beginning with the revelation of God in nature as his defining numinous experience, it holistically connects the other peak moments: the Cotswold discovery of the Word in Scripture; conversion to Christ and entry to monastic life;

¹⁰⁰ Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 159.

the move to India and realization of a more inclusive reality as a *sannyasi* in Indian; and his late integrating experience at Shantivanam. All are decisive for his journey. This evolutionary process reflects his Benedictine identity, underscored by his assumption of the name Bede, with the central contemplative, communitarian and historical dimensions. I find in his prophetic tone and interest in *advaita* his primary call to unity and contemplative prayer, which he defines as a “marriage of East and West.” Implicated in this is his insistence on: the importance of the “feminine”; celebration of diversity; and openness to encounter all of life which he identifies with Christ, “the Golden String.” To begin with, we explore his openness to encounter with respect to his “dialogue companions.” This is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Companions for the Journey

Introduction

Griffiths' partners in the theological dialogue are central to his journey, providing, as they do, support, challenge and further motivation to "go beyond." They are most relevant to the last two sections of the chapter above, "moving to India," and "the ever-larger community," and to the focus in this thesis on Griffiths' mature theology. Certain aspects of Bede's theology are comparable with theirs: the individual life experience; movement in history; evolution of the consciousness; divine out-going and return; movement towards the Eschaton; and infinite continuation.

We now turn to examine their influence under the headings:

1. Raimon Panikkar and Sri Aurobindo
2. Karl Rahner
3. Gregory of Nyssa
4. Bernard Lonergan

1. Raimon Panikkar and Sri Aurobindo

Raimon Panikkar and Sri Aurobindo are most immediate in terms of geographic proximity. At the start of Bede's life in India, he and Panikkar established a friendship and correspondence specifically in Mumbai – then, Bombay. Sri Aurobindo died in 1950, five years before Griffiths arrived there. Griffiths is overtly conscious of, and grateful for, the largesse of their ideas. Of Sri Aurobindo, in *Return to the Centre*, he says:

In him the values of being and becoming, of Spirit and matter, of the One and the many, of the eternal and the temporal, of the universal and the individual, of the personal God and the absolute Godhead, are integrated in a vision of the whole, which has never been surpassed in depth and comprehensiveness.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Bede Griffiths, *Return*, 137.

With Panikkar on the other hand there continued a reciprocal correspondence. In Kodaikkanal, in 1989, Panikkar wrote the introduction to the German edition of Griffiths' *A New Vision of Reality*.¹⁰² In fact, one might take this short introduction as exemplifying, though in a nutshell, key aspects of similarity and difference in their understanding of "journey."¹⁰³ Panikkar for his part, states that their "personal communion" which is "oftentimes at a physical distance . . . does not preclude spiritual closeness."¹⁰⁴

Sri Aurobindo's personal history demonstrates an interesting parallel with Griffiths' in that opportunities afforded by natural gift and circumstance provided the basis for a unique articulation of later deep intuitions coming through immersion in the spiritual traditions of India.

Son of an Indian doctor resident in Calcutta, in the late nineteenth century, at age six, Aurobindo Ghose was sent to England. Here he received fourteen years of classical education finally emerging from King's College Cambridge, having mastered along the way Latin, Greek, French, German and Italian while wholly deprived of an Indian tradition. His re-entry into India seems to have initiated a spiritual change and growth which continued throughout the rest of his life during which there were four pronounced conversion experiences.

The first was of a divine all-pervasive intimacy that he expressed as "the Immanent inhabiting material objects and bodies."¹⁰⁵ He taught in colleges, involved himself in Indian Nationalism and began to practice yoga at which time he had further *advaitic/Vedantic* experiences that continued even into a year spent in prison when he was falsely accused of helping instigate a bomb fatality. Soon after being acquitted, he moved to Pondicherry where he established an ashram dedicating himself to religious life. This change was motivated by "inner voices." In Pondicherry between 1910 and 1926 he underwent other major transformative spiritual experiences. The third which pre-dated his major writings was of the Supreme Reality, the One as both unity and multiplicity. The fourth was of what he called the "Overmind" which seems to have been most profoundly unitive.

¹⁰² The English translation was given to the Bede Griffiths' Trust by Roland Roper in 1994.

¹⁰³ See page 48 below.

¹⁰⁴ Raimon Panikkar in the Introduction to the German edition of *A New Vision of Reality*, Trans. Roland Roper, Kodaikkanal, 1989.

¹⁰⁵ Diane Collinson, *Thirty-Five Oriental Philosophers*. Online Book (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1994, accessed 30 January 2008), 93. "Letters on Yoga," Vol. 22, 121; available from <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/australiancathu/Doc?id=10017774&ppg=99>; Internet.

Inspired by these spiritual experiences and with the benefit of a classical Western education, Sri Aurobindo structured a philosophy on the *Upanisadic* tradition to articulate his understanding of the meaning of existence. For him the linear appearance of history is related to a deeper “unfolding” which is none other than Brahman whose manifestation comes about slowly through evolutionary consciousness.¹⁰⁶

Arguing from the Absolute freedom of Brahman, One/True, neither being nor non-being (*sat*), Sri Aurobindo sees in matter the free out-going of Brahman who “delights in realizing the infinity of possibilities inherent in its nature.”¹⁰⁷ Because of Absolute delight (*ananda*), there exists a created universe that has real value. Underlying change in creation is Absolute consciousness/force (*cit*). To show all terms are one and the same Brahman, Sri Aurobindo uses the synonym *satcitananda*.¹⁰⁸

In the evolution of consciousness, pain and evil will ultimately be transcended. The created universe with its conceptual limitations will be transcended. What we now regard as human nature will be transcended, “replaced by ‘a supreme consciousness and an integral awareness.’”¹⁰⁹ Griffiths points out that Aurobindo’s genius sees, not dissolution of differences in the ultimate which is the usual Indian idea, but rather, that “the divine consciousness penetrates the whole of creation and integrates the whole in a final state of transcendence.”¹¹⁰

For human nature, such a complete transformation depends on human co-operation. Three stages are necessary: a psychic transformation which for the individual necessitates a passing from the surface ego to the real self or true soul; a spiritual transformation which involves “an invasion of the infinite”;¹¹¹ and finally, the supra-mental transformation or “descent of the Supermind” which is sheer gift and eventuates in “gnostic

¹⁰⁶ In *A New Vision of Reality*, 25-27, 92-95, Griffiths names Sri Aurobindo as one in “modern times” who shares with Teilhard de Chardin insight into the evolution of the whole universe towards the “ultimate point,” de Chardin’s “Omega Point.” For India, Aurobindo incorporates the concept into the Hindu vision. There are correlations with Bohm’s “implicate order” and the thought of Ken Wilber which will become more apparent as the thesis progresses.

¹⁰⁷ This links up with Beatrice Bruteau following Gregory of Nyssa with whose work Griffiths was very familiar. On the “enstatic”, “ecstatic” life of the Trinity, see the chapter, *Imago Dei*.

¹⁰⁸ Jesu Rajan, *Bede Griffiths and Sannyasa*, 81. Rajan attributes the origin of the term to Brahmabandhav Upadhyay, one who in Rajan’s words, “was far ahead of his time” and had he been encouraged “could have contributed considerably to the creation of an Indian Christian Theology and *sannyasic* life.” Upadhyay died at the age of 47 in 1907. *Bede Griffiths and Sannyasa*, 82-83.

¹⁰⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*. See Diane Collinson, *Thirty-Five Oriental Philosophers*, 637.

¹¹⁰ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 92.

¹¹¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*. See Diane Collinson, *Thirty-Five Oriental Philosophers*, 28.

being” for want of better conceptual expression. Gnostic being has “intuitive awareness . . . ‘able to see and grasp things by direct contact and penetrating vision’ (and) a holy will . . . spontaneously and with delight doing what is ‘right.’”¹¹²

Despite the profundity and optimism of this philosophy, Collinson points to inconsistencies in Aurobindo’s philosophy. She questions the premise of Brahman’s self-manifestation through such enormous suffering and the suffering of individuals who lack insight. She maintains that the Sri Aurobindian philosophy has no answer for such questions.¹¹³

A further point of disagreement is directly related to Griffiths’ commendation of Aurobindian thought. Hindu scholar, Amal Kiran (K.D. Sethna) disagrees with Griffiths’ equating the transformed body of the resurrected Christ both with the “diamond” body of Buddhist tradition, and the transformation of the body through the transformative power of the Supermind referred to by Sri Aurobindo.

The issues Amal Kiran raises¹¹⁴ demonstrate a difference between Griffiths’ and Panikkar’s approach. Panikkar criticizes a lack of clarity on Griffiths’ part when comparing different epistemologies, whether of religion or other systems. In most instances, Panikkar agrees with the conclusion. However, as Griffiths increasingly moves towards a more tangential and intuitive way of expression he risks being misinterpreted or having his ideas distorted.¹¹⁵

Panikkar’s abstract for the eighth lecture of the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh of 1998/9 shows how closely his ideas of a transcendent way of being correspond to the Sri Aurobindonian vision. In this provocative abstract, Panikkar asks:

¹¹²Diane Collinson, *Thirty-Five Oriental Philosophers*, 35. The author believes Kant’s use of “a holy will” describes this state.

¹¹³Diane Collinson, *Thirty-Five Oriental Philosophers*, 35.

¹¹⁴ Kiran points out the fact of Jesus’ death; he states that neither Jesus nor his followers conceived of an evolutionary goal, for the individual or for history, or of a sustained mystical development. He refers to Griffiths’ description of the risen Christ: “Has any saint or Yogi obtained a body comparable to ‘the body of Christ,’ which is no longer limited by space and time”? See Kiran Sethna, “Aspects of Sri Aurobindo” (Waterford, CT.: *The Integral Life Foundation*, 1955). See also, Bede Griffiths, *Return*, 138. I believe Kiran’s perspective either disregards or is ignorant of, on the one hand, the different modes of appearance of the risen Christ as witnessed in Christian Scripture and, on the other, Christian acceptance of the authority of Christian tradition developing under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

¹¹⁵ This could happen for example, in the case of Griffiths’ concept of a Christian “qualified *advaita*” compared with the Hindu eighth century philosopher Shankara’s concept of *advaita*.

Is it possible to live a truly “religious” life, a full human existence while transcending all theisms? The answer is yes. Worship persists, but free from idolatry. Prayer remains, but free from superstitions and being a projection of human frustrations. Love is not split into service of God and concern for our fellow-beings. The “presence of God” is not an act of the memory or the will. The Sacred and/or the Holy are then purified of all taboos. Each being recovers its dignity and human freedom is not reduced to making choices. Ethics finds its basics in the very nature of Being. Human knowledge does not need to be divorced from sacred knowledge, and the vexing conflict between reason and faith, Science and Religion is dissolved. True piety does not disappear, and humanism is no longer anthropocentric. The rift between philosophy and theology is healed and all sciences rediscover their proper ontology. Furthermore the experience of the divine dimension is compatible with different ideas about the Deity according to the diverse religious traditions of humankind which are then seen as concrete expressions of the deeper cosmotheandric intuition. We are Divine as much as the Divine is Human – without confusion and division.¹¹⁶

Such a vision of what it will mean for humanity living a *cosmotheandric*¹¹⁷ unity must surely include the exercise of other capacities which are a hidden, but more than mere human potential. Rather, they will be a realisation of the divine, the gift of promise, cherished in a faith that is “previous to its articulations in beliefs and belief-systems.”¹¹⁸ As with Sri Aurobindo’s insight, our co-operation is necessary for claiming the vision to instigate its realisation as a present reality. Indeed “the temporal eschatology of an Omega point in a linear future, ultimately only postpones the final end.”¹¹⁹

Evolution in a linear historical time is not the whole story. Like the warp and woof of a loomed fabric, the vertical factor is inextricably inter-woven in the whole.¹²⁰ Ultimately, transcendence of material reality, the total transformation of the whole of creation, means possession of divine life, a complete transformation into the divine, a “return” to that from which all has originated but with a difference, the enriched delight of creation become conscious and divinised. All that is of time will be made over to the divine because “the

¹¹⁶ Raimon Panikkar in the Abstract to “Trinity and atheism: the housing of the Divine in the Contemporary World” (The University of Edinburgh: Gifford Lectures 1988/89) Lecture 8, P6. This has recently been published as *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010).

¹¹⁷ Raimon Panikkar invented this synecdochic expression precisely as symbolic of the life to which we are called according to his explication given here.

¹¹⁸ Raimon Panikkar, Abstract 10, p 7.

¹¹⁹ Raimon Panikkar, Abstract 10, p 7.

¹²⁰ The section of the thesis, “Imago Dei” in “EXPLORATION”, demonstrates a strong connection with Ken Wilber’s thought and the integration of vertical and horizontal movement of Spirit.

rhythm is not eternal return, but tempiternity.”¹²¹ This has implications for the Indian belief in re-incarnation. Griffiths’ answer to this interreligious question is dealt with in the chapter, “Divine Lord.”

Sri Aurobindo’s philosophical system, based as it is on the *Upanisadic* but with a further interpretation of *advaita*, integrates what Panikkar names¹²² as the triple horizon of the divine – the cosmological, the anthropological and the ontological. The whole encompasses the goal of humanity and, in Panikkar’s terms, is expressed as a new paradigm which is the only way forward for the changed human consciousness of this new epoch.

Similarly, Griffiths’ life represents a search for confirmation of the synthesis he believes underlies apparent divergencies among religions, cultures, and structures of knowledge. It is a synthesis he began to explore when he first became aware and took hold of “the golden string” in the numinous, life-changing experience one afternoon as a high-school student. He comes to understand it more and more as a synthesis of relationship rather than of images and ideas, a synthesis based on a common humanity and a common call to self-transcendence. Shared images even when varying in interpretation because of diverse cultures may still be evocative vehicles for dialogue when they represent such core human characteristics. For Griffiths, the basis of this synthesis that rests on relationship is the Trinity, while the Eucharist, the worshipful celebration of creation consecrated in Christ, is supreme symbol of the Trinitarian vision and sacrament of its Life.

Like Griffiths, Panikkar holds community as all-important. Importantly, the community in which the new consciousness must be born and nurtured is one where individual religiousness centred in the individual conscience would be paramount. It is not here yet, because, as both Griffiths and Panikkar agree, the state of world cultures each struggling with a complete loss of the originating myth is quite chaotic.¹²³

¹²¹ Raimon Panikkar, Abstract 10, P 7. This is Panikkar’s own word to express that, “the eternal is not outside but inside the temporal. The world is not an illusion if it is seen for what it really is.” See Raimon Panikkar, *The Trinity and World Religions, Icon-Person-Mystery*, “Inter-Religious Dialogue Series”: No. 4 (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1970) 649. While incorporating in the *rhythm of the universe* the insights of modern science and technological development, Panikkar argues that nature exhibits, in Christ, a becoming that takes it beyond the purely entropic towards an eschatological fulfillment. See Gerard Hall, *Raimon Panikkar’s Hermeneutics*, 22-40.

¹²² Raimon Panikkar, *The Experience of God Icons of the Mystery*, Joseph Cunneen, Trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 33-38.

¹²³ Raimon Panikkar, “The Religion of the Future” in *Interculture*, Volume xxiii, Number 2 Spring 1990/Issue # 107. 17. See also, Bede Griffiths, “East and West the Mystical Connection with Father Bede Griffiths.”

In this, the new understanding of religion which is called for is not about a set of objective beliefs or of any particular vision of the final transcendent state. Religion, rather, is seen as symbol for the core human self-conscious search for meaning and reaching towards self-transcendence; it is “the dimension of ultimacy in the human being.”¹²⁴ The prime attitude people must assume in the new human communities is more than religious tolerance. It will be the recognition of the need for “mutual fecundation”¹²⁵ of different cultures for the sake of human survival.

It is not that there is any suggestion of collapsing all religious systems and spiritualities into a syncretistic mass or of seeking the kind of synthesis that creates a comfortable blend of spiritualities at a superficial level; nor is it only to gain through such mutual sharing a valuable (more-so essential) deeper appreciation of the absolute truth of one’s own particular religion. The strength of the new community will be a profound acknowledgement of the very freedom implied in the dignity of being human. Panikkar uses the image of different instruments in a symphony to express the relational aspect of cultures and religions having a single unifying “myth.”

The solution for humankind’s present perilous state is engagement in “dialogical dialogue.”¹²⁶ This can only authentically take place in the recognition of humanity’s need to relate to the whole of reality with the human centre, the earth centre and the divine centre. These are not discrete realities but inter-related, indeed, interpenetrating aspects of a larger whole. Furthermore, such a community can be realised only in the concrete of the actual language and day to day exigencies of the local scene. It requires a new methodology, one that is more than rational as it involves the heart.

It is not difficult to see why Panikkar writes that he and Griffiths shared a deep communion of the spirit.

Beginning with Shantivanam but extending further to some experimentation based on his mature vision for lay-contemplative communities that would multiply throughout the world, Griffiths demonstrates a comparable intent. One could infer that the new methodology Panikkar speaks of is seen to be articulated to some extent in the day by day

¹²⁴ Raimon Panikkar, “The Religion”, 107, 15.

¹²⁵ Raimon Panikkar, “The Religion”, 107, 11.

¹²⁶ Raimon Panikkar “The Religion”, 107, 11. See also, Gerard Hall, “Intercultural and Interreligious Hermeneutics: Raimon Panikkar.” See the Australian Ejournal of Theology, Issue 1 (12 February 2002) accessed 12 January 2008. Available from <http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/theology@mcauley.htm>

living at Shantivanam during the time that Bede was there as *sannyasi*. There is a difference in Panikkar's and Griffiths' approach which is pointedly just one of methodology. For Panikkar, the possibility of unexpected agreement in intuition and ideas is certainly held. However, like the steps that establish the proof of a mathematical conclusion, "dialogical" insists not only on clear and coherent enunciation of the multi-faceted aspects, the interwoven threads of a founding myth, but equally clear and coherent articulation of the steps of approach that may bring together aspects or patterns in a parallel view, or in even more harmonious comparison,¹²⁷ or otherwise that reveal an antithetical relationship. Such steps include precision in delineating various linguistic points of reference. This is not Griffiths' main concern. In fact he critiques Wayne Teasdale's method as being too restrictive.¹²⁸ Leaving space for openness to change is intended in Griffiths' theological method. He quotes Newman: "To live is to change and to live long is to change many times." Griffiths continues: "Change is growth. And to grow continuously is to change."¹²⁹

A human being is on the one hand called to unity, on the other he/she is being in relationship. Both are integrated in the authentic life which is "life according to the Spirit . . . (who) teaches man (sic) that he is not an I (*ego*) but a thou (*te*)."¹³⁰ Life in community as both Griffiths and Panikkar envisage, will reflect this openness in relationship to the mystery of another because it will be lived in the knowledge that for every single person, "to be true to ourselves means also to be truthful to the shaping of the universe just by being, that is by becoming what we really are called upon to be."¹³¹

Clearly such a community must practice and daily exercise above all, courage and patience (which would include forgiveness). Indeed, it would be well guided by Bernard Lonergan's transcendental precepts, "be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be

¹²⁷ Griffiths' comparison of Christian and Hindu renunciation, (*sannyasa*) which is part of the Christian and the Hindu tradition is one such "homeomorphic equivalent," (Panikkar's term). See Chapter 4, Section 3, Engagement in India's Journey.

¹²⁸ Griffiths says, "He's too Cartesian really. . . . He wants to arrange everything. . . . He's got it all mapped out in a way I wouldn't accept." See "An interview with Bede Griffiths," by Fr Charles Brandt, March 3, 1989. Available from The Bede Griffiths' Archives.

¹²⁹In "An Interview with Bede Griffiths." The source of Cardinal Newman's original quotation, "to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often," is, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter One, Section I.7 See

<http://www.cardinalnewmansociety.net/theology.html> (accessed 8 February 2011).

¹³⁰ Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity*, 1970, 63, 64.

¹³¹ Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity*, 793. In fact it is just this "being there" and "becoming" that Panikkar believes is Griffiths' extraordinary gift.

responsible, be loving.”¹³² Perhaps it is telling that Griffiths, who emphasizes a number of times Karl Rahner’s immense contribution to theology, neglects Lonergan’s whose concern for an appropriately enhanced methodology for theology in our times is in a way more comparable with Panikkar.

In his Preface to the German edition of Griffiths’ *A New Vision of Reality*, which he ironically deems “An Old Vision of Reality,” Panikkar highlights its best qualities. These are: “the fruit of a whole life search,” that is, its providing the “metaphor” of contemporary science; the “clear synthesis of some of the major traditions of the world”; access for “the average reader . . . (to) an integrated spirituality”; and the idea of a “new age” which is “unambiguously” defined as a “new culture.” At the same time, “to deepen and continue the dialogue,” Panikkar provides an addendum which generally questions the logic of Griffiths’ methodology and the seeming inconsistencies this introduces to his argument. Similarly, he finds a lack of clarification in his presentation of the “*philosophia perennis*” and his presentation of Teilhard de Chardin’s sense of evolution.¹³³ Panikkar suggests that the apparent discord between these two philosophical approaches is neglected or side-stepped and does not disguise what he thinks is their “profound incompatibility.” Finally, he questions Griffiths’ clarity of articulation of Christianity in “the new age” that he describes. Panikkar celebrates the visionary contribution Griffiths brings to the dialogue but questions the dialogical quality of his methodology.

Nevertheless, this critique is not intended negatively but rather, as Panikkar points out, to extend the dialogue. In *The Trinity of Love*, Anthony Kelly, pursuing the work of Lonergan, writes that “there is an uncanny ‘more’ in the experience of the mystic, the artist, the martyr, the prophet, the great thinker,” and Panikkar clearly places Griffiths in this category for (to borrow Kelly’s words) he is one of those who, “dramatize in their lives what all of us experience more dimly or admiringly in our own.” Because of his life, “questions stir about the nature of the universe itself”¹³⁴ It is Panikkar who links the founders of

¹³² Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972), 4 – 13, 26, 231. (Henceforward, *Method*.)

¹³³ Panikkar questions whether Griffiths has simply muddied the waters through imprecision, or whether he has actually intuited something new. This question is explored later in Ch 6, *The Imago Dei*.

¹³⁴ Anthony Kelly, *The Trinity of Love*, 152.

Shantivanam, through their common witness as “martyrs.”¹³⁵ They are “giants” who though “roman catholic” (sic) are “so bold, so free, so fearless.” Panikkar deems a unique tolerance to be Swami Dayananda’s¹³⁶ “extraordinary gift . . . he did not judge anybody or anything,” and it is proof and seal of his “full resurrection.”¹³⁷

The strength of Griffiths’ approach, centered as it is in a particular mode of community, is the continual stimulation of questioning. This focus bears directly on the next of Griffiths’ journey partners.

2. Karl Rahner

Shantivanam was for Griffiths, Church operative in the best sense. And yet so many who came considered themselves to varying degrees alienated from the institutional church. It is quite clear that Griffiths is encouraged by the kind of understanding Rahner extended towards questioners such as these.

Rahner points out that speculative questioning is always present for professed members of the Church. He describes the reason for and the challenge of “critical questions” as something connected with the limitations of every human life. In the present era, it is more pronounced:

We are confronted with the immense complexity of our existence, with an immense pluralism among the philosophies of life and the problems and findings of the sciences . . . with the multiplicity of our experiences of life. . . . And in view of all this it is obvious from the outset that our ultimate commitment of faith is always surrounded by an incalculable range of questions which we have not yet positively solved, mastered, or reduced to a positive synthesis within this commitment of faith in any effective sense.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Panikkar includes five in this special tribute: Jules Monchanin, the founder of *saccidananda ashram* - “cenobium” of the Holy Trinity, he identifies with a “trinitarian leadership”; Abishiktananda, whom he calls “the transformer”; and Griffiths, “the reformer.” He also includes, Father Lambert of the Mother of God (1912-1968) who was both Carmelite and *sannyasa*, and Francis Achyra, founder of Kurisumala ashram. See Raimon Panikkar, “A Tribute to Fr Bede,” *Ashrama Aikiya Newsletter*, “Special Issue in Memory of Dom Bede Griffiths,” No 28. September, 93, 20.

¹³⁶ On his consecration as *sanyassi*, Dayananda, or Bliss of Compassion, was the name chosen by Griffiths.

¹³⁷ Raimon Panikkar, “A Tribute to Fr Bede,” 21, 22.

¹³⁸ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigation*, Vol. 12, Trans., David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 150, 151.

Questioning can be painful and frustrating and yet no matter how deep it is, it should not and cannot separate someone from that which is so profoundly part of who he/or she is.¹³⁹

Paradoxically, those who considered themselves alienated from the Church or from church generally and came as seekers to The Forest of Peace, came in goodwill to someone who was unquestionably representative of the Catholic Church; someone who chose to wear the compassionate face of Church due to his consistent and radical exercise of the gift of tolerance.¹⁴⁰ Whether or not visitors had engaged in a self-inflicted soul-destroying separation, “allowed (themselves) to be manoeuvred into that kind of questioning which is destructive of (their) lives,”¹⁴¹ Griffiths’ hospitality extended to them all a total absence of reproach. Rahner advises gentleness towards all who undergo “the purgatory of doubt and questioning” and in particular towards those who have vainly struggled and fallen. However he warns that this should not mistakenly indulge the cowardice of others who refuse to endure the unresolved tensions in relation to the Church.¹⁴²

Rahner distinguishes two kinds of future, a “this-worldly future” based on a “natural law” which unfolds as expected in an evolutionary way, and one that “is radically new” based as it is on God, the “absolute future.” Both orientations are operable for the person of faith and “mutually condition one another.” While the “this worldly” future demands a particular responsibility, it receives from the other a “radical dimension.”¹⁴³ This has points of convergence with Panikkar’s idea of “tempeternity” above. It is also comparable with Teilhard de Chardin’s *milieu divin* which I introduce in detail in the chapter, “The *imago dei*.”

Rahner sees humankind in a state of transition such that the individualization characteristic of the modern era is combining now in post-modern times with an acute awareness of “the collective discovery of truth.”¹⁴⁴ Since the time of his publication, 1974, in some spheres of dialogue this movement has clearly gathered pace, in other areas, motivated in part by events since the September-eleven terrorist destruction of the symbol of US economic power, New York’s “twin towers,” there appears to be a new defensive

¹³⁹ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 150.

¹⁴⁰ This choice is clearly reflected in Griffiths’ choice of name as *sannyasi*, Dyananda, that is, “bliss of compassion”.

¹⁴¹ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 149.

¹⁴² Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 149-151.

¹⁴³ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 191.

¹⁴⁴ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 122.

conservatism and a growing fundamentalism. How can two such opposed approaches co-exist in one religious profession?

Rahner sees the need for the recognition of saintly leaders, an aristocracy not of the official hierarchy, but inspired by “charismatic grace,” a recognition which could be signaled by, a “pilgrimage of Church officials.” In the present repressive climate, this is very hard to imagine. It was more a possibility during Griffiths’ time at Shantivanam. It did not take place even then. However, a few examples are available, in more recent times, such as Pope John Paul II’s visit to Nelson Mandela in September, 1995 and his several meetings with the Dalai Lama.

For Rahner, the individualization of the modernist period, heralds a new level of maturation within the people of the Church.¹⁴⁵ The pluralism of interpretation of a given dogma, especially with regard to non-church goers, does not deny their membership in the Church. The kind of heresy that would exclude them would have to be a public denial of a core truth, or a public rejection of the official authoritative proclamation on a central issue. The Church is more than a conglomeration of individual persons and the question of unity of the whole body is of vital importance.

So long as this lack of Christianity on the part of the baptized Christian does not solidify into a clear and decisive negation of the Christian faith, such as can be recognized even at the public level, this grey throng does belong to the people of the Church, in other words to the Church herself and not merely of the objects of the solicitude of the Church (that is, of her official institutions!)¹⁴⁶

Amidst the pluralism of our present global society, Rahner has a vision for local community structure in Church which admits of new more relevant interpretations of Scripture and belief, even of creedal formula.¹⁴⁷ Not because of “a shallow humanistic love of neighbor” but because of the very mystery of Christ, “we should arrive at a theology which from the outset takes as its starting-point man’s (sic) experience of himself.”¹⁴⁸ It is this openness to the pluralistic society, a readiness to dialogue with the secular world *because* it is the workplace - the craft-shop of Christ, the locus of operation of the Spirit, which Griffiths, Panikkar,

¹⁴⁵ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 223.

¹⁴⁶ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 224.

¹⁴⁷ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 216.

¹⁴⁸ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 213.

Rahner and Lonergan have in common. It informs their interest in the various disciplines, especially science.

Rahner speaks of God's self-communication in grace which is evident and operative in human existence.¹⁴⁹ A person's own experience may be recognised in the reflection and analysis enshrined in church tradition. From this he/she can claim the confidence to acknowledge their experience of that "holy mystery" which is "a hidden closeness, a forgiving intimacy, (their) real home."¹⁵⁰ Griffiths' Shantivanam represented this approach.

This is to say that rather than being centered in or on religion, God's self-communication takes place in the midst of all human existence. Persons can consciously choose to enter their interior depths and discover that their most ordinary experiences are centered in "holy mystery," or they can momentarily be moved into the transcendent moment through peak experiences of birth and death.¹⁵¹ Whereas the mystery communicates itself, the human subject is a free agent and with a particular receptivity. A person owns a freedom which is still "coming to be" within a freedom "which has already been freely exercised."¹⁵²

The kind of freedom most characteristic of human dignity is basic to Rahner's vision for new human communities. In these, leaders will arise from within a local group which is recognizably centered in love. The one who is looked to for leadership would be mature and basically theologically centered and informed, though not necessarily academically. They would be more an "elder," representing a Church of "brethren" rather than of "clergy." It would share at least the rudiments of common culture, language, education, issues and ideals. Although Rahner expects these are basic essentials, the structure as such belongs to the mystery of the future, wherein the charism is prized and authorized in lieu of dogmatism. Furthermore, within such an intensely pluralistic environment, secular sociological structures in which such Church communities might be expected to be born and nurtured need to be identified and encouraged.

In Rahner's vision, there are correlations with Griffiths' plan. Griffiths identified himself as monk and *sannyasi* rather than as priest, and it is clear that he worked to keep

¹⁴⁹ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith, An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, Trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroads, 1987), 130.

¹⁵⁰ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 131.

¹⁵¹ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 132.

¹⁵² Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 133.

the kind of freedom Rahner describes, in the forefront at Shantivanam. Griffiths was particularly tolerant of difference in his community. At the Forest of Peace where silence was so highly esteemed and desired, even difference in language did not then, and does not now, prove an obstacle to unity. Silence in turn naturally directs towards Gregory of Nyssa's apophatic theology. Significantly, while the imagery Gregory uses serves this end, there remains a certain ambiguity which begs the question of his own "groundedness." I show this below in terms of a "gendered plurality" in the "unity of the Godhead."

3. Gregory of Nyssa

Differences were tolerated in the Shantivanam community, such as those related to faith-orientation, and gender. Griffiths points to a correspondence with Gregory of Nyssa's negative theology and the apophaticism of the *Vedic/advaitic* insights. Nevertheless, there is a question of difference between Griffiths' understanding of gender (in his later years) and Gregory's.¹⁵³ I believe this is important in view of the challenge Bede set himself for the necessary integration of masculine and feminine principles, in himself, the church, and humanity as a whole.

Gregory's literary style allows for such subtlety of idiom that his message is ambiguous enough as to invite question. A married man, does he intend his emphasis on "virginity" to be understood literally or metaphorically? Whatever the case, he does emphasise the need to avoid getting caught up in, distracted, and exhausted by material concerns.

Implicitly sexual imagery reflects his passionate longing for God and experience of profound spiritual intimacy. With selective translation of Gregory's imagery, Virginia Burrus seeks to discern his meaning in respect of marriage centred in freedom and free-will, as being both life-bringing and death initiating. Gregory's meaning is quite clear. Marriage is, he says, like a sword which is:

smooth and handy, and polished and glittering outside; it seems to grow to the outline . . . of the hand . . . it offers for the grasp of the senses a smooth surface of delights. (But it is also) the worker of mourning and of loss.

¹⁵³ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 239 – 243, 248,

Burrus succinctly points out “the instrument of pleasure is thus also the organ of birth and therefore tainted with the violence of death”.¹⁵⁴ I suggest it can also image Gregory’s concern, as described above, to find a balance between married duties and contemplation.

Gregory himself insists the images he uses must be apprehended spiritually. Griffiths who was familiar with Gregory’s work and, judging by the frequent references to him over the years, convinced of its truth, similarly found Indian sexual imagery in temples and shrines could be a powerful evocation of spiritual wisdom.

In his first exploration of Indian culture, in the company of Raimon Panikkar, Griffiths describes the impression made on him of the little shrine beside a river “in which there was nothing but a roughly carved lingam and yoni.” Whereas, “a European would be inclined to regard this as ‘obscene,’” he came to understand its significance for the Hindu as “holy.” It can evoke an awareness of intense presentiment. He explains:

God manifests Godself in all the works of nature, in earth and fire and air and water, in plant and animal and the human. Sex is one of the manifestations of the divine power – the *Sakti* – which sustains the universe and has the character of a sacrament. (And furthermore) It is this vision of a cosmic unity, in which humankind and nature are sustained by an all-pervading spirit, which the West needs to learn from the East.¹⁵⁵

On the other hand, in dialogue with Eastern religions, Griffiths finds in the utter simplicity and unity of the Godhead a gendered plurality which Burrus cannot find in Gregory’s writing. For Griffiths:

We need to know it (the abyss of the Godhead) as both Mother and Father. It is the womb from which the Son is born. . . . The Word is the seed in which all creation is contained. The whole creation comes forth eternally in the Word from the abyss of Being which is both Father and Mother.¹⁵⁶

At the end of his life’s journey Griffiths’ transformative experience was of God as Mother who “overwhelmed” him with love. The new life-giving integration he experienced neither

¹⁵⁴ Virginia Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made: Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 93. Interestingly, Griffiths’ description of the Hindu *Kali* has a comparable meaning. It is perhaps significant that Griffiths’ emphasizes the Hindu *lingam* in the apophatic context, as “the image of the formless Godhead.” He compares this with the Hebrew revelation, in images of the *merkabah*, the *shekina*, and the Temple “mercy-seat.” BedeGriffiths, *A New Vision*, 217.

¹⁵⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 14, 15.

¹⁵⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Return*, 27.

wholly absorbed nor denied either masculine or feminine. In like mien, his new communities envisaged the presence of men and women, married and single, lay and religious.

Differently, Burrus finds that Gregory's "vertically oriented 'philosophic logos' does not flow in channels of gendered plurality but begets a singular, and singularly graceful, masculine subjectivity that derives its position of transcendent dominance 'from its power to eradicate the difference between the sexes.'"¹⁵⁷ Gregory rejects the idea that God's image in us could somehow involve the distinction between the sexes and bases this on his particular interpretation of Paul's "In Christ there is no . . . male or female."¹⁵⁸

Laird responding positively to the work of Mark Hart says that for Gregory:

Marriage is ultimately viable for the Christian in-so-far as it is founded on the very quality that makes Christian celibacy viable, that is, non attachment. . . . The viability of virginity lies in the fact that virginity is ultimately a question of non-attachment. The problem with desire, therefore, is not that it is concerned with the body *per se* but that the soul seeks ultimacy in what is not God.¹⁵⁹

It may appear that there is a certain ambiguity which employs equal respect for marriage, freedom, and an ultimate androgynous state. However, it may be that the very exercise of finding the right balance between the vocation of marriage and contemplation is an authentic means of achieving "non attachment" – a non attachment centred in charity. On the other hand, Gandhi ultimately withdrew from conjugal relations, seeing it as inimical with the higher stages of the spiritual journey. Gregory's way may not demand such action. Griffiths had shared a similar conviction as Gandhi, whom he greatly admired, early in his

¹⁵⁷ Virginia Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made*, 26.

¹⁵⁸ David Bentley Hart, "The Mirror of the Infinite," in *Rethinking Gregory of Nyssa*, Sarah Coakley ed. (MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 111-131.

¹⁵⁹ Martin Laird, "Under Solomon's Tutelage: The Education of Desire in the Homilies on the Song of Songs," in *Rethinking Gregory of Nyssa*, 78. Griffiths explains how the Hindu *ekagraha* is related to the Christian idea of "detachment." It involves a "balanced spirituality," neither "rejecting the world" nor "indulging the senses." Griffiths quotes St Anthony of the desert: "Discretion is the greatest virtue: to know how to balance your life between the extremes." This kind of balance is needed both in the East and the West. In America, says Griffiths, "every appetite is on sale." However, such a spiritual realization comes through a "cosmic consciousness," the profound awareness of the interrelatedness and interdependence of all things which are all actually gifts from God. See Bede Griffiths, "America and India: The Balancing of Extremes," in *Deep Ecumenis, Creation Spirituality*, Sep, Oct, 1991, P 41. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

faith journey but a change towards the end influenced his mature vision for community.¹⁶⁰ In view of the universal call to contemplation, these particular questions of interpretation are in need of deeper exploration. However, that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Nevertheless, there is no conflict among critics today that Gregory emphasised desire inherent in all of creation; what Laird calls “the homing instinct for God.”¹⁶¹ For Gregory it is necessary, “to desire as much as you can . . . to fall in love.”¹⁶² Fire is the image Gregory chooses for this.¹⁶³

Like Irenaeus before him,¹⁶⁴ Gregory sees that which is created finite in a state of becoming which is infinite.¹⁶⁵

This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him . . . no limit would interrupt growth in the ascent to God, since no limit to the Good can be found nor is the increasing of desire for the Good brought to an end because it is satisfied.¹⁶⁶

Gregory can say, on the one hand, that the superlative human dignity is freedom:

There is in us the principle of all excellence, all virtue and wisdom, and every higher thing that we conceive; but pre-eminent among all is the fact that we are free from necessity, and not in bondage to any natural power, but have decision

¹⁶⁰ This idea becomes clearer in the chapter, “divine Feminine.” Griffiths’ insight into *ekagraha*, “one-pointed,” “single-mindedness,” detachment for purity of heart that is necessary for becoming one with the divine is complex because it encompasses his journey. It changes with his changing attitude towards marriage and with his coming to know of *tantra* and finally *dzogchen*. Griffiths describes the *dzogchen* description of the “journey” according to three stages, from *sutra*, to *tantra* to *pneuma*. Furthermore, the earlier stages can be passed over by a “sudden enlightenment.” This is comparable with the three stages within Christian tradition where a sudden transformation would come through and with and in Christ. That is, in this Tibetan Buddhist, Christian and also Hindu traditions, transcendence can be sudden or gradual. See Bede Griffiths, “Dzogchen and Christian Contemplation,” *A.I.M. Monastic Bulletin* (1993): #55, 122, 123. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

¹⁶¹ Martin Laird, “Under Solomon’s Tutelage.” Laird is speaking for John Behr’s study of Nyssa’s *De hominis opificio* . . . Gregory’s “ascending perspective.” P78.

¹⁶² Martin Laird, “Under Solomon’s Tutelage,” 82.

¹⁶³ Martin Laird, “Under Solomon’s Tutelage,” 82. The image of “fire” is important too for the *Vedic* revelation, but rather in terms of divine energy of being. From within the Christian tradition, Griffiths names contemplation as “knowledge by love.” Griffiths is quoted in “Inter-Religious Dialogue: a discussion between Professor Dr. Michael Windey S.J. and Roland R. Ropers Obl. O.S.B.,” Kreuth/Tegernsee, 24 September 1994. Available from The Bede Griffiths Collection, GTU Archives, Berkeley, CA.

¹⁶⁴ Denis Minns, *Irenaeus*, Outstanding Christian Thinkers Series, Brian Davies ed. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 63.

¹⁶⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, Translation, Introduction and Notes by Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 115, 116.

¹⁶⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 116.

in our own power as we please; for virtue is a voluntary thing, subject to no dominion; that which is the result of compulsion and force cannot be virtue.¹⁶⁷

This freedom which is by nature directed to love of God is compromised by the failure of the human will. Nevertheless, some people, like Moses, attain an undivided will, in a form of *Theosis*. This *Theosis* is never complete because Creator and created are infinitely distinct.¹⁶⁸

Like Philo, but central in importance for Gregory, the symbol for this “way” to God is darkness and anticipates the later apophaticism of Denis the Areopagite. God is beyond all images and concepts as Gregory’s frequent use of oxymoronic expression, such as “the darkness of unknowing” and our need to “penetrate the impenetrable” intends to communicate.¹⁶⁹

At the same time, creation is a manifestation, a mirror-reflection of the splendour of God who is Trinity.¹⁷⁰ Significantly, *The Song of Songs* with its passionate imagery symbolically epitomises the apophatic space of divine/human encounter.¹⁷¹

There is much in Gregory of Nyssa’s theology and spirituality, from its Trinitarian and apophatic emphases to the characteristic imagery employed, to which Griffiths consciously relates in his pursuit of a possible Christian *Vedanta* and of a contemplative community, meaningful in our present era. Significant points of sexuality and sexual difference, and the question of the final state of *theosis* which have been introduced will be taken up at later appropriate points in this thesis. From this sense of “beyond” we shall consider the image of “horizon” in Bernard Lonergan’s thought.

4. Bernard Lonergan

It is a sustained questioning such as can extend the limits of the horizons of intelligibility that is, in Lonergan’s thought, central. Positive and negative can both be equated with “limit” horizons. Lonergan points out that for the mind that is either closed to the

¹⁶⁷ Michel René Barnes, “Divine Unity and the Divided Self: Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology in its Psychological Context”, in *Rethinking Gregory of Nyssa*, 52.

¹⁶⁸ Michel René Barnes, “Divine Unity and the Divided Self: Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology in its Psychological Context”, 59. Griffiths finds in the Christian tradition, Clement of Alexandria is the earliest teacher of *theopoiesis*, or “deification” and this “links . . . immediately with the Indian tradition.” See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 232.

¹⁶⁹ Martin Laird, “Under Solomon’s Tutelage”, 84.

¹⁷⁰ David Bentley-Hart, *The Mirror of the Infinite*, in *Rethinking Gregory of Nyssa*, 118.

¹⁷¹ Martin Laird, “Under Solomon’s Tutelage”, 84.

transcendent dimension inherent in human existence, or else dominated and blinded by the pseudo-self of the ego, they impose conformity, rigidity, mediocrity, stagnation. However, if they are symbolic of mystery, they stimulate question, creativity, change and adventure. Indeed, for a community (or an individual) open to such intelligent, reflective and creative questioning, “this entire universe appears as a great single question”¹⁷² Lonergan nevertheless speaks of an:

ultimate limit to the whole process of going beyond. Insights and viewpoints can be transcended as long as further questions can be asked. But once all about all is understood, there is no room for further questions.¹⁷³

Does Lonergan’s concept ultimately point to a deeper apophaticism than Gregory’s and more akin to Denis the Areopagite? This is the area of ambiguity Griffiths was exploring. For Lonergan, in the eternal, timeless act, “all instants are one and the same instant.”¹⁷⁴ Does this mean that in a final *theosis* there is not the infinite becoming intimated by Gregory of Nyssa?¹⁷⁵ Where desire continues, does question remain?

For Lonergan, the universe is ordered in accordance with the divine will but it needs the cooperation of humankind in order for it to achieve its divinely ordained end. Operative wisdom knows this so that “apart from the surd of sin the universe is in love with God.”¹⁷⁶ The person of good will is in love with God. This is an interior authenticity that spills over into works. One can ignore or even reject the whole question of God that is within every person’s horizon. However, this is to deviate from the divinely ordained order of the universe. This raises a very clear point of comparison with Griffiths in dialogue with the Hindu tradition. He points out how illusion on the one hand is seen to be a rejection of the “Supreme,” the transcendent origin of the world of multiplicity; on the other hand it is a rejection of the value of the world of multiplicity which is a “reflection” in time and space, under “limited conditions,” of the “One.” This “supreme” reality which is known under many names and symbols and which Christians call “God” is ultimately beyond all names and designations. Both extremes, representing West and East, come together in what Griffiths understands as a deep mystical wisdom. In the “deeper tradition in Hinduism” there is,

¹⁷² Anthony Kelly, *Trinity*, 93.

¹⁷³ Bernard Lonergan, *Insight*, Fifth Edition (Longmans, Green & Co.: London, 1957), 666.

¹⁷⁴ Bernard Lonergan, *Insight*, 685.

¹⁷⁵ One can imagine that our image of “journey” may simply ultimately transmogrify into “relationship.”

¹⁷⁶ Bernard Lonergan, *Insight*, 720.

through meditation, an integration of the external world with its problems. The whole of experience is integrated and drawn up “into the transcendent.”¹⁷⁷

For Lonergan, the fulfillment, that being in love with God brings, transcends pain and suffering. It is a converted consciousness that can still be “broadened, deepened, heightened and enriched” because a new horizon has been introduced:

The fulfilment of being in love with God dismantles and abolishes the horizon in which our knowing and choosing went on and sets up a new horizon in which the love of God will transvalue our values and the eyes of that love will transform our knowing.¹⁷⁸

As a guide, Lonergan provides eight “functional specialties” each tuned in accordance with the transcendental precepts: “be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible.” The aim is that these provide a vehicle for the kind of interiority that is necessary to see behind conflictual surface differences. Here, differentiated consciousness can come to understand itself and be able to see, in the “different patterns of cognitional activity . . . , complementary purposes.”¹⁷⁹ The operations of Lonergan’s Transcendental Method for day to day existence - experiencing, understanding, judging, deciding - centre on the clear awareness of this interiority.¹⁸⁰

Lonergan’s concern with the clarification of a theological method, such as may be universally assumed to facilitate the dialogue of theological exchange, is not the primary concern of Griffiths whose energy was consumed by the day to day, moment by moment life as a Christian *sannyasi*. While this included study and teaching, experience itself was the primary focus. It was an exploratory adventure into God within a welcoming community.

For his life in the Forest of Peace community, where the goal was the fruits of contemplation, Griffiths’ journey matches with the theological functional specialty that

¹⁷⁷ Bede Griffiths, “Communion and Renunciation,” *The Buddhist Exchange*, Asirvanam Monastery, Bangalore, 25 December 1992.

¹⁷⁸ Bernard Lonergan, *Method*, 106.

¹⁷⁹ Bernard Lonergan, *Method*, 115. Trapnell cites Bede Griffiths’ criticism of Lonergan’s “method” for being too heavily oriented to “common sense,” leaving insufficient weight on imagination, myth, and symbol. Yet Trapnell insists there are important convergences in the method of both theologians. This includes their views on objectivity and truth, intentionality or “the drive to know which intends an object,” the experience of self-transcendence beyond all symbols, “horizon and conversion” and especially what he regards as “key” to both Lonergan and Griffiths, “that which is intended by one’s concepts and conscious operations is that which is experienced when all – such mental categories and activities - concepts and conscious operations are transcended.” See Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths’ Theory*, 496-521.

¹⁸⁰ Bernard Lonergan, *Method*, 14.

Lonergan calls “communications.” There is a close connection with the value that both Lonergan and Griffiths put on “horizon.” It is an important and especially provocative symbol for the present transitional state of humanity.

With regard to differences in theological approach, we may perhaps discern a pointer, a referent for Panikkar’s communities of “mutual fecundation.” Must there appear per constraint of human tendency and individual inspiration within community discreet roles, a further refined and sophisticated development of the Paulian diversity in community? In what measure can the theologian/methodologist just as well be the inspired theologian/visionary? Are they pursuing the same end, but in two separate though mutually enriching roles, which must both be present and maintained in tense balance and continuing dialogue? Are there stages in a faith journey when a person tends more to one or the other? The way Griffiths’ approach changed can be compared with the choice made by Thomas Merton who chose prolific writing in response to public demand, rather than what he considered would be less, yet more polished, output.

I am not suggesting that methodology is absent from the work of the visionary, or that the fruits of mystical experience or intuition are lacking in the logical precision of the other. I am suggesting that although their habitual intellectual milieu has somewhat different furnishings this could be means of enrichment rather than an obstacle, even though each is more comfortable and productive in their own different ways. Griffiths’ community at Shantivanam assumed, I believe, a dimension of open hospitality, through his gift of tolerance that welcomed such diverse types. He is able to recognise the same quality in the theology of Karl Rahner as already shown.

In Lonergan’s presentation of the “interior authenticity that spills over into good works” there is a generous openness to the hidden movement of the Spirit at work in the world. If the universe is “in love with God” at an elemental level, this has not necessarily been so articulated by the human vehicle of such love. However, the “converted consciousness” is urged humbly to recognize and celebrate overt signs of the movement of the Spirit. That Griffiths does not pursue theological method does not mean method is absent in his theology. Lonergan’s way is certainly not Griffiths’ which does, however, represent the kind of life Lonergan’s method extols. This, Griffiths models for others. Further exploration of the images he uses will show that it becomes more pronounced in his dialogue with culture, the arts and sciences.

Conclusion

I introduced Griffiths' journey partners at this point to bring into better focus the overarching image of journey and its significance for Griffiths' role as *sannyasi*. This is especially important with respect to his interest in new kinds of contemplative communities. Similarities and differences were explored with regard to "journey" in the thought of three theologians for whom Griffiths professed outright sympathy. Lonergan's thoughts are included because of his emphasis on the symbol of horizon, the primacy of freedom and the comparability of his emphasis on methodology and Panikkar's. Together this helps throw light on the *Sitz im Leben* of Griffiths' life's work.

Sri Aurobindo's thought on the unfolding of the divine through the course of history with human evolutionary consciousness connects with Griffiths' continued exploration. Indeed, Griffiths was indebted to Sri Aurobindo's understanding of the divine/cosmic journey encapsulated in the symbolic construct "satcitananda." It is the name Bede was happy to assume for the Ashram of the Holy Trinity at Shantivanam, the Forest of Peace - a name which had been given by Monchanin and Le Saux.

The Sri Aurobindinian vision of the transformation of a humanity endowed with "supermind" and Panikkar's of a "cosmotheandric unity" correspond with Griffiths' concern already described that ultimately humanity is called "beyond religion." I see Panikkar and Sri Aurobindo representative of Griffiths' emphasis on individual life experience, movement in history and evolution of the consciousness.

The fundamental primacy of freedom is evoked and supported by the provocative symbol of horizon which is so well articulated by both Rahner and Lonergan, while for Gregory of Nyssa it may be something infinite. Gregory's insights compare with Griffiths' interest in the areas: the divine out-going and return; the movement towards the eschaton; and infinite continuation. Rahner has especially illuminated the transcendent dimensions of the historical movement and the stages of consciousness, while Lonergan contributes further insight into the historical movement linked with the Eschaton, and again the question of the end state.

Significant questions have surface which direct further exploration for the sake of a deeper Christological understanding of the "journey" theme. For example, for humankind made in the image and likeness of God, how do different understandings of the male and female principles and of ultimate union affect the envisioning of new human communities?

Other points are in need of exploration and clarification, such as the issue of Chardin's evolutionary perspective and the perennial philosophy. Such areas of interest and the ideas of the theologians presented above will be teased out as Griffiths' images of God are taken up one by one. It first remains to complete the journey theme which comprises Part ONE, with an articulation of an image synonymous with Griffiths', "Golden String", that is, the grand image, God of the Journey. In this, Hall's use of rhetorical categories will assist.

Chapter 4

God of the Journey

Introduction

Griffiths states, “Myth is a symbolic story which expresses, in symbolic terms which rise from the depths of the unconscious, humankind’s understanding of God, and the mystery of existence.”¹ In his terms, therefore, we are here exploring Griffiths’ unique story as it is lived in and through his focal symbol, the Golden String. According to Judson Trapnell:

Griffiths . . . not only lived a life, he created a work, a “text” whose literary shape and symbolic power he himself sought to understand and put into words.²

Moreover, for Griffiths, while the individual, interior, spiritual journey is basic, it is inseparable from the whole of humankind’s historico-cosmic movement in space and time, and the evolution of consciousness. It accounts for his conviction of the importance of interreligious dialogue in assisting humankind to move forward towards the ultimate goal in God.³

Griffiths’ all-embracing focal symbol, which he names as Christ, the Golden String, can be understood first in terms of the metaphor of “journey.” It underlies the meaning of existence and the questions posed: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? How is this possible?

The headings for this chapter relate to the “text” of this myth. They are:

1. Journey and Encounter
2. Journey as Pilgrimage
3. Engagement with India’s Journey
4. The Journey of Consciousness
5. Journey as a Common Goal
6. Journey as a Dialogical Encounter

¹ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 115.

² Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 1.

³ Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*, 26.

1. Journey and Encounter

Basic to Bede's symbol of the Golden String is openness to Encounter. This is the essential predisposition for the journey and underlies his focal image which is both seed and substance of his theology of complementarity⁴ that developed through his experience in India:

All redeemed humanity . . . are called to experience . . . communion of love in the mystical body of Christ which embraces the whole of creation . . . (to) engage in this task . . . not fully accomplished.⁵

The very question of an integration of eastern and western journeys is central in this chapter.⁶ At the same time, it is important to note that Griffiths' hope for mutual understanding of East and West acknowledges the strengths and weaknesses in both human perspectives. On the one hand:

(While) the Cosmic Revelation has shown the Hindu the real transcendence and immanence of God in creation and in humankind . . . a revelation of divine love . . . it leaves out the reality of this world . . . caught in the wheel of *samsara*.⁷

On the other hand:

The life and death and resurrection of Christ have not only a meaning for all, but also an effect on history . . . (yet) the danger of Christianity today is that it over-emphasises the importance of matter and science and history and human progress in this world striving for a better world.⁸

With such a momentous coming together in dialogue, the world over, in the face of pressing crises, Griffiths saw the signs of the times necessitating major re-assessment, re-interpretation and re-expression of Church doctrine. His frustration with the Roman Catholic

⁴ My rhetorical analysis of Griffiths' root metaphor based on Hall's approach was published as a peer reviewed article in the *Australian Ejournal of Theology* 10 (May 2007).
http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_10/green.htm.

⁵ Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*, 130.

⁶ Such integration, as will become clear, does not mean for the "universal religion" Griffiths finally envisions, an end to unique religious symbols or to religious differences. Griffiths' mature theology of complementarity is to be understood rather in terms of unity in difference reflecting the very nature of God.

⁷ Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*, 118.

⁸ Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*, 128.

Church's slowness to respond to what he perceived as a crucial need for change is related by Shirley du Boulay. Griffiths says:

The Church is still in the nineteenth century it has not progressed. . . . Just as Jesus stood before the Temple buildings and said, "I tell you solemnly, not a single stone here will be left on another: everything will be destroyed," so one could equally well stand before St Peter's and say "Not a stone upon a stone will remain."⁹

Nevertheless, Bede expresses the hope in his mature work, *A New Vision of Reality* that "we are learning, and we shall continue to learn, that all the different religious traditions, from the most primitive to the most advanced, are interrelated and interdependent and that each has its own particular insights."¹⁰

Ideas such as this, which we treat in more detail in later chapters, underlie Griffiths' image of God of the Journey and motivated me to search beneath the 'skin' of his story. Judson Trapnell points out that Bede's basic interreligious concern remained unchanged for the rest of his life. In 1954, Bede says:

It was the experience which came first and so it must always be. All our knowledge comes to us directly or indirectly from experience, from the vital experience of the senses and imagination. The philosopher can interpret our experience . . . , but ideas can never take the place of experience. An idea of God which had no relation to my own experience would have no interest for me.¹¹

Raimundo Panikkar echos this idea at a memorial service in Chicago, referring to Griffiths' corpus of dialogue, he says:

We can find fault with many of his ideas in which the presentation was not up to the point. That was not his forte. That was not his mission. The importance of Fr Bede which we should never forget, for us, was his person . . . was his being there.¹²

We therefore find the inclusion of a heuristic dimension in this early chapter helpful both because the thesis takes in different levels of being and because it touches base with Bede's own theological exploratory method.

Use of rhetorical tropes in this chapter assists the elaboration of the Golden String in terms of a journey. Four specific tropes - metaphor, metonymy, synecdochy, irony - are

⁹ Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 254. From an unpublished interview with Griffiths' friend Wayne Teasdale who reports that Bede often repeated these words.

¹⁰ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 287.

¹¹ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 56. See Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life*, 5.

¹² Kenneth Cracknell, "Forward", xii, in Judson Trapnell, *A Life*.

featured in the different chapter sections to highlight the effectiveness of Griffiths' theological rhetoric. The approach takes its cue from Hall's explication of Raimundo Panikkar's theological hermeneutics in terms of a "rhetoric of dialogue."¹³ Hall's rhetorical analysis presents Panikkar's "cosmotheandric" principle as the synechdochic key to his theology. In comparison, I locate Griffiths' synechdochic key within the image of God of the Journey as will be seen later in the chapter.

2. Journey as Pilgrimage

Besides an inherent sense of community, Hindu tradition shares with Native Australian spirituality an ancient pre-history.¹⁴ It connects with Griffiths' emphasis on the need for the meeting of East and West. Deferring to the great age of both Australian Aboriginal and Indian spiritual traditions, Griffiths agrees with Raimon Panikkar that Christians of the West do not have a monopoly of the Holy Spirit: "We are all pilgrims in search of truth, of reality, of final fulfillment."¹⁵

Griffiths met Panikkar on his arrival in India. They had spent six months learning Sanskrit together from an Indian Carmelite Sister in Bangalore, and visited places of religious and cultural significance.¹⁶ Bede goes on to describe how he was inspired by traces of the ancient Dravidian worship of the feminine, its religion of the earth, "in all the villages around us" where "the principle temple is always that of the Mother, the Mother goddess – the object of worship."¹⁷ The significance is explored in Chapter 6, the divine Feminine.

The fine buildings from the British Raj which I found carefully maintained especially for the sake of tourism are in stark contrast with the style Griffiths introduced to his ashrams. He is very critical of the awkward incongruity of the adopted European church architecture. Gandhi proved an inspiration. Gandhi's espousal of *ahimsa* is expressed in his

¹³ Hall adopted "certain rhetorical categories to illuminate the manner and purpose of Panikkar's linguistic and communicative procedures." See Gerard V. Hall, *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism*. Thesis for the Degree in Doctor of Philosophy (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 1993), 342.

¹⁴ This pre-history is described on P314 in Appendix I.

¹⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 203.

¹⁶ Bede Griffiths, "Father Bede Griffiths and the Indian Foundation," Installment 2, April 17, 1955, and 3, July 10, 1955, pp 4 and 2 respectively. Available from the Pluscarden Archives. In this source, Griffiths describes Panikkar as "a brilliant scholar . . . the ablest theologian I have ever met . . . even more revolutionary than I am (and much more capable philosophically and theologically) . . . most stimulating . . . with as deep a love for India as I have."

¹⁷ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 13, 14.

identification with and commitment to the poor of India.¹⁸ This attitude is evoked in Griffiths' commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita, the River of Compassion* and situates Bede's inclusion of concern for the poor in the contemplative mode of being. This theme is central in Chapter 7, "Divine Lord." Bede was also troubled by the erosion of the kind of personal dignity and graceful ways of the poor of Southern India due to post-Independence Western capitalistic influence. He believed a global response through a marriage of East and West, and a return of religious traditions to their founding inspirations to be the basis for authentic dialogue and the key to a solution.¹⁹

His concern to overcome the dichotomy between science and religion in India became real when I witnessed with my own eyes the conflict between "Western" material acquisition and technological advance, and spiritual tradition in India. Bede notes how at the same time as the West struggles to rediscover its own spiritual traditions through dialogue with the East, the very spiritual treasure that the East has to offer the West is in danger of being overwhelmed by Western influence, and suffocated.²⁰

Engagement with India's journey, which I develop further in the next section, throws into sharp focus Griffiths' image of journey as a pilgrimage. In rhetorical terms, the basic image of "journey" operates in the "first order apprehension of experience,"²¹ in a metaphorical sense. Extending from this, the "pilgrim" God, together with the "pilgrimage" of the soul, is evoked by "Christ is the Golden String," an image which we maintain is constitutive of Griffiths' evolving theology throughout his life. Indeed, he states this clearly:²²

¹⁸ These ideas are developed in the chapter, "Divine Lord".

¹⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 104. See also, *Marriage*, 171-175, 200.

²⁰ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 10, 11.

²¹ Gerard Hall, *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics*, 45-69. Hall refers to the "tension theory of metaphor" in Ricoeur's "semantic approach to metaphor":

The signification at the level of the sentence rather than the word . . . (that) can be understood as applying to the totality of an author's work(s) . . . create new meaning that is never purely translatable. Moreover, the metaphorical meaning is both "behind" the author's interpretation of a domain of experience and in "front" of the audience that is invited to share in the meaning, to make the metaphor its own . . . the emphasis is on the first order apprehension of experience. Gerard Hall, *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics*, 346.

²² He chose this image, the Golden String, as the title for his first book, an autobiography. In this sense, metaphor is used in its wider meaning, as demonstrated in Mary Veling's "Classic and Contemporary: a Hermeneutical Exploration of Trinity," *AEJT*, October, 2006. Veling cites Bernard Lee: metaphor "mediates experience in the very moment of the origination of experience." http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_8/veling.htm (accessed 10 February 2008).

The Golden String has led me. It was put into my hands while I was still a boy at school . . . At every stage I have been conscious that it was not I who was leading but that something was leading me.²³

From the start, Bede understands Christ, the “Golden String,” as being present to all adherents of religion in a sacramental way but most fully present in the Sacraments to the Catholic Christian person who is “on the way.” The gate is faith, but once inside “the heavenly city” all this is left behind, dogma, rules and sacraments are no longer necessary in the direct experience of God.²⁴ Significantly, during his time in India, Griffiths develops a more nuanced interpretation of this image. It shows journey as pilgrimage both as exterior and interior movement involving every soul in states and stages of transcendence. Certainly, it is far removed from the common idea of “a pilgrimage” as a pious action to be perhaps undertaken when time and money are available, or avoided or simply ignored as irrelevant. It describes on the one hand a movement in space and time at an individual level, or a communal level but in any case with a communal dimension that is for humankind, inevitable; on the other hand, it means entry into states of being which ultimately are beyond place and time. A physical journey, especially a journey understood as a “pilgrimage” opens the mind and heart to the possibility of change and effects change.

For the different religious traditions, the emphasis varies. With Buddhism, the physical pilgrimage is central. Christian Benedictine spirituality, on the other hand has “stability,” virtually remaining in the same monastery, as a core principle. This introduces an anomaly in Griffiths’ particular monastic career, an entrancing and provocative ripple or crinkle that hints at a hidden pull, something unexpected and surprising that offsets any tendency towards stasis and perhaps throws light on his deepest concern with the need always to “go beyond.” Sr Pascaline Coff OSB pointed out in Oklahoma, that the movement of Griffiths’ life was still in fact true to the spirit of the Order.²⁵ Abandonment to Christ the “way” is implicated in this and is developed later in this chapter as the metonymic element in the image of “journey.”

²³ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 41, 42.

²⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 43, 44.

²⁵ Sr Pascaline’s comment is found in her interview in the third section of the DVD, in Appendix 3. Furthermore, in India Bede himself finds a place for the “wandering monk,” the “gyrovague” whom St Benedict once “mercilessly condemned.” Bede Griffiths, “Poverty in the Life of Prayer,” *A.I.M. Asian Conference*, Sri Lanka, 1980. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

Griffiths notes how journey is integral to the foundation myths of the world religions. He points out how “at the beginning of every great movement, there is a departure through the desert.” He describes the story of Moses’ wandering as interpreted by Gregory of Nyssa.²⁶

Furthermore, in the Hebrew Bible we read, “A wandering Aramean was my ancestor,”²⁷ that can refer both to Abraham and Jacob. There are the wanderings of Siddhartha Gautama before his enlightenment under the Bodi tree and further wanderings of the Buddha throughout India and thence to the classical Buddhist heart-land of Sri-Lanka. With Mohammad, the key event of Islamic history begins with the “flight” (*hijrah*) from Mecca to Medina and the triumphant later return to Mecca where resides the canonical centre of all Muslim pilgrimage, the black rock enclosed in the Kabal. In Hinduism, there is the initial Aryan journey, and then the *rasis* departure into the forest and the journeys of the *Mahabarata*. The Australian Aborigines have an extraordinarily ancient “Dreamtime” genesis spirituality of creative journeying spirit ancestors. Climactically, there is the sending forth of Christ from the Father, whose will encompasses Jesus’ fateful journey to Jerusalem, his resurrection and return to God in glory. Nor can we omit the missionary journeys of Paul whose own transformation came about while en route to Damascus. These journeys are co-extensive with spiritual transcendence, and change of consciousness.

Early on, Griffiths had had a keen interest in the subterranean store-houses of the soul and this underlies his experience and understanding of journey and change; that there *is* something about going on a journey that taps primordial well-springs in the human psyche. Jacques Maritain’s “poetic intuition” with his presentation of the authority of non-rational knowledge was familiar to him from his Oxford days. His early numinous experience sparked interest in the assertion that “far beneath the sunlit surface . . . are the sources of knowledge and creativity, of love and supra-sensuous desires . . . the existence of an unconscious or preconscious which pertains to the spiritual powers of the human soul and to the inner abyss of personal freedom.”²⁸

²⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 134,135.

²⁷ Deuteronomy 26:5. This verse was recited from ancient times at the presentation of the first fruits in the Temple.

²⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 154, 163. See also, Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (London: The Harvill Press, 1953), 94.

An awakened interest in the spiritual in nature, and continued inquiry into the deepest recesses of the human spirit fueled long conversations with tutor and mentor, C.S.Lewis.²⁹ Round this time, in the wilds of the Cotswold Hills, Griffiths and his two student friends had, “passed at a single bound from the complexities of twentieth-century civilisation to a life which was primeval in its simplicity”³⁰ and he had begun to travel, up to eighty miles, by foot, so that “every departure from the village was an adventure . . . which gave one a deep sense of belonging to the country.”³¹ Later, he was to emphasise both masculine and feminine principles as basic to the drive for human integration. In the Cotswolds, Griffiths began to experience how the depths of the human spirit, the sacred territory molded and engraved through the multiform touch of sensory experience also mediated contemplative experience. The outward and inward journeys to God are seen to be mutually supportive.

To begin with, it was an intellectual resistance to the ravages of industrialization that motivated the graduates, and their search was profoundly philosophical. Having ventured out into the isolated hills, they became increasingly instinctual and prayerful. With the discovery of the power of the Word of scripture, the whole came to be remembered and savored as a unique kind of pilgrimage.

Such transformative experience related to a journey and evocative of pilgrimage can be seen in various types of contemporary literature. In 1963 an illustrated account in Italian (later translated into English) was published of a 1958 journey to the Hindu Kush by a group of explorers and mountaineers. One of the party, Fosco Maraini, describes their final encounter with the remnants of a once strong Kafir culture³² in a hidden valley the entrance being through a high gorge. He writes:

By the end of any expedition one is, almost inevitably, reduced to the condition of a wandering beggar. A cooking-pot lost yesterday, a pair of socks today, a pocket-knife tomorrow . . . you end up by living rather as do those Indian *sadhus* whose only possession is a begging-bowl. What is more, this progressive liberation from the burden of objects leaves one with a great sense of calm relief, a kind of cosmic bouyancy.³³

²⁹ The friendship continued throughout their lives despite some irreconcilable differences in belief.

³⁰ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 66.

³¹ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 71.

³² Before 1895, it is reported there were several hundred thousand of these “Red” Kafirs. They were massacred and enslaved in 1895 by the Emir of Afghanistan, Abdur Rahman Khan. See Fosco Maraini, *Where Four Worlds Meet*, Trans. Peter Green (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964), 242.

³³ Fosco Maraini, *Where Four Worlds Meet*, 270.

In much earlier Megalithic³⁴ times, there is evidence that pilgrimages associated with earth centres of magnetic intensity were made. There were places of pilgrimage for the Celts, Egyptians and Greco-Romans,³⁵ while in India shrines and temples (the focus of endless pilgrimages) contribute to a sense of sacred space that permeates the whole sub-continent. This was observed by Griffiths³⁶ and it endures today for visitors as the extraordinary sacred symbolism of India, despite the encroaching western-style business and technology.

Physically engaging the whole being in a particular journey that is understood as pilgrimage helps towards the kind of unity Griffiths understood as necessitating the transcendence of differences. Significantly, in the Forward of a new translation of Hermann Hess's *Siddhartha*, the translator, Kohn, quotes Hess' prophetic recognition as early as 1920, of "pangs of spiritual loss and the desire to cure them by means of a 'journey to the east'":

. . . many are speaking of . . . a new religion to come . . . Europe is beginning to sense that the one-sidedness of its intellectual culture . . . is in need of correction, a revitalization coming from the opposite pole. . . This is a general yearning for . . . a yogic capability.³⁷

A "yogic capability"? This is a means or technique to gain access to these hidden depths. It is this very "yogic capability" which Griffiths missed at Prinknash and which he had hoped India would teach him. Kohn's observations in the 1920's, take place round the time of Jung. Jung's student, Karen Sussmann, was Bede's mother's Theosophist friend who introduced the young monk to the classical spiritual texts of the East. It is hard to avoid such signs of ferment for change. It also reflects on the possibilities inherent in Bede's openness to encounter that we have suggested is his hermeneutical forté.

A 2009 report,³⁸ almost a century after Hess's message, tells of the "huge interest in pilgrimages" among the youth of Norway, only a minority of whom attend church, and this

³⁴ Martin Gray, "Sacred Sites: Pilgrimage in Ancient Europe - Megalithic and Celtic Sacred Space" in http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Sacred_Sites/id/2323 (accessed October 2, 2006). See also Martin Gray, "Sacred and Magical Places", <http://www.sacredsites.com/sacred-places/index.html> (accessed December, 2009).

See also, Ian Rutherford, in Abstract for "Encounters with Egyptian Gods: patterns of pilgrimage in Greco-Roman Egypt." See the Conference, "Ancient Perspectives on Ancient Egypt," The Institute of Archeology, the University College of London, 2006.

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/events/conferences/enco/ancient> (accessed October 2, 2006)

³⁵ Ian Rutherford, in Abstract for "Encounters with Egyptian Gods: patterns of pilgrimage in Greco-Roman Egypt." See the Conference, "Ancient Perspectives on Ancient Egypt," The Institute of Archeology, the University College of London, 2006.

³⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 15.

³⁷ Hermann Hesse, in the Preface to *Siddhartha* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2000), vii.

seems for the author an indication that younger people are searching for a deeper meaning in life beyond the surface trivia. The movement between “poles” (comparable to Griffiths’ concern for the integration of East and West) is intimated here where the report suggests such pilgrimage is a means of free expression of faith which Norway’s natural reticence avoids. That Griffiths clearly saw himself as part of this larger movement will become more evident.

Griffiths’ own path shows there is no easy way to do this human “pilgrimage.” The presence of the Christian ashram in India with the *sannyasi* who acts as a spiritual guide reflects the same kinds of structures in Western contemplative communities. They teach that not only the physical journey but the interior journey especially is fraught with perils and proceeds only in stages.

What we are dealing with is the sacramental whereby the ordinary details of daily living are realised as vehicles for transcendence, a deeper encounter with reality, or as mediators of the divine presence. However, it is daily living understood in terms of a necessary journey along the way to ultimate fulfillment in the divine Mystery.

Bunyan’s *A Pilgrim’s Progress* and the more ancient *Way of the Pilgrim* from the Eastern Orthodox tradition are examples of this enduring motif in the Christian tradition. Griffiths was deeply conversant with these traditions.³⁹ The prayer of the Russian pilgrim is the one he chose for his own pilgrimage in life and in his dying hours: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me - a sinner,” together with the triumphant “Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.”⁴⁰

As we have shown, the metaphor of pilgrimage, drawn from Griffiths’ symbol “The Golden String,” uses a word designating an age-old ritual to image the journey of the soul and all humankind to a final goal in God. At the same time it images the creative outward journey of the divine from the transcendent source for the ultimate consummation of unity with humanity and all of creation.

³⁸ Noralv Pedersen, “The Modern Pilgrim,” *Gemini*. Pedersen cites Gustav Erik Gullikstad Karlsaune, lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at NTNU, Norway. http://www.ntnu.no/gemini/2001-06E/42_1.htm (accessed December 12, 2009).

³⁹ See especially, Bede Griffiths, *A New Creation*.

⁴⁰ Thomas Matus, “Bede Griffiths, Monk (1906-1993): the Universal in the Specific,” 1994, 287. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust. Griffiths said he had prayed the Jesus prayer for over forty years, such that it continued to repeat itself inwardly. See Dom Bede Griffiths “How I Pray,” *The Inner Directions Journal*, 1996. In *The New Creation on Christ*, 21, Griffiths describes the source as the Russian classic, *The Way of a Pilgrim*.

This section extends the image of God of the Journey in terms of Griffiths' more mature theology of complementarity (rather than a "fulfillment" theology he held on his entrance into India). His understanding of the Christian revelation as a unique manifestation of "the seeds of the Word" is deepened through his encounter with Indian religions. However, as a Benedictine monk and *sannyasi*, his practice of radical hospitality means that his encounter with other religions convinces him of the distinctive importance of other faiths, as also being unique faith journeys. The image of a "Pilgrim God" becomes explicit in Griffiths' mature life and writing. He is very familiar with the work of Julian of Norwich. She wrote of God being revealed to her on earth as though "on a pilgrimage . . . leading us . . . until he has brought us all up to his bliss in heaven."⁴¹ It has a profoundly incarnational import which surely is not lost on Griffiths who sees himself led by Christ, the Golden String. Humility and the pilgrim image are synonymous. It is profoundly linked with "horizon," which is later examined:

Every Church, every religion, every human community, is only a stopping place, a tent which is pitched on this earth by pilgrims who are on their way to the City of God.⁴²

It suggests that through the eyes of faith, all of life is revelatory of the divine, drawing humanity and all creation to life with God. In the later chapter on the Bede's use of the *Imago Dei*, this topic is explored further.

Trapnell's analysis of Griffiths' inter-spirituality is helpful in this context. He notes that Griffiths' developing theology is earthed in his own Godward journey yet one that is shared with others through the Holy Spirit moving in all creation.⁴³ I emphasise how Griffiths' theology shows that God is not a distant reality, but a travelling companion in all of life ever ready to be revealed.

⁴¹ *Revelations of Divine Love, Showings*, Trans. Edmund College and James Walsh (Mahwah, NJ.: Paulist Press, 1978) 174. (Henceforward, *Revelations*)

⁴² Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 44.

⁴³ In his thesis, *Bede Griffiths' Theory of religious symbol and practice of dialogue: Towards interreligious understanding*, Trapnell⁴³ tracked Griffiths' journey of encounter with Eastern religious traditions that took him from a theology of fulfillment to one of complementarity. Trapnell points out how for Griffiths, the world's religions are expressive of diverse histories and cultures; they evoke different myths and contrasting symbols. Nevertheless, they point to the one divine mystery. Today the work of theologian/philosophers, Michael Barnes and Bob Plant, provides a contemporary analysis in regard to "change" and "other" that throws light on the temerity of Griffiths' own journey and ensuing change.

Furthermore, a theology of complementarity understands that every individual human story is somehow intricately caught up in its own integrity in the one journey of humanity. This belief lends a particular detachment to Griffiths' response as a guru⁴⁴ to each of those who visited Shantivanam.⁴⁵

In both English and Scottish Benedictine monasteries where he lived prior to the move to India, the virtue of hospitality as expressed in *The Rule*⁴⁶ spurred him on to new conceptions of the monastic life.⁴⁷ The enormous geographical and cultural change involved in moving to India was further influenced by Hindu *advaita*⁴⁸ and exploration of a Christian expression of this experience. His radical response was to become a *sannyasi*. Griffiths' adherence to hospitality, as a central tenet of Benedictine spirituality, was basic to his deepening theological understanding of the universal "journey" he shared with all.⁴⁹

Clearly the journey-image is multi-dimensional. It includes the interior spiritual journey, the evolution of consciousness through time and all other related journeys, historical to cosmic. Griffiths found "The Perennial Philosophy,"⁵⁰ which pertains to a universal wisdom with "a unique insight into ultimate reality" and "an integrated holistic view of life," cohesive with his experience and of foundational importance.⁵¹ He proclaims the divine "other," as One who indwells all of creation, the one Supreme God who is beyond conceptualization.⁵²

⁴⁴ Griffiths rejected the idea of "guru" in the Hindu sense where this means a disciple gives up their own mind and will, so that the "guru" is like God in their lives. Nevertheless he believes today people are profoundly in need of a guru, one who is able "to communicate the experience of the Holy Spirit, of Christ within." See Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 65.

⁴⁵ Similarly, today, Michael Barnes describes Ricoeur's sense of "synchronic subjectivity" (in contrast to Levinas's "diachronic call of the other") that also encompasses the more primordial responsibility of the self before history and culture. See Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 119.

⁴⁶ *The Rule of St Benedict* written one and a half centuries ago includes "this happy state" of humility, and hospitality whereby each stranger "should be received just as . . . Christ himself" as traits recommended for practice for our earthly pilgrimage that are perfectly exemplified in the Divine Pilgrim.

⁴⁷ At Prinknash, Griffiths was Guest-master; at Pluscarden, Scotland, he was Novice-master.

⁴⁸ The Sanskrit term, meaning "not two," for the concept dealing with the non-dualistic apprehension of reality.

⁴⁹ Griffiths says that humankind's "desire for a homeland can never be satisfied with anything in this world." See *Marriage*, 131.

⁵⁰ A full articulation of this term is found in the Chapter, *Imago Dei*.

⁵¹ *A New Vision*, 286,296. Liebnitz is responsible for term itself which was further elaborated by Aldous Huxley. For a fuller explanation, see Ch 5, "The Imago Dei."

⁵² Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, 175.

Earlier, in 1958, Rudolf Otto wrote of the “self-attestation’ of religious ideas in one’s own mind,”⁵³ as distinct from historical tradition and primeval revelation.⁵⁴ In the 1980’s, in dialogue with the new science, Griffiths seeks to interpret the theological significance of the conception that the entire cosmos is a dynamic web of interdependent relationships.⁵⁵ He sees this as being integral to the evolution of human consciousness with the recognition of mutual relationships between God, humanity and all of creation.⁵⁶

Human participation in this relationship, through intuition and intellect, the finite senses, language and imagination is the means of mediation of the God beyond names to human thought. It assumes an awareness of the transcendent that is potentially consciously shared with all of creation. As the uniquely human, spiritual dimension comes into consciousness, it seeks expression in symbol and myth by which to focus life’s meaning.⁵⁷ Griffiths includes a vital caveat which underscores mature development of “integrative wisdom” and the new consciousness, dealt with in later chapters. On the one hand he insists that “we must not despise the myth,”⁵⁸ and, in his discussion of Indian mythological history, cites Mircea Eliade⁵⁹ who insists that “the symbol, the myth and the image are of the very substance of the spiritual life, they may become disguised, mutilated or degraded, but never extirpated.”⁶⁰ On the other hand, Bede insists that “the myth needs to be corrected by reason and by science, where science means a knowledge of the concrete reality of things.” This would allow freedom from a “moral ambivalence” which Griffiths believed to be particularly detrimental in Indian society.⁶¹ It is relevant for all belief systems. Through their different symbols, Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu mystics convey an experiential

⁵³ This is the myth representative of sacred mystery. See Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 106.

⁵⁴ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, Trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 130.

⁵⁵ For this concept and its expression, Griffiths cites Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point*. See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 9.

⁵⁶ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*. See the chapter, “God and the World”, 149-175.

⁵⁷ Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths’ theory of religious symbol and practice of dialogue: towards interreligious understanding*. The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (The Catholic University of America, Washington D.C, 1993). Both for Griffiths and the Buddhist Lama Govinda, religious symbols are formed in the sub-conscious as a result of non-rational experience and express what is true via images which can be rationally interpreted, 391. They are “the expression of the divine mystery in the depths of human consciousness.” P 323. (Henceforward, *Bede Griffiths’ theory*)

⁵⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 116.

⁵⁹ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 118.

⁶⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols, Studies in Religious Symbolism* (Mission, Kansas: Sheed, Andrews and McMeel, 1961).

⁶¹ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 116-118.

knowledge of God. All speak of a movement or journey of emergence and return to the divine or transcendent source.

Within Christian tradition, Griffiths found confirmation and support for the interior journey in the writings of Ruysbroeck and Eckhart. Eckhart advises:

To get at the core of God . . . one must first get into the core of himself . . . for no one can know God who has not first known himself. Go to the depths of the soul, the secret place of the Most High, to the roots, to the heights; for all that God can do is focused there.⁶²

Griffiths discerns clear correlations between the Vedic seers' disclosure of the wholly immanent reality in all creation, and Christian mystical and Trinitarian insight. Eckhart writes, "When creatures came to be and took on creaturely being, then God was no longer God as he is in himself (*sic*), but God as he is with creatures."⁶³

This can be seen as a self-surrender constitutive of divinity.⁶⁴ Christian theology expresses this as a relationship of love and self-giving, climactically revealed in the incarnation of the Word, Jesus Christ, whom Griffiths comes to understand as "unique absolute symbol."⁶⁵ It is integral to the image of a Pilgrim God and will be articulated in greater depth in a later chapter.

3. Engagement with India's Journey

Before the times of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the highly esoteric *Vedic* myth of origins describes the myth of journey out from the transcendent and back to it. The aim is "not an attempt to communicate information but to share mystical awareness" for the primordial mystery is "wrapped" in the total darkness of apophatism.⁶⁶ Here, a non-analytical, receptive attitude is the spiritual posture in accordance with Panikkar's presentation in *The Vedic Experience: Mantramanjari*, a 1983 publication which Bede highly recommended.⁶⁷

⁶² Raymond Blackney, *Eckhart, A Modern Translation* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1941), 246.

⁶³ Raymond Blackney, *Eckhart*, 228.

⁶⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 97.

⁶⁵ For an explication of symbol, real symbol, absolute symbol, relative absolute symbol, see Trapnell, 320-330.

⁶⁶ Raimundo Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, 55. Panikkar's translation and interpretation of the *Vedas* provides particular clarity in respect to the Vedic "myth of origins". This is included later in the thesis on account of Griffiths' emphasis on Hindu experience and philosophy in his exploration of other religions and the importance he attaches to it in terms of the whole.

⁶⁷ I have chosen to do this because of the clarity which is due to Panikkar's aim of avoiding any correlations with other religions or the sciences (although he says the temptation was sometimes

The wholly transcendent “origin” is neither “being” nor “non-being” but “thisness” (or thatness) *idam* (or *tad*).⁶⁸ “This” is “that,” but also “*tad ekam*” - absolute oneness. Ardor in “thisness,” *tamar*, desires *kama* “to be.” Being results and “being” – *prajapati* – longs to create “other.” How can “being” bring about “being”? *Prajapati* self-sacrifices – self-dismembers and self-immolates through the power/fire *agni*, of ardour/*tamar* and desire/*kama* which is also order. All created existence comes from this dismemberment and immolation. But *Prajapati* is now exhausted and weakened, and material existence goes its own way, independent and prone to disorder and chaos. *Prajapati* longs to rescue and reunite with material existence. In this instance, the son – the primordial man – *purusa*, is the means – through the power of the emanation of the energy of ardour - which is feminine gender. Consciousness seeks its source and the *atman* – the deep self-reflective consciousness – is revealed as one with the wholly transcendent other, *Brahman*. It is precisely here the soul may attain to *saccitananda*, that is, being, consciousness, bliss.

Later, *Bhakti Yoga*, the way of devotion as described in the *Bhagaved Gita*, would see the final goal in the divine transcendence, but not a loss of identity through dissolution in the One. Rather the fulfillment of Self is an experience of unity with all that is. This unity is made possible by the sacrifice or “gift” of self, reflective of the self-sacrifice of *Prajapati*. For humankind this sacrifice is to be interpreted as conversion, the engagement of the whole person from the very core or inmost temple. The myth expresses a movement both personal and universal towards wholeness and integration, which is completed by union with the divine in contemplation and extended in a life which is prayer itself.⁶⁹

very strong). Furthermore, in his talk, “Christianity and the New Science,” in 1985, Bede Griffiths recommended this work as being eminently scholarly and original. The myth of origins comes to us from the *risis*, the contemplative “forest dwellers”, via the final stage of the Vedic process, the *Upanishads*. Reading this summary account of the Vedic myth of origins, it is best to remember Panikkar’s caution, “The Vedic experience . . . does not carry a doctrinal message, but a universal form of human celebration.” See Raimon Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, 27. Griffiths’ *River of Compassion* also deals with this subject. However, here, Griffiths sets out to make connections and correlations with the Christian faith.

⁶⁸ In the Australian Aquinas Lecture of 23 November 2009, at The Australian Catholic University, Professor Anthony Kelly pointed out Thomas’ identification of “God” as “isness.” This is comparable with the later insight in the *Gita* and with Levinas’ *dasein*. Available from http://www.acu.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/220311/2009_Aquinas_lecture_notes_-_Anthony_Kelly.pdf

⁶⁹ *Vedic Experience*, 51-57. The Indian myth of the journey is further elaborated in Chapter 6, “Divine Host” and includes Griffiths’ exploration of the myth.

In this movement out from the transcendent source and the return that is interpreted in terms of life-giving and life-sustaining sacrifice, Griffiths finds correlations with Christian thought, and philosophy, psychology and the new science. He considered this as related to the modern scientific notion of a universal network of interdependent relationships that grows in an evolutionary way.⁷⁰

It is significant, particularly for present times, that geographical change can affect human consciousness. Griffiths had no idea that his journey to India would necessitate a greater degree of asceticism; that his simple Benedictine robe, writing desk, and eating utensils would separate him from solidarity with the really poor. His choice to become a *sannyasi* was directly a result of the geographical move and the immediate effect of the changed environment.

Now, with the inclusion of India's "journey," I return to the comparison I made with Hall's rhetorical analysis of Panikkar's "cosmotheandric" principle. The "more tangible, metonymic elements"⁷¹ in Griffiths' root metaphor I see as the day-travel with light to see by, and surrender to the movement of the pilgrimage journey. The paradoxical element in this is developed later as "irony."

It is indicative of the sincerity of Bede's spiritual journey in dialogue with Hinduism that it led to the setting of an ashram and his own self-identification as a *sannyasi*. He shares profoundly his contemporary Panikkar's conviction that, "without in some way sharing in (other people's beliefs)," we become involved in "the inauthentic hermeneutical device of interpretation by proxy." This means that, in assuming a particular "paradigm of intelligibility" we practice condescension.⁷²

The emotive expression, "What a day this has been," referring to the day's travel⁷³ has its derivation in Old French. A day's travel when the light was available is quite

⁷⁰ Bede Griffiths deals with this in chapter 12 of *A New Vision of Reality*, 255-275.

⁷¹ Gerard Hall, *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics*, 349. Hall refers to Kenneth Burke who "explains metonymy as the 'reduction of some higher or more complex realm of being to the terms of a lower or less complex realm of being.'" Gerard Hall, *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics*, 92.

⁷² Raimundo Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience Mantramanjari. An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration*, 4th ed. (Pondicherry: Narendra Prakash Jain, 1983), 21. (Henceforward, *Vedic Experience*). Similarly, Bede speaks of a "genuine religious ecumenism" his community practiced in Shantivanam. See, *Marriage*, 23.

⁷³ See http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_gb0432980#m_en_gb0432980 for the linguistic derivation of "journey": from the Old French *journee*, meaning a day's traveling, and day, from the Latin *diurnalis* – the time when the sun's light is available, before the "dying" of the sun, (accessed Dec 12, 2009).

significant for journey in terms of a pilgrimage. Following both Owen Barfield as an early influence and later Eliade,⁷⁴ Griffiths, in dialogue with other religions and modern science, consistently points out the contextual nuances and levels of meaning available in language. In this instance, Jesus' words, "Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you,"⁷⁵ at a basic material level could refer to the predatory activity of animals and brigands and other chance mishaps; at another level, it recommends faith in Jesus Christ which dispels fear and related negativity, and an awareness of the movement of the Holy Spirit. Every person is addressed, but the faith community in particular are expected to "know the signs of the times,"⁷⁶ to be conscious of their relationship with the Holy Spirit whom Griffiths refers to as the Spirit of Wisdom⁷⁷ as she is revealed in the history and daily life of the world.⁷⁸ Griffiths says of Wisdom in conversation with Hindu *advaita* that it is:

the realization of the one Spirit in all. The centre of consciousness . . . passes from the ego, the *ahamkara* or I-consciousness, to the Self, the Spirit within, who is the real centre of our being. When we see everything in the light of the Spirit, we see the truth; when we see everything in the light of the ego, we are the victims of error and illusion.⁷⁹

Moreover, light is significant for his whole India experience and life as *sannyasi* in the ashrams. It evokes the physical, psychic and spiritual realms. It is source of awe and reverence, symbolised in Hindu terms by *agni* and *savitur*, fire and sun respectively to which life owes its colour, beauty and inspiration on all levels of being. Griffiths frequently points out that all of life has a sacramental efficacy.⁸⁰ Awe and worship motivate the striving beyond self to the transcendent Reality. Later, in Chapter 9, we explore Griffiths' use of the image of "divine Light" in detail.

Like Gandhi, whom he admired tremendously, Griffiths sees the special journey, the day-travel of our interaction with the light of truth that is mediated to human consciousness in so many ways, as a self-surrender, a self-surrender through a freedom to trust. It involves going beyond the controlling ego, beyond a purely rational, and a self-centered existence.

⁷⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 21, 32. Here Griffiths quotes from Barfield's, *Poetic Diction*. He finds Eliade, "One of the best known masters of comparative religions."

⁷⁵ John 12:35.

⁷⁶ See Mtt 16:3.

⁷⁷ For Spirit also as "the love-energy of God," see Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, 270.

⁷⁸ In the "Prologue to the Rule of St Benedict", Benedict has "Run, while you have the light of life." In the *Benedictine Handbook*, 2003.

⁷⁹ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 232.

⁸⁰ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 129.

The metonymic equivalent for journey as pilgrimage is a joyful surrendering-up within the confidence-giving light of the transcendent other, the movement towards total surrender to God. This movement is for Bede indissolubly linked with the Golden String. Further, again as with Gandhi, Griffiths understands “total service of humanity” as being “compatible with total surrender to God.” This too, is the subject of a later chapter, *Divine Lord*. It illustrates how the external movement of the journey and the interior dimension are integrated. Furthermore, this surrender, in Hinduism, *samatva*, is the source of peace whether it is in the midst of failure or success. Griffiths makes the comparison with Ignatius Loyola’s “holy indifference.”⁸¹

This kind of self-surrender apparently synonymous with the human search (for God) may seem as if human effort is all important when in reality, “it is God who is loving us and drawing us towards (Godself).”⁸² It expands on the “golden string” image. Perseverance in the journey rests on the revealed Word.⁸³

Indeed, the emphasis on Benedictine hospitality in Griffiths’ own life is well and truly grounded in this “surrendering up.” But it is a Self-surrender in the first place on the part of the Divine Mystery.⁸⁴ As earlier shown, Griffiths teaches that all religions can at a mystical level of insight speak of a pilgrimage out from the transcendent origin with an originating impulse of dispossession through divine creative ardor whether it is expressed in the sense of Self-condensation, Self-immolation, Self-giving.⁸⁵ Griffiths endorsed the theology of Beatrice Bruteau. Her background in mathematics and physics, together with her access of Patristic sources, are the basis of her presentation of a God who stretches in creation

⁸¹ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 32, 56.

⁸² Bede Griffiths, *River*, 227.

⁸³ *The Benedictine Handbook*, “The Rule of St Benedict” states, “God is present everywhere” and 53, “Any guest . . . should be received . . . as we would receive Christ himself.” Ch 19, p53.

⁸⁴ Self-surrender can be seen to be constitutive of divinity. Christian theology expresses this as love in relationship, epitomized or, more significantly, incarnated in the Christian absolute symbol, Jesus Christ. In *River of Compassion*, Griffiths explains the difference between the Gita and the *Advaita Vedanta* interpretation such as that of Sankara - because it only appears that Brahman acts, a person must go beyond *karma*, beyond action to reach God. In the *Gita* – though eternally inactive, God always acts. As the action in the world derives from One who is immutable, it is intuited and theologically interpreted as sacrifice and clearly this is significant for Christians.

⁸⁵ See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 144, 145, 157, 249. This is more pronounced in Christian theology and Jewish mysticism but is also found in the mystic writing of Ibn al-Arabi. In *A History of God*, Karen Armstrong shows how the Muslim mystic stressed the pathos, the longing of God which brings forth into existence the whole of the cosmos and human beings, *logoi*, God’s self-expression. See Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (New York: Random House, 1993), 237. <http://www.necessaryprose.com/armstrong.htm> (accessed Dec 12, 2009).

through an ecstatic expansion of the divine inner relational personhood. She finds it coheres well with an Eastern theology of origins. It describes a divine self-emptying expressive of self-gift in ecstatic self-forgetfulness.⁸⁶

Griffiths insists there is “no difference” in Hindu and Christian views of God as both immanent and transcendent. “We are all members of a cosmic whole . . . Our only true Self is our Self in God.”⁸⁷ “Journey” in this respect becomes an image of depth and density.⁸⁸ Griffiths sees the “fine point of the soul,” traditionally understood as the *nous* or *intellectus*, comparable to the Hindu concept of the *Buddhi*.⁸⁹ It is at this point that the Spirit of God and the human spirit meet, where the human spirit is open to realization of the divine ground of being, through divine union.⁹⁰

However, this universalist perspective was for Griffiths based on the concrete specificity of the life of the monastic community. Thomas Matus⁹¹ writes that for Griffiths, being grounded and centred in the daily round of prayer, manual labour, domestic tasks and recreation “were as much synonyms for being universal as they were for meditation and contemplative prayer.”⁹² Griffiths himself speaks of the chanting in choir being for him, “the bridge between the cosmos and the Absolute.”⁹³ In the community, representative of the world, where he experiences his own and his community’s limitations, he is called to surrender his own will in faithfulness to the times of common prayer and the requirements of hospitality. It was in the midst of this interplay of the universal and specific that he expressed his sense of the urgent need of a marriage of East and West and responded to a request to start a foundation in India. The difficult leave-taking and the painful process of requesting Rome for temporary excommunication for the interim travel, and misunderstanding

⁸⁶ Beatrice Bruteau, *God’s Ecstasy* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co, 1987).

⁸⁷ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 261.

Griffiths illustrates how in Aquinas’ thought in spite of his delineation of “connaturality,” the source of knowledge is through logical reason. Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 153. Griffiths makes the point that this is justifiable in view of the Aquinas’ later contemplative experience that motivated his words that all he had written was “but straw.” See *Cosmic Revelation*, P105.

⁸⁸ We have noted Aquinas’ idea of “connaturality.” This Griffiths understands as an “affective” knowledge of God proper to humankind. Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 153.

⁸⁹ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 71.

⁹⁰ Realisation of the divine, union, or *advaita*, Griffiths demonstrates as being differently understood for Hindus and Christians. Griffiths’ understanding of a “qualified *advaita*” is explained further on in the thesis.

⁹¹ Father Thomas Matus OSB Cam teaches at Sant’Anselmo College in Rome.

⁹² Thomas Matus, “Bede Griffiths, Monk (1906-1993): the Universal in the Specific.” Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

⁹³ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 150.

attendant upon such an irregular step are of a part with his abandonment to “the Golden String.”

The journey to India, the geographical move corresponding with a psychological shift demands of him a deeper degree of conversion and self-surrender. An authentic dialogue – that of equals - impels Griffiths to exchange what had seemed like the accoutrements of poverty for the most basic of material goods, giving up his monk’s robe and the simple furniture of his cell for the way of the *sannyasi*, saffron *kavi*, bare-foot, food taken with the hand, seated on the ground.

Correspondingly, the interior way of surrender led him to deeper simplicity. In his mature thought, a conviction of the need for a synthesis of ideas among world religions was not to suggest any kind of collapsing together of the different religious beliefs which are contingent on culture, but that all faiths, each operating in accord with its own “absolute symbol,”⁹⁴ have their share of truth by which all are meant to profit. All are pilgrims on the way to the one Divine Mystery, which in its profoundly intimate relationship with the whole of the cosmos has dispossessed itself and pilgrimages with and in humanity. Self-giving, self-surrender is constitutive of the Divinity.⁹⁵

Griffiths insists on a profound interconnectedness which includes the collective unconscious. To my mind, his openness to change and focus on the horizon, the “beyond,” encourages comparison with the thought of Bob Plant and Michael Barnes today, concerning the cutting edge, the point of growth, the place where things are alive and happening where the risk of alterity exists; that which is different even “other” is encountered and engaged in dialogue in a spirit of courage. It is significant for interreligious dialogue. Griffiths is uncompromising:

It is a vital need of the Church that we should enter into dialogue with other religions – I see no future for the church apart from this. It can only survive as a ghetto religion as Judaism did, unless it opens itself to the truth contained in the Scriptures and living traditions of other religions.⁹⁶

Griffiths’ engagement with India led to his theology of complementarity, a broad and compassionate perspective. It reflects on the Hindu name Griffiths’ chose, *Dyananda* – Bliss of Compassion.

⁹⁴ See “God of the Journey” above, in the section, Journey as Dialogical Encounter.

⁹⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 97.

⁹⁶ Bede Griffiths in a Letter to Pascaline Coff, Oct 16, 1984. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

My understanding of Griffiths' engagement with India has been enriched with the help of the particular lens of the rhetorical device of metonymy. The day-travel of self-surrender, that is the metonymic equivalent of journey as pilgrimage, introduced the details of light to see by, and the infused light of truth, peace and hope and trusting self-surrender. It re-introduced the challenging issue of commitment to and engagement in dialogue with others and the world, and the new science, and especially with inter-religious dialogue which it emphasized more strongly as a non-negotiable.

4. The Journey of Consciousness

While the idea of "journey" suggests activity and geographical shift, the objective is the "still point." Griffiths envisages a new global consciousness grounded in an appreciation of the inestimable value of the contemplative dimension in everyday community living. He expressed his message: "always to transcend our divisions — religious, social, psychological, linguistic — the fragmented state of humanity — and recover the wholeness . . . the unity behind diversity."⁹⁷ This can be compared with Panikkar's "cosmotheandric vision" of "the three irreducible dimensions of the divine, the human and the earthly" which, existing as one in relation, "expresses the ultimate constitution of reality . . . constitutive of the whole, but flash(ing) forth, ever new and vital, in every spark of the real."⁹⁸

Indeed, the "synechdochic moment" for Griffiths is "horizon." It reintegrates the disparate parts as a new level of apprehension. It is a symbol which "is the reality but as symbol."⁹⁹ In the journey, the horizon limits, yet supports, and signifies the "beyond." The pilgrimage of life is incontrovertibly linked to the horizon, ever before, behind, indeed quite surrounding, from every human birth deep within the psyche as unarticulated symbolic disclosure of the continuation and expansion of life. Christ, the Golden String, is, superlatively, and superabundantly, also the horizon.

Griffiths' focus on the ever "beyond" is evoked in Frank Anderson's 1980's hymn familiar to many, *The Galilee Song*. Horizons surmounted give rise to others:

As I gaze into the night down the future of my years
I'm not sure I want to walk past horizons that I know.
But I feel my spirit called like a stirring deep within,

⁹⁷ Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond Darkness*, 252.

⁹⁸ Raimon Panikkar, in Gerard Hall, "Colligite Fragment for an Integration of Reality", the *Prayer Peace and Unconditional Love Seminar: Alienation for Atonement*, Mumbai, 20 – 23 Dec. 2005, P74.

⁹⁹ Gerard Hall, *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics*, 353.

Restless, 'til I live again beyond the fears that close me in.
 So I leave my boats behind,
 Leave them on familiar shores,
 Set my heart upon the deep,
 Follow you again my Lord.

The passing from horizon to horizon corresponds to the stages of self-transcendence.

Our lives proceed in stages; and at each stage there is a particular limited horizon, and we have to live within that.¹⁰⁰

Yet, Griffiths' constant reiteration of the need "always to go beyond" is central. Ultimately, the horizon is for Griffiths the promise of *advaita*.¹⁰¹ He reiterates the importance, on the Eve of Jesus' death, of his mystical saying in the Gospel of John 17:21: "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." It is especially meaningful that in the midst of this life's pain and suffering, the horizon gives hope.

There are no words to express that which is finally "the Beyond," the Godhead, or *nirguna brahman*. It is "the One beyond all . . . beyond thought altogether . . . beyond concepts."¹⁰² Hindu spirituality describes it as *neti neti*, "not this, not this." Revelation of this One, communicated through the power of the non-rational mind, is always conveyed symbolically. Griffiths draws attention to the divine revelation to Julian of Norwich of "all that is" as an object in the palm of her hand the size of a hazel nut; and that her insight compares with Eastern mystical traditions: although the One fully immanent in all the vast cosmos is at once wholly "other" wholly transcendent, this tiny "object" is beloved.¹⁰³

Since all is thus beloved, conflict and violence are obstacles. For Griffiths, the "only way" to overcome the conflict and violence of present times is for humanity "to go beyond the limits of each religion and realize the transcendent mystery which is manifest in all of them." This is because "we're all pilgrims on a journey to the beyond . . ." ¹⁰⁴ The present

¹⁰⁰ Bede Griffiths, *A Human Search*, 128.

¹⁰¹ This for Griffiths is a qualified *advaita*, not a unity where all distinction disappears. There has been some difference in judgment as to whether the 8th century Hindu mystic Shankara's experience and explanation of this final non-dualistic union with God meant that all material existence as *maya* was pure illusion. However, Griffiths came to believe that Shankara properly interpreted meant *maya* as illusion only in the sense of the way material existence is perceived by those who have no faith in a spiritual reality. Bede Griffiths, *A Human Search*, 93.

¹⁰² Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 201.

¹⁰³ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 200.

¹⁰⁴ Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths' Theory*, 199. Griffiths' response in an interview by Trapnell at Waitsfield, Vt, Tape Recording, August 1992.

status of humanity demands that all religions re-examine their religious symbols. Moreover, mutual sharing should lead to re-expression of the symbolic content and avoid a cloying effect from those symbols which have lost their meaning, have virtually died. Living symbols effect change; enable the journey to continue and limiting horizons to be surmounted.

The movement is not as separate individuals but as one humanity. Furthermore, it is the journey of the entire cosmos which is “connected in a wonderful way.” Here, Griffiths refers to Francis Thompson:

Move but a wing
And disturb a star.¹⁰⁵

Griffiths draws attention to the theology of Rahner whom he regarded as having extraordinary mystical insight. In his “Theology of the Symbol” written in the 50s, Rahner describes the differentiation within unity as “an ontological ultimate.”¹⁰⁶ That every being must express itself as an “other” is necessary for fulfillment. Indeed, it is because of the very real differences that “we have to evolve a consistent conceptual system by which we can interpret and integrate our experience of the transcendent.”¹⁰⁷

It correlates with the Eastern mystical experiential knowledge of the multiplicity held in the One and the One being present in all things. Griffiths discovered that the new science and new technology provide means of fresh insight. He uses the example of the hologram, a three dimensional image where every component contains the whole.¹⁰⁸ Bede indicates for comparison the ancient Hindu image of Indra’s pearl necklace where the whole necklace is reflected in each part, in each pearl is reflected every other pearl and the whole.¹⁰⁹

Griffiths points out how, in *The Turning Point*, Fritjof Capra’s description of the cosmos as “a dynamic web of interdependent relationships” is a sign that science has broken free of the Cartesian rational objectification of the material order and included in its

¹⁰⁵ Actually, one cannot find such lines in Thompson’s poetry but it is very likely that Griffiths has conflated the “Butterfly Effect” of American mathematician Edward Lorenz whom we identify with the science of “chaos,” and Thompson’s poem *The Mistress of Vision*. The actual words are, “All things by immortal power, Near or far, hiddenly, To each other linked are, That thou canst not stir a flower, Without troubling of a star.”

¹⁰⁶ Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths’ Theory*, 242.

¹⁰⁷ Bede Griffiths, “Modern Physics and the Eucharist,” Taped lecture, Shantivanam, 1989. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

¹⁰⁸ This is an example of Griffiths’ mature spirituality where the dialogue with religions is constantly being widened to include the inter-faith dimension. See *A New Vision*, 30.

¹⁰⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 174.

ambit the primordial rhythms of a deeper pattern of life.¹¹⁰ It is reflected again in theoretical physicist, David Bohm's implicate order.¹¹¹ Material existence is explicated as the observable part of an implicated whole so that the whole of creation is unfolding as particular forms and structures. Also, Ken Wilber, a transpersonal psychologist describes the stages of development of the human psyche whereby each stage is transcended and replicated as a movement towards full integration in the whole. It is, however, not deterministic. Bohm's concept allows for potentiality. Different possibilities of unfoldings are evoked in the synecdochic image of "horizon." These images are treated in more detail in later chapters.

Significantly, too, there is a new appreciation of the "cosmic religion" of "native" peoples such as the Australian Aborigines and the American Indians for whom "everywhere there is this sense of a divine power and presence in the whole creation – in all matter, in all life, in all human beings."¹¹² The horizons of these belief-systems, on the one hand impose limits, on the other provide stability and the hope of final transcendence.

Horizon, as Griffiths' "dialogue partners" earlier described, is compulsive as an image of promise. To disregard the signs of the times, not to catch the tide at the height, Griffiths predicted, would amount to a negative focus on "difference," a worsening of racial and religious violence, religious disintegration, total eco-degradation, and a growing threat of nuclear annihilation.¹¹³ In the end, Griffiths' contemplative experience in India and in particular of personal integration barely two years before his death convinced him that the key to the impasse was to be found in lay contemplative communities.¹¹⁴ These would be groups comprised of people from a variety of backgrounds, and connected with a religious monastic community, who would meet for discussion and most especially corporate contemplative prayer and then go back to their day to day activities inspired and energized to work wisely and effectively. Griffiths came to believe as he practiced the prayer of the

¹¹⁰ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 9, 12.

¹¹¹ "The universe was originally folded up fifteen thousand million years ago in a tiny point." See Bede Griffiths, "Modern Physics and the Eucharist."

¹¹² Bede Griffiths, "Cosmic Person Cosmic Lord." In a talk at *Human Potential*, St James's, Picadilly, 1992. Published in *Human Potential*, Summer 1992, 16. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

¹¹³ The last two chapters of Griffiths' *A New Vision* contain these ideas, and specifically, 295, 296.

¹¹⁴ The community founded by St Benedict was originally a lay community patterned after the style of St Anthony of the desert's community.

presence of God¹¹⁵ that mindfulness was key and that action as prayer was as much a means to union with God as the monastic discipline.¹¹⁶

In the human journey to God, Griffiths describes awareness of the horizon representing the veil between reality as we presently perceive it, and the full truth of “the beyond” as the basis of mindfulness. Simply stated, he proposes that humanity can only go forward now through living out the kind of interdependency which has already become manifest at basic levels and which was always known by mystics. This would require a synthesis of non-rational and rational thought, through the light of contemplation, of religious truth through interreligious (and inter-faith) dialogue, and of prayer and action.

Christ, is both Golden String and horizon leading to “the beyond,” is the sacrament of God. The goal is *saccidananda*, being, consciousness, bliss.¹¹⁷ That much is revealed but the reality of what lies beyond is impossible to conceive. “Nothing we can conceive of God or of eternal life can have more than a remote resemblance to the reality.”¹¹⁸ Griffiths’ Christian interpretation of this final experience of union with God as “love in relationship” is often repeated. While “horizon” on the one hand represents that which is always beyond, on the other, it is that for which humankind as a journey-people is always yearning and straining towards, the source of exhilaration because it leads to the wider view, the larger experience.

Bede had been disappointed in Abhishiktanda’s lack of interest in the Ashram in Tamil Nadu and his eventual complete absorption in the Hindu experience of *advaita*.¹¹⁹ Griffiths’ concept of community pre-supposes a “radical hospitality.” In this, welcoming the “other” no matter how, what or when, is the goal to strive towards. It involves a kind of

¹¹⁵ See Bede Griffiths, *A New Creation*, 29.

¹¹⁶ “Higher than meditation is surrender in love of the fruit of one’s actions. The commonest most universal way is the most profound.” Bede Griffiths, *River*, 225.

¹¹⁷ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 23.

¹¹⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 185.

¹¹⁹ Bede Griffiths, “Conversations with Fr Bede,” in an Interview with Judson Trapnell, Waitsfield, Vermont, 11 August 1992, Tape 1, side A. With reference to Monchanin’s vision for Shantivanam as being a balance of contemplation and service to the poor, Griffiths said, “You know Abishiktananda broke his heart.” See also Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths, A Life*, 179, 180. Jacques Dupuis points out what he considers to be the real value of this man’s radical living out in himself “the symbiosis of the two traditions, the Hindu and the Christian, in so real a way that both became part of himself.” The experience of what Abishiktananda calls “two forms of a single “faith,” Dupuis understands to be a prophetic witness to the kind of existential encounter possible in inter-religious dialogue.” See Judson Trapnell, “Abishiktananda’s Contemplative Vocation and Contemporary India”, http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/society_essays.htm (accessed 21 January 2006).

justice which incorporates mercy. Today, philosopher, Bob Plant, writes of this kind of justice as more than a matter of “ethics”— rather a striving “within justice for a better justice” which is a movement beyond fixed morality since it contains always the sense of incompleteness.¹²⁰ Griffiths encountered this kind of a challenge following the Golden String. His journey involves a personal intuition that what is perceived as “other” will be discovered to be not radically so.¹²¹ It is in line with Rahner’s theology of differentiation within unity.¹²² Again, it agrees with theologian Michael Barnes’ description of what he believes to be vital for today – something we recognize as quintessentially Benedictine tradition. I believe Griffiths had before his move to India, as indicated at Farnborough (Chapter 2), already taken up “the task of telling the Good News of God’s own act of welcome and hospitality . . . in all its complexity and most unlikely manifestations.”¹²³

The *Rule of St Benedict* written one and a half millennia ago lays stress on the “happy state”¹²⁴ of humility and hospitality whereby each stranger “should be received just as . . . Christ himself.”¹²⁵ Bede’s *Shantivanam* was an example of this kind of hospitality. This is shown in detail in Chapter 5.

Understandably, Griffiths was particularly interested in Teilhard de Chardin’s evolutionary paradigm¹²⁶ treated in *Le Milieu Divin* and *Prayer of the Universe*. Capra’s description of a unifying principle behind apparent chaos is comparable along with the work of Ken Wilber. Wilber, he judged to have “gone beyond the basic structures as Freud and Jung understood them, linking these up with the highest levels of human awareness.”¹²⁷ In

¹²⁰ Bob Plant, *Wittgenstein and Levinas* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 185,191.

¹²¹ It is interesting to note that as far back in 1790, in his anonymously published, “In Vindication of the Hindoos”, “Hindoo” Stuart, an Englishman employed by the East India Trading Company had written, “Whenever I look around me, in the vast region of Hindoo Mythology, I discover piety in the garb of allegory: and I see Morality, at every turn, blended with every tale, and, as far as I can rely on my on my own judgement, it appears the most complete and ample system of Moral Allegory that the world has ever produced . . . (the *Vedas* were) . . . written at that remote period in which our savage ancestors of the forest were perhaps unconscious of a God; and were, doubtless, strangers to the glorious doctrine of the immortality of the soul, first revealed in Hindostan.” See William Dalrymple, *White Mughals, Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India* (London: Flamingo, 2003), 48.

¹²² See thesis above, 89.

¹²³ Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21. These later words of Michael Barnes can be very well applied to Griffiths’ endeavour of a decade earlier.

¹²⁴ *The Benedictine Handbook*. “The Rule of St Benedict” (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003), 32.

¹²⁵ *The Benedictine Handbook*, 74.

¹²⁶ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 25, 26.

¹²⁷ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 26.

Up from Eden a transpersonal View of Human Evolution, Wilber shows how each new stage of consciousness which humankind achieves is a recapitulation of earlier stages. Moreover, the process of the evolution of consciousness for humanity as a whole replicates that of the individual person.¹²⁸ Bede understands such developments in terms the journey of humanity which is now “emerging into a higher state of consciousness.”¹²⁹ Not only is “the Ultimate Reality sustaining the whole universe”¹³⁰ but the wholly “other” nevertheless walks our journey with us. Indeed, each person is “a unique reflection of the one eternal light and love . . . Each is a unique expression of God, a unique manifestation of the divine, and each is in all and all are in each.”¹³¹ Griffiths describes “the rhythm of the universe”:

Everything comes forth eternally from the Father, the Ground of Being, in the Son, the Word and Wisdom of the Father and returns in the Spirit. The Father, the ground, is pouring itself out eternally in the Son, knowing itself and expressing itself in the Son, and the Father and the Son return to one another, unite with one another, eternally in the embrace of the Holy Spirit. We are enfolded in that love.¹³²

Holding fast to “The Golden String” Griffiths began to explore “the feminine” both in God and in the human intellectual make-up. In this respect, Hinduism as a religion with a vast panorama of male and female “gods” appealed to him. His investigation of the *Vedas* and the *Bhagavad Gita* from the *Mahabarata* became for him a confirmation of the truth of the Gospels.¹³³ At the same time, he grew in his understanding of the One who paradoxically journeys with us, of the incredible texture, variety, the sheer adventure of the journey out from and back to the divine mystery the ground of our being and source of life. For Griffiths, every human being uniquely shares in the journey of the cosmos. In each

¹²⁸ It counters and balances the radical Hindu concept of re-incarnation, with the necessary release from *Samsara* through *moksha* or enlightenment, a cyclic process compared with the Judaic/Christian linear eschatological view. Jesus’ words concerning John the Baptist as the Elijah who was to come, (11:14) might lead to a more open-minded interpretation of re-incarnation in some acceptable form or degree; Griffiths refers to Coomaraswamy’s following of Shankara, that, “the Lord is the only transmigrator.” Bede understands by this that the one Spirit, the Self in every person goes from life to life “gathering” experience. Another angle would understand reincarnation as explicable through experience of the collective unconscious. See Bede Griffiths, in “On Poverty and Simplicity: Views of a Post-Industrialist Christian Sage. A Dialogue Between Father Bede Griffiths and Renée Weber.” *Re-Vision* 6/2, 1983. (The Bede Griffiths Trust) An image for the journey in and to God which is a combination of cyclic and linear would be relevant here, such as - a multiple helix is explored by Elizabeth Johnson. See thesis, the chapter, *Imago Dei*.

¹²⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 27.

¹³⁰ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 27.

¹³¹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, 253. See also, Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths, A Life*, 365.

¹³² Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 251.

¹³³ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 325.

person uniquely, the energy of the entire cosmos achieves its greatest poise and intensity. Trapnell believed that Griffiths, through his search for a marriage of East and West, and feminine and masculine tendencies, had himself towards the end of his life, achieved a particular poise of personal integration and self-transcendence.¹³⁴

His experience shows that the “beyond” indicated by the image of the horizon that we have called Bede’s synechdochic key, is at once, presence, possibility and promise, and will, at the level of consciousness to which humankind is now being called, be apprehended as a deeper human dimension to be grasped. This idea is further elaborated later in the thesis.

5. Journey as Common Goal

Griffiths says, “‘the Golden String’ is Christ.” It signifies the pilgrim God who is the goal of the journey. Deriving from this profound mystery that is revealed in such paradox, the pilgrimage experience is one where light is darkness, surrendering up is to possess, and to journey more deeply in and with humanity is to journey into God.

This is the irony of deep paradox with which the faith-filled person lives as a day-by-day reality. For Griffiths, this is centred in *advaita*. Describing the metaphor of journey as pilgrimage; the metonymic equivalent of the continual daily surrender to the movement of the Spirit; and the awareness of the ever present “beyond” of horizon assist an understanding of this reality.

The “day” pilgrimage with the “light” is also the journey of “night.” Besides the paradoxical way of Christ, there is the interior journey. The light remains but the spiritual brilliance of so dazzling a light can only be perceived by a spiritual sight that “sees” sightlessly in a “darkness” that is understood as filled with the presence of God. Encounter with God in the contemplative journey uniquely encompasses and nourishes the whole journey of life.

Griffiths models radically living the “journey” of humanity in Christ. He reminds us this is the call to Christians who must “confess that we are ‘strangers and exiles on earth’”; that we have here “no abiding city.”¹³⁵ His theology based on Trinity, Incarnation and

¹³⁴ Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life*, 8, 9, 206, 207.

¹³⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 185.

Eucharist proclaims complementarity in regard to inter-religious dialogue and contemplation in action where contemplative experience is key.

Properly speaking, the Benedictine life does not distinguish “contemplation” and “action” but centres on a balance or integration of prayer, reading (lectio divina) and work in community. Differently from this, the monastic ashram which Griffiths helped to found in India incorporated the eremitic life¹³⁶ observable in the sprinkle of separate little huts around the central chapel.¹³⁷ It was in the final two years of his life that a profound sense of the real integration of these two aspects came about. Letters of 1985 to Sr Pascaline Coff¹³⁸ indicate Dom Bede’s intention to “retire.” He thought his journey was near its end, he was weaker and his life would be mostly one of self-imposed, contemplative isolation in his hut in the forest.

Dominic Milroy OSB says, “Benedictines suffer from a chronic identity crisis.”¹³⁹ Reading *The Benedictine Handbook*, of 2003, it could appear there is a general uncertainty just where to slot Griffiths. Although *Shantivanam*¹⁴⁰ was welcomed into the Camaldolese¹⁴¹ congregation in 1982, there is no mention of the Indian Camaldolese Ashram in the book’s quite detailed description of the Benedictine Family. However, this is probably more due to the great variety of “autonomous” Benedictine “congregations” world-wide.¹⁴² It does come up in the interesting section “A Benedictine Who’s Who” (that is, exemplary deceased

¹³⁶ In point of fact, this is an example of inculturation and reflects the Indian emphasis on the interior journey with its beginnings in the *risis*’ contemplative isolation in the forest, 4,000 years ago, that gave rise to the *Vedas*.

¹³⁷ Griffiths’ India experience in a sense leads him beyond the “horizon” of the Church. A *sannyasi* is one who in the contemplative experience of the wholly transcendent has “gone beyond” religion. They are called to guide others towards this centre of unity, through the “gate” of “Jerusalem,” the eternal “City of God.”

¹³⁸ One of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration who founded the Osage Monastic Ashram at Tulsa, O.K.

¹³⁹ *The Benedictine Handbook*, 328. Milroy points out the history of “anomalies and contradictions” in the Benedictine history. “Let the Abbot decide . . .” was the earliest dictum. According to Milroy, there has always been “a tension between two fidelities – fidelity to the letter of the Rule, and fidelity to the call of immediate and localized charisms,” 321, 322. One could conclude Griffiths’ contribution is restorative, and regenerative.

¹⁴⁰ “Forest of Peace,” the Benedictine Ashram in Tamil Nadu on the bank of the sacred Cauvery River where Griffiths spent 27 years.

¹⁴¹ The Camaldolese are a monastic and contemplative community, in the Benedictine tradition, with an emphasis on both solitude and community.

¹⁴² Abbot Francis of Prinknash pointed out, “We know very little about Benedict.” This perhaps reflects on flexibility and healthy freedom of interpretation of the Rule.

members of the Congregation), in the paragraph describing Griffiths.¹⁴³ There is no negative criticism intended in this observation. Griffiths' transcribed and published talks and interviews and aspects of some of his writings are not always consistent. The journey he made and the transformative experiences he had were enormous. His ideas changed. Some of what he says is ambiguous. One has to correlate ideas and read between the lines. Jacques Dupuis,¹⁴⁴ for example, questions whether Bede has "distinguish(ed) the hidden reality of the Godhead from its manifestation in a personal God and, in Christianity, from its manifestation in the three divine persons," in such a way that is not "altogether consonant with the Christian tradition." Dupuis admits that such parallels are "somewhat elusive and difficult to handle." In *A New Vision of Reality*, Griffiths seeks to clarify his Christian viewpoint and he finds support in Ruybroeck:¹⁴⁵

One has entered into the Godhead and one knows in the light by the light. This is exactly how it is put in the Upanishads and in the *Bhagavad Gita*, where it is said that one knows the *atman* through the *atman*. God is grasped and held through God . . . we have our eternal archetype in God which comes forth forever from the Father in the Son and returns in the Spirit. . . . In the utterance of the Word which comes forth from the Father eternally the whole creation, the whole humanity . . . are present . . . this is what is meant by our uncreated being in the Godhead.¹⁴⁶

The Eucharist which Griffiths understands as a contemplative experience is central to the "knowing by unknowing" which can be seen as the core of the most profound human reality. "The Mystical Body and the Eucharistic Body are one."¹⁴⁷ The glorified body of the risen Christ (*res*) is present in the Eucharist (*sacramentum*). Through the Spirit, the risen Jesus draws all into the Divine life. Surrendering up is sacrificial in the sense of out-flowing love which makes holy, and returns drawing all things together in unity. Before his entry to India, Bede understood the Eucharist to represent:

¹⁴³ *The Benedictine Handbook*, 248.

¹⁴⁴ Jacques Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 267,268.

¹⁴⁵ He quotes Ruybroeck, "God utters himself in the Spirit eternally without intermediary and in this Word he utters himself and all things," *A New Vision*, 248.

¹⁴⁶ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 248.

¹⁴⁷ Bede Griffiths, "Modern Physics and the Eucharist," in a taped talk at Shantivanam, 1989. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

the sacrifice of Christ . . . the central event of human history; it is the event which alone gives meaning to life. It was in the Resurrection of Christ that the illusion of this world was shattered and humankind was set free from the bondage of space and time.¹⁴⁸

Expanding the dialogue into the inter-faith dimension, Griffiths explores the mystery of the Eucharist (along with the resurrected and risen body of Christ) in terms of insights from the new science. We will take this further in the next chapter.

Integral to the combination of revelation and mystery at the heart of human experience is the expectation of a “new consciousness.” For Griffiths, the next level is a discovery of “the unitive consciousness which goes beyond dualistic awareness.”¹⁴⁹ This would be, as described above, powerfully integrative and creative. This is the next stage in the journey along which humanity is being drawn. “Every religion looks forward to a time when the end will come and the new birth will take place. So in a very wonderful way we are at the birth of a new age and a new consciousness.”¹⁵⁰ As the human being and consciousness of Jesus was assumed into the total divine reality, or in Hindu terms, *Saccidananda*, being, consciousness, bliss, so through the Holy Spirit, the whole of creation through a redeemed humanity is being brought towards its source in God. Paradoxically, while we perceive according to time and space, in God all is the ultimate state – “Now.” The world process through all races and religions has to be fulfilled for all “to converge” finally on the One. This final convergence is not a utopian vision but ultimately eschatological.¹⁵¹ The significance of this for Christian community is explored in more depth in a later chapter.

The pilgrim church, essentially a mystical reality is yet materially present as “a movement in history . . . affected by all the social and historical conditions of the time.” Characterized and animated by the Holy Spirit, it ideally epitomizes love in relationship, the goal of the pilgrimage. The strength of Griffiths’ belief in church along with his emphasis that the church in the world must be open to change and adaptation¹⁵² becomes apparent later in the thesis.

¹⁴⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 184.

¹⁴⁹ Bede Griffiths, “The New Consciousness”, *The Tablet* 247, No 7954 (1993): 70.

¹⁵⁰ Bede Griffiths, “The New Consciousness”, 70.

¹⁵¹ Griffiths points out that created reality, finite reality, is the world of multiplicity and “finite world is an imperfect world.” See *A New Vision*, 147. See also, *Marriage*, 203. See also, “On Poverty and Simplicity.”

¹⁵² Bede Griffiths, “The Ashram as a Way of Transcendence,” in Vadana Mataji, *Christian Ashrams* (New Delhi, 1993), 30 -33. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

On grounds of the above, Griffiths emphasizes that the monastic calling is universal. All are called to see within, acknowledge and accept their weakness, sin and limitation; to surrender the demands of the will, transcend the ego, to live for the other/others. This would mean to be pure of heart, disposed to contemplation. It is the way to personal integration and wholeness, the experience of oneness with all that is. Griffiths' prophetic tone is characteristic:

It's urgent. We must get beyond these terrible divisions which are destroying humanity. We are destroying the universe around us, the whole planet . . . We can never get over it as long as we remain on the physical or psychological level.¹⁵³

The best witness to judge the authenticity of Griffiths' message might be whether or not the transformation has taken place in his own life. This after all, has been the age-old test of private revelation. And so we find that Griffiths did not retire to his hut in the forest. Instead the integrative experience in his eighties which he describes as a God hitting him on the head (others as a stroke) led to two years of constant journeying round the world. He produced two more books and went on tours giving talks in England, Germany, Canada, USA and Australia. People who expected to see a frail old man alight from the plane, were taken aback to see him energetically and cheerfully striding towards them.

Michael Casey OCSO describes in *Truthful Living* (2001) a "surge in vitality that stems from a spiritual liveliness . . . Once the capacity to love is extended, sluggishness is overcome and a new dynamism is engendered. Like small children we have a surplus of energy."¹⁵⁴ According to St Benedict, this is in the context of love and it is true that Griffiths who described his integrative experience as being "overwhelmed by love," was in Benedict's terms, "most intensely animated not by love of abstract goodness but by a personal love of Jesus Christ."¹⁵⁵

So far, the treatment of the journey has introduced physical travel, entered the interior dimension, returned once again to the surface. It reflects Griffiths' focus on "the horizon," which is also his hope for lay contemplative communities that they may constantly carry "the light" uppermost in their minds. This is expressed in the *Gayatri mantra*, the most sacred in the *Vedas* which is chanted in Shantivanam at the beginning of each prayer: "Let

¹⁵³ Bede Griffiths, "Spiritual Awakening," a talk for the Mystics and Scientists Conference, Winchester, England, 1992. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

¹⁵⁴ Michael Casey OCSO, *Truthful Living* (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2001), 249.

¹⁵⁵ Michael Casey, *Truthful Living*, 251.

us meditate on the splendor of that glorious light; may he illumine our meditation.” It is given to the Brahmin when he receives the sacred thread. He represents for Griffiths the “universal monk,” who is sent out with the advice, “Go my son, go over the wide spaces of the earth, go to the beyond.”¹⁵⁶

In *The Marriage of East and West*, Griffiths draws attention to the present stage of the journey of humankind and the earth itself. It is at a point of crisis. Trapnell argues that Griffiths is one who has transcended in his own person the divisive issues of East and West as a “culture-bearer.”¹⁵⁷ As a “bridge,”¹⁵⁸ he holds the solution is to be found by recognizing, by way of mystical intuition, the common goal for all creation.

Questions arise for interreligious dialogue. What if “the West” were to discover¹⁵⁹ within itself a unity with the deepest self (as Self) and all of creation? What if “the East” were to appreciate an ultimate value in all features of this present material existence? If respective limiting horizons were transcended and such possibilities were realized there would be ethical consequences. God would be manifest in new, perhaps startling ways. Griffiths was certainly surprised by the sudden turn of events that took place in his own life as he journeyed with God. His outer journeyings, which increased much to his surprise in the last two years of his life, and his interior path seemed to coalesce and crystalise, to grow in integration and clarity.¹⁶⁰ Griffiths’ own life demonstrates the authenticity of his horizon of promise.

6. Journey as a Dialogical Encounter

We note that Griffiths’ images of God emerge in his search for a Christian Vedanta in the daily ashramic context. This is significant. Raimon Panikkar considers that “the dialogue of persons precedes and makes possible the dialectic of ideas.”¹⁶¹ Barnes agrees that, in a

¹⁵⁶ Bede Griffiths, “The Silence and the Solitude of the Heart: Communion with God”, an unpublished talk at Shantivanam, edited by Roland Ropers, 1991. These are the words spoken by the guru at the conclusion of a *sannyasi’s* initiation. India also has the feminine monk, the *sannyasini*.

¹⁵⁷ Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life*, 205 – 207.

¹⁵⁸ Abbot Francis of Prinknash Monastery referred to Bede Griffiths as a “bridge.” For interview with Abbot Francis by the author, see accompanying DVD in Appendix II and the description, Appendix I.

¹⁵⁹ “Re-discover” would be appropriate here in terms of the Christian mystical tradition.

¹⁶⁰ As he lay dying at Shantivanam, Dom Bede recognized a face from the Cotswolds and was visibly moved, joyful because it completed the circle: “I never thought I would ever meet someone from there. How good God is.” See Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 258.

¹⁶¹ Panikkar, 1984, in Michael Barnes, *Theology and Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 137. The idea is available in Panikkar’s writings, for example, *A Dwelling*

dialogical encounter, conversation precedes cognitive analysis.¹⁶² Griffiths, throughout his life-time demonstrated an openness to be engaged in such timely conversations.

He did attend to the differences or interpretation that comparisons revealed and to subtle nuances in understanding. In his exploration of the Hindu concept of *Advaita*¹⁶³ and the interior journey to the Self, the *Atman*, Griffiths describes the human spirit, Francis de Sales' "fine point of the soul," the *nous* or *intellectus* comparable with the Hindu *Buddhi*. Here, the Spirit of God and the human spirit meet and the human spirit is open to realization of the divine ground of being, the Self. "Connaturality" in the Thomistic sense, Bede describes as a primordial intuition of this innate taste for the divine that is common to all humanity. However, among the religions, "journey" includes various journeys, different paths to the one reality. Whereas the Reality is One, the real symbols that mediate this presence to souls on the way vary. For each path/religion they are "absolute," of essential value, although, to the extent that symbols must be transcended for entry into union with the wholly transcendent reality, they are "relative." Griffiths can describe Jesus in regard to other religions as a "relative absolute symbol." For a Christian, Jesus Christ is "the unique relative absolute symbol."¹⁶⁴ This idea is further articulated later in the thesis.

In contrast to pure *advaita*, Bede shows that Christian mystical experience speaks ultimately of unity in multiplicity. God is One, but holding all within that oneness. The experience is unity in distinction. This is a "qualified *advaita*." Griffiths compares this with the Buddhist experience as described by Lama Govinda. Rather than the image from pure *Advaita* of the drop dissolving in ocean, Lama Govinda speaks of the ocean "slipping into" the drop.¹⁶⁵ Govinda describes the ultimate transcendent experience of unity, where not only does difference remain, but the experience is of infinite differentiation in unity.

Furthermore, history and culture form the soul, but especially through the mediation of core symbols and images, or as Griffiths (supported by Trapnell) says, the mediatory influence of the Real Symbol. As a consequence, although the ultimate reality is the One, the One is Love in relationship, and experience is pluriform. The uniqueness of the Christian

Place for Wisdom, Trans. Annemarie S Kidder (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 157-159.

¹⁶² Michael Barnes, *Theology and Dialogue of Religions*, 137.

¹⁶³ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 71.

¹⁶⁴ For detailed explanation of Real Symbol/Absolute Symbol especially in respect to Griffiths, see Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths' Theory*, 320-400.

¹⁶⁵ Bede Griffiths, "On Poverty and Simplicity," 26. See also, Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths' Theory*, 394.

faith for Griffiths resides in the fact that Jesus is the Word incarnated in history,¹⁶⁶ Christ, the Son who lived in obedience to the Father's will and was raised to eternal life. Union with this Christ continues even in the ultimate state of eschatological fulfillment. Jesus Christ is neither *avatar*, nor legend.¹⁶⁷ Christians, however, must transcend, or to use Griffiths' often repeated expression, "go beyond" all signs and symbols to experience God. Ultimate union of all within the One God is also Love as ultimate communion of many in the One.¹⁶⁸

Significantly, Griffiths continually insists on the need to be aware of the limitation of language when speaking of what is beyond words. When the mystery of God is beyond comprehension, language must necessarily be analogical.¹⁶⁹ This is both motive and problem for interfaith dialogue.¹⁷⁰

The Vatican documents describe four types: the dialogue of life; the dialogue of common action; the dialogue of religious experience; and the dialogue of theological exchange and the intimate links between. These represent different dimensions of a familiar human experience, the everyday encounter with another person which opens up new vistas and new possibilities.¹⁷¹ In this respect, India radicalized Griffiths' endeavour.

The Romantics had been a major influence prior to his conversion. For them, the apprehension of beauty gave rise to pure thought and freedom of spirit. As he discovered, this is part of the picture.¹⁷² Describing Bede's understanding, I turned to Barnes: we have to contend with "the broken middle," the "place" between "same" and "other" available for

¹⁶⁶ "Incarnation in some sense is a universal phenomenon (which) exists in some form in Hinduism . . . Buddhism . . . Islam," "Man and God in India," *The Tablet* (1971): 5, 6.

¹⁶⁷ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 165.

¹⁶⁸ Similarly, Raimon Panikkar, assuaging past anthropocentric and heliocentric systems, describes this pluralism, in terms of a "*theanthropocosmic*" where there is no absolute centre because "reality itself is concentric" and "every creature (every tradition) constitutes the centre of the universe." See Raimon Panikkar, *A Dwelling Place*, 142.

¹⁶⁹ Anthony Kelly, *The Trinity*, 252.

¹⁷⁰ Wrong interpretations can be harmful. Wainwright describes the heartbreak when great stories or grand narratives are "used in a way that is death-dealing – a key characteristic, even if not made explicit, in our present great global conflict." E. Wainwright, cited in Francis J. Moloney, Mary L. Coloe, Rekha M. Chennattu eds. *Transcending Boundaries: Contemporary Readings of the New Testament. Essays in Honour of Francis J. Moloney* (Roma: LAS - Libreria Artneo Salesiano, 2005), 232. The "great global conflict" Wainwright refers to here is the "war on terrorism" and particularly the carnage in Iraq. Had he lived longer, Griffiths' himself would no doubt have seen in the Iraq war such a clear indictment.

¹⁷¹ Anthony Kelly, *The Trinity*, 243, 244.

¹⁷² See Bede Griffiths, *The Golden String*, 35, 39, 41.

negotiation.¹⁷³ There is the ethical dimension to consider. The needs of “others” make a primary claim. Yet, this is compatible with a strong sense of self.¹⁷⁴ Justice issues Bede encountered in India are more comprehensively dealt with in the chapter, “Divine Lord and the Reign of God.”

At Shantivanam which was visited both by youthful “seekers” and mature intellectuals such as Rupert Sheldrake, Griffiths was very aware of a particular kind of challenge that draws on levels of intellectual, academic, psychological and spiritual maturity. In *The Contemplative Life in India*, it is clear Bede understands charity is a means to self-transcendence.¹⁷⁵

Wayne Teasdale considers that such a vision led him to be always searching for “the common ground, the bridge that unites all ways of knowing in an overarching unified knowledge, a kind of new species of wisdom.”¹⁷⁶ Further, while Griffiths does not identify *saccidananda* with the Trinity, nevertheless he recognises a common Cosmic (Covenantal) Revelation. This is a “point of encounter in the depths of interior experience.”¹⁷⁷ In dialogue with Hindus, the adoption of *Saccidananda*, being, consciousness, bliss can serve as a Sanskrit “equivalent” for the Trinity. This makes possible a “Christian Vedanta” – a Christian teaching in Hindu terms for creative correspondence with Hindus. This is a means of “allowing others to speak without their voices being presented within the language appropriate for describing one culturally specific experience.”¹⁷⁸

With respect to Griffiths’ grasp of Christ, “the Golden String,” the need to return to the originating myth, the mystery of Christ, links with contemporary philosophy and

¹⁷³ Michael Barnes, *Theology*, 246.

¹⁷⁴ As Barnes observes, “Even – perhaps especially – the most self-effacing of persons requires a strong sense of self.” He goes on to state:

The work of communication across the “broken middle,” which demands such a complex interaction of theological “dimensions,” is due not so much to the inadequacy or incompleteness of the language of cultural idioms which are used, but the fact that, in a much more profound sense, the persons who seek to communicate are themselves incomplete. See Michael Barnes, *Theology*, 64, 246.

¹⁷⁵ In *Pax*, 51, 1961, 105-111. See also, Bede Griffiths, See Bede Griffiths, in “On Poverty and Simplicity,” 24, 25.

¹⁷⁶ Wayne Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction*, 199. Today, while Barnes is concerned with describing an attitude for “negotiating the space between” where “same” and “other” meet, following the thought of Levinas, Bob Plant warns of an indiscriminate application of “radical otherness” and agrees with Bernstein who “condemns . . . the facile ‘postmodern’ temptation to lump together all differences under the general rubric of *the ‘other.’*” Bob Plant, *Wittgenstein and Levinas* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 10.

¹⁷⁷ Wayne Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction*, 181.

¹⁷⁸ Wayne Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction*, 115.

theology.¹⁷⁹ If the cutting edge, the point of growth, the place where things are alive and happening is indeed where the risk of alterity exists where that which is different even “other” is encountered and engaged in dialogue in a spirit of courage, then for people of faith this is no mere option but vital for the sake of integrity.¹⁸⁰ It is a stance recommended by Karl Rahner, as noted earlier.¹⁸¹

Trapnell describes Griffiths’ second stage of self-transcendence (which took place in India). At that point, Christian faith was seen by him as supreme, the fulfillment of God’s self-revelation. But Trapnell recognizes a third stage of transcendence. This amounted to a personal integration which led Griffiths to proclaim the “hidden” God who intimately journeys with all of humanity in separate, unique ways. Now, for Griffiths Christian faith is unique but no longer regarded as “supreme.” It highlights in a new way, the coming to be of the transcendent One in Judaic history as “Yahweh” or “Elohim” who exercises “sovereign freedom.”¹⁸² Humankind must learn to bow in awe at the divine, profligate sowing of the “*logoi spermatikoi*.”¹⁸³ Christians may also be aided to recognise and celebrate a permanent

¹⁷⁹ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 198,199. We note the comparability of Barnes’ ideas on the cutting edge, or the growth point of faith. Risking compromising the integrity and life of “same” in contradistinction to “other” through a dialogical encounter demands movement across boundaries and “becoming other” – a more radical encounter than “standing in someone else’s shoes” or “seeing from a different vantage point”; it means change is inevitable - his understanding of “alterity.” “Alterity” then is the real “other” which nudges the arousal of alarm. However, analysing the presence of the past as the anarchic returning “other,” following Ricoeur, Barnes identifies this phenomenon as integral to Christian faith and concludes that this is the cutting edge, the point of growth. Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 100.

¹⁸⁰ This also connects with Levinas’ emphasis on the ethical dimension. Plant, however, argues against Levinas’ “pessimistic” stance on the “natural” as groundless. He compares it with Wittgenstein’s later thought (contradicting his earlier held premise) supporting a positive interpretation of “natural, primitive phenomena.” Bob Plant, *Wittgenstein and Levinas*, 9.

¹⁸¹ Plant points to Wittgenstein’s argument, that language is “auxiliary to,” an “extension,” “refinement” or “replacement” of primitive reactions.¹⁸¹ The “pre-linguistic,” natural or “primitive” reactions towards “other” are grounded upon the fact of suffering “central to the life of human beings” which draws forth a natural response of care and concern.¹⁸¹ Wittgenstein would argue on the grounds of an underlying “unifying naturalism” against the definition of “radically other” though this is not to explain away distinction or difference due to historical events and cultural diversity or to suggest any easy way of overcoming resultant tensions and separation. There is a correlation between Wittgenstein’s idea of primitive and contemporary (all) religious rituals deriving from the same “general inclination” and Griffiths’ intuition of a commonality of mystical experience. Barnes agrees that “same” and “other” are *relational* categories, not the poles of a dualism.¹⁸¹ God’s self-revelation in the process of history is compatible with the evolution of human consciousness in a kind of “birthing” that is consonant with Romans: 22 of the entire cosmos in labour to give birth.

¹⁸² Michael Barnes, *Theology*, 85.

¹⁸³ *Seeds of the Word* – an image used by Justin Martyr in respect to Greco-Roman culture and persisting to Vatican 11 when it was used in respect to knowledge of truth found in all peoples. See

relationship with Judaism. Griffiths recognises a journeying God who walks with us is at once the longed for Homeland of all humankind and of the entire cosmos; an image that demands patience and humility in acknowledgment that our grasp of truth is only ever partial.

So far, this section has looked more deeply at Griffiths' journey of encounter with the East. It had stimulated radical hospitality and asceticism in the knowledge of the universality of this journey with and in God. In this, change through dialogue with the "other" is to be anticipated, expected and welcomed. It has outlined Griffiths' journey to a mature theology of complementarity. The image presented of God of the Journey, the Pilgrim God who journeys with all humanity as a pilgrim people is found to be a central theme in Griffiths' life and works. In our times it lays prime value on mutual encounter through dialogue.

Conclusion

The heuristic dimension of this chapter mediates the confluence of mine and Griffiths' journeys and underscores the immediacy of the "journey" image. Use of rhetorical categories assists to better delineate this focal metaphor. I have described the deep spiritual and universal significance of the human journey as a pilgrimage. Griffiths' exercise of the Benedictine charisms in the ashram expresses self-surrender within the "day-travel" guided by the light of Christ, the Golden String. This is the metonymic equivalent of the pilgrimage journey. It brings to the foreground the interplay of the historical, communitarian and contemplative. For Bede, dialogue is central in our times. It is reaching towards what he understands as a new level of consciousness for humankind. I see Griffiths' synecdochic interpretive key for this as "horizon" which encapsulates his continual reiteration of the need always to "go beyond." The day-to-day paradox of Christian experience that is irony binds together the various, richly diverse threads at this stage of the journey of creation in accordance with Griffiths' vision and understanding.

My treatment of this image has provided an indication of the degree of Bede's emphasis on dialogue¹⁸⁴ and the relevance of the images of God he uses in his own practice. This rounds off the mapping, or "Plotting the Way," that is Part One of the thesis' narrative structure. I now introduce Part Two as we proceed to explore his use of selected images beginning with Chapter 5, "Divine Host."

¹⁸⁴ Dialogue in all its forms infers the need for some specialisation. Panikkar's presentation of "dialogical" dialogue and theology infers this. See *A Dwelling Place*, 122, 128.

PART TWO: EXPLORATION

Chapter 5

Divine Host: All-Embracing, Generative Love

The Christian view is that creation is given by God as the sphere in which human experience can be worked out which is essentially God giving Godself to the world in love and drawing the world back to Godself in love.¹

Please understand that everyone is the image of God. For that reason alone you accept anyone. In spite of the weaknesses of people, we should not disregard anyone.²

Introduction

For Griffiths, divine Love is synonymous with divine Host. By “host” we mean one who receives a guest. As we have already noted in the Introduction, one will not find the image of God, “Divine Host” named as such by Griffiths but we find it best evokes his understanding of divine Love as expressed in his words above, and authentically identifies and holds together related images in his thought and life experience.

Earlier we suggested that Griffiths’ mature theological approach exemplifies what today, Michael Barnes names as “the task of telling the Good News of God’s own act of welcome and hospitality . . . in all its complexity and most unlikely manifestations.”³ Central to “journey,” we find that the image of divine Host as all-embracing, generative love is a constant background for all Griffiths’ mature writing, and intimated in his early life. Furthermore, in a previous chapter we have noted that *The Rule of St Benedict* written one and a half millenia ago includes “this happy state”⁴ of humility and hospitality whereby each stranger “should be received just as . . . Christ himself.”⁵ In *The Benedictine Handbook*, the reflection, “Hospitality,” demonstrates awareness of the profound import of Benedict’s emphasis of this virtue. The author, Norris, says, “The Incarnation is God’s hospitality to us,

¹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 252.

² Bede Griffiths to Christudas, in “My Experience with My Guruji, Fr Bede,” Fr Christudas O.S.B. Cam. *Ashrama Aikiya Newsletter*. No 28. “Special Issue in Memory of Dom Bede Griffiths,” Sept. 93.

³ Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 21.

⁴ “The Rule of St Benedict,” *Benedictine Handbook* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003), 32.

⁵ *Benedictine Handbook*, Chapter 53, “The Reception of Guests,” 74. To act hospitably is commanded throughout the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. Matthew 25:35 is especially pronounced and evocative and is the basis of the Benedictine rule and Griffiths’ radical action.

a means of welcoming us not only as friends, but as family.”⁶ In the same chapter of his Rule, Benedict also directs that “the greatest care should be taken to give a warm reception to the poor and to pilgrims, because it is in them above all others that Christ is welcomed.”⁷

These and related ideas are explored in this chapter under the following headings:

1. Background and Context of the Image
2. Vedic Experience, the Divine Host and Generative Love
3. The Experience within Christian Tradition
4. Griffiths’ position
5. The Divine Host, Healing and Restorative Space
6. The Divine Host Represents Healthy Community

1. Background and Context of the Image

Because in an exemplary way, Griffiths’ life and teaching are expressive of his own unique interpretation of this axiom of Benedictine community, we find the image, divine Host, encapsulates Bede’s articulation of divine invitation, acceptance, hospitality, infinite generosity and super-abundant creativity that forms communion and unites as one all that exists as “difference.” In this way, the divine Host also heals, with the assistance of created forms of beauty and mediated all-inclusive love.⁸

While the exploration of Griffiths’ images of God takes us most deeply into the Indian context, other religious traditions also come into play. In this chapter, insight into Buddhist and Muslim⁹ traditions contributes to the image. We also include the experience within Christian tradition including Griffiths’ own experience in dialogue with Rahner and Panikkar, Church Fathers - Origen, the Cappadocians and Denis, and Medieval theologians

⁶Kathleen Norris, “Hospitality,” in the chapter, “Tools of Benedictine Spirituality,” in *The Benedictine Handbook*, 75.

⁷ *Benedictine Handbook*, 75. Living the *Beatitudes*, (for Gandhi, the most eminent Christian message), one understands as acting in “*persona Christi*.”

⁸ This suggests that the more we are transformed by learning (as Christ) to embrace and accept that which is different, the more we approximate the divine way of being and that whatever represents “difference” in all its weird and wonderful manifestations is a special “gift” to humanity.

⁹ This is specifically Sufism.

Eckhart, Ruusbroec and Julian of Norwich. Related thought of contemporary philosophers Milbank and Irigaray is included for comparison.

This image is Trinitarian and Eucharistic in the widest sense. (This is explained in section five of this chapter.) While healing of mind and spirit often brings a sense of physical well-being and sometimes even physical healing, the healing described here is primarily the former kind. Nevertheless, in the description of Shantivanam Ashram, it is shown that the place of the body is integral.

Even though the ancient *Vedic* tradition helps guide the form this image takes, it nevertheless is one that becomes more emphatic and consistent as the back-drop to Griffiths' vision for the future of humanity. In regard to this dialogue, tension is evident as he deals with parallel if not comparable myths in the traditions of different religions concerning the meaning of life and notably the act of creation itself.¹⁰ The image is therefore significant for ultimate transcendence as the ground in which mundane reality finds its source and its destination.

It was towards the end of his life that Bede came into contact with Buddhist *dzogchen*.¹¹ Here, he discovered what seemed to be very close parallels with Christian contemplative experience. The final section dealing with divine outflowing love and healing is articulated by his leadership in Shantivanam and new experience with Buddhist *dzogchen*. Because of his continual dialogue with the mystical tradition in the Muslim religion, the model provided by a Sufi response to human psychological need is also included for comparison.

Loneragan's method - experience, understanding, judgment, decision - is subtly held to guide the movement of discussion; his categories are not formally defined which, in view of Griffiths' own approach, would be stifling.¹² Such a plan is desirable where the ineffable

¹⁰ Both in Hinduism and Christianity adverse criticism frustrated but did not deter Griffiths and he and Panikkar agree that in the different religious traditions, at the level of mystical intuition, there is a convergence of ideas born of experience. See Bede Griffiths, "A Meditation on the Mystery of the Trinity." *Monastic Studies*, 17 (Christmas 1986), 69 – 79. The vast pantheon of Gods in Hinduism has a symbolic depth, the referent of which is nothing less than the horizon marking the mystery of God.

¹¹ Griffiths learned of *dzogchen* from the Dalai Lama during his visit to Australia in 1992. See Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 251.

¹² Despite Griffiths' criticism of Lonergan's "method" as being too heavily oriented to "common sense," leaving insufficient weight on imagination, myth, and symbol, Trapnell insists there are important convergences in the method of both theologians. This includes their views on objectivity and truth, intentionality or "the drive to know which intends an object," the experience of self-transcendence beyond all symbols, "horizon and conversion" and especially what he regards as

experience of the *Vedic risis*, mystical experience documented within Christian tradition, and Griffiths' own shared experience, are the substance of the exploration.¹³ As will become evident, experience of this kind both informs and pursues understanding, which in turn provides impetus for further experiential exploration. Experience and understanding together motivate judgment which directs decision-making and standards of living. This amounts in the end to a particular quality of life, the very living of which is expected to be subsumed into the whole transformative reality.

It is reflected in Griffiths' movement into a unifying vision, presaged in his early life and writing and coming to a climax with his integrative experience in 1990. It is a vision that describes above all trust in God, the divine Host, who is generative Love, whose Spirit in Christ constantly animates and renews the whole of creation. For Griffiths, it calls for radical faith, openness to unimagined possibilities and a love which offers hospitality and leaves space for the helping healing Spirit. It is a challenging vision which can arouse fear or apprehension.¹⁴ The radical faith that is necessary has to be nourished by experience of communion with others and with God, contemplation being the principle means.¹⁵

2. Vedic Experience, the Divine Host and Generative Love

The experience of the transcendent from which the complex religion¹⁶ we know as Hinduism originated, begins long before the earliest hymns and chants were first recorded. While our exploration encompasses the whole of the *Vedic* period, the evidence we have to

"key" to both Lonergan and Griffiths, "that which is intended by one's concepts and conscious operations is that which is experienced when all – such mental categories and activities - concepts and conscious operations are transcended." Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths' theory*, 496-521.

¹³ Even though Griffiths' own research evidenced in his published writings covers various different religious traditions, we have necessarily limited the discussion to these three areas.

¹⁴ Kathleen Norris pin-points this fear, in "Hospitality," *Benedictine Handbook*, 125. She includes Benedict's antidote, "Hospitality is a tool that keeps us focused, not on ourselves, but on 'the divine presence [that] is everywhere,'" "the Rule of St Benedict," Chapter 19.

¹⁵ We turn to Norris again who refers to Esther de Waal's point in *Seeking God*, that "monastic hospitality has two simple ends: Did they see Christ in us? Did we see Christ in them?" In Benedict's Rule, the presence of Christ is shown by, "a bow of the head or even a full prostration on the ground which will leave no doubt . . ." (Rule, 53) "But guests must not," says Benedict "unsettle the community" because although "God is present everywhere . . . (God's) presence to us is never so strong as while we are celebrating the work of God in the oratory." (Rule, 19).

¹⁶ Griffiths prefers to speak of Hinduism as a spirituality rather than as a religion.

go by begins with the earliest of the *Vedas*, the *Rig Veda*, and culminates in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Our principle sources are the works of Dom Bede Griffiths and Raimon Panikkar.¹⁷

The word to symbolize the whole of *Vedic* experience of the given image is “embrace.” The earliest *Vedic* tradition, from 2,000 BC (long before the *Upanisads* of 800 BC) has no personal God; rather, it is expressive of a sense of cosmic integration that exerts a transformative embrace of all that exists into eternity. The sacred verse employed for the daily sacrifice of worship¹⁸ is shaped by the *rasis’* religious experience and presents an optimistic vision of life in which every detail has value as part of the whole. (The exception is the state of non-being).¹⁹

This earliest experience does not own a personal Lord. Nevertheless, an infinite lordship underlies the whole. The creator God is “The Seer, our Father,” who “fashioned the Earth and shaped the glory of the heavens,”²⁰ “The Father of vision, the wise in spirit” by whom “the Sky and the Earth were . . . extended.”²¹ The “gods,” the created powers of the universe that are integral in the cosmic order “*rita*,” as representative of the “great *Brahman*, the Ultimate,”²² receive supplication for health and wealth and general well-being. *Mitra* is the “Divine Friend (who) brings Men together,”²³ while the symbol of *Skambha*, the cosmic tree, by whom “Heaven and Earth remain firm-fixed” itself is *Brahman*, the *Nirguna Brahman*,²⁴ which “from fullness pours forth the full,” “is vaster than the whole wide universe,” “the marvelous mystery of God,” who “near though he is, one cannot leave him!”²⁵

¹⁷ Unless specified, the *Vedic* translations in this chapter are from Panikkar’s *The Vedic Experience: Mantramanjari: An anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977). This is a text which Griffiths applauded and recommended others read. See Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 11, 12. Griffiths says that the *Vedic Revelation* is “very rewarding. No one before has really opened up the religious meaning of the *Vedas* in English as he (Panikkar) has done.”

¹⁸ The *agnihotra*, the sacrifice to *Agni* (fire, heat, friend), is central to life. The “three worlds” of the physical, psychic and spiritual are integrated and permeated by God and depend on the collaboration of humankind in the eternal sacrifice for their peaceful and harmonious continuation.

¹⁹ Among the Gods, *Surya* – the sun, is symbol of light and life and mediates within the different spheres of reality. Sin and evil are its extinguishment. Hell therefore is non-being. It is “the pit,” “the abyss,” “bottomless darkness,” RV II, 29, 6. RV VIII, 104, 3. Similarly, Griffiths believes that “hell” is simply the “failure to be.” See Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 39.

²⁰ RV X, 81.

²¹ RV X, 82.

²² AV, X 8.

²³ RV III, 59, 1

²⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 40, 45.

²⁵ AV X, 8

As already mentioned, sacrifice is central to this cosmic religion.²⁶ The chants and hymns served and benefited the worship which had an ontic thrust and to which all were summoned to re-enact the cosmic sacrifice as collaborators in upholding creation. Because sacrifice is integral to the original creative act of Self-offering, so the whole cosmos through the great rhythm of the world dictated by *rita*, the principle of order, participates in the offering which is daily ritually celebrated through the work of the ministering priests. This sacrifice encompasses all material existence. *Vedic* people had a profound sense of integration with the natural environment:

Whatever I dig up of you, O Earth,
May you of that have quick replenishment!
O purifying One, may my thrust never
Reach right unto your vital points, your heart!²⁷

Like other ancient spiritualities such as that of the Australian Aborigines,²⁸ the Earth was their mother, for whom they had the deepest respect.

Brahman, “the mantra, the word of sacrifice” came to be understood as the source of all, the ground of all being from which creation comes and returns.²⁹ In the earliest Vedic times, worship as sacrifice is a physical and concrete act which strengthens and supports belief in extenuation of “this life,” albeit in a transformed state, into eternal existence.³⁰ Faith, then, is characterized by a profound holism; the body is not felt as separate from, but an extension of, the whole universe.³¹ Later, although the idea of the Self appears in the *Athava Veda*, it is the *Upanisads*, the mature fruit from the contemplative practices of

²⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 27.

²⁷ AV XII, 1, 35.

²⁸ Although, the Vedic religion was brought in the first place by the Aryan nomadic invaders from the north, they soon settled and, mixing with the native Dravidian people and forcing them south, became employed in agriculture.

²⁹ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 49, 50. Both Griffiths and Panikkar point out that interpreting the *Vedas* and *Upanisads* as pantheist and monist is misconceived. The symbolic language of these Sanskrit Scriptures cannot be analysed according to Western philosophical categories using Greek terminology.

³⁰ Later in the Chapter “Divine Feminine,” it will become clear how in Ken Wilber’s terms, the *Vedic* sacrifice participates transitionally in the level of consciousness of Great Mother/mythical extenuation of life and also the next level of transcendence mental/egoic without losing the profound spiritual insight.

³¹ Neither Griffiths nor Panikkar are oblivious to the magic content of the *Vedic* cultic sacrifice. However as their concern is the development and growth of consciousness, both with a view to Christian ontology and human understanding generally, it is of incidental importance in their writing. Besides, their concern is the unveiling of truth in the *Vedic* insights.

“forest dwellers,” that record the awakening of consciousness to a new depth of insight into the mystery of creation, to the Self, the *atman* dwelling in the “Cave of the Heart.”³²

The concrete sacrificial acts of early Vedic times changed to ascetical practices as the journey towards the divinity immanent in all of creation was interiorized. The *atman* is realized as inner divine power, as One with the transcendent *Brahman*. Finally, the *Bhagavad Gita*³³ inspired yogic practices and especially through the practice of *Bhakti Yoga*, the “way of devotion,” provided a middle path, a way of meeting the Lord and transcending the vicissitudes of life that was accessible to the ordinary person in every-day life. Griffiths regards the *Gita*³⁴ as the meeting place of “the essential teaching and essential spirit of the ancient Hindu scriptures.”³⁵

The triad of underlying concepts of the *Vedic Revelation*, further demonstrates this holistic view: *rita* is the cosmic order; *tamas* is “heat,” or in the *rig Veda* “divine ardour”; and *satya* is “truth.” Centrally, the god *Agni*, “fire,” presided over the sacrifice, the depth of the symbol taking in all dimensions of life, the three worlds, physical, psychic and spiritual and the supporting principles, mediating between the One wholly transcendent God and humankind. The *Agnihotra*,³⁶ also celebrates and mediates the myth of origins. *Tamas, rita, and satya*, that is, “heat/divine ardour,” “order” and “truth” come together in the “cosmic person,” the *purusha*, the primordial Man³⁷ who self-dismembers in the originating sacrifice for the creation of the universe. In the *Rig Veda*, the *purusha* is the universal man, three fourths of whom are in heaven, one fourth on earth. This explains his immanence in creation. Later, *Upanisadic* wisdom saw the *purusha*, manifesting from the primordial silence of the word, *vac*,³⁸ as one with the *atman* and *Brahman*. Griffiths says that:

³² The *Upanisads* (“to sit near to”) are the discourses from master to student (disciple), and are intended to engender in the student mystical experience. They are not intended as philosophical discourse. They have to be undertaken in the right spirit, with an openness and attentiveness to the symbolic content. Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 11; *The Vedic Experience*, “General Introduction”, 8.

³³ Although strictly speaking the *Bhagavad Gita* is not part of the *sruti* both Griffiths and Panikkar include it as representing the culmination and distillation of *Vedic* spirituality.

³⁴ *Gita* means, “song” and *Bhagavad Gita*, “Song of the Lord”.

³⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 12.

³⁶ The fire sacrifice/celebration/ritual.

³⁷ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality* 128-130, *Cosmic Revelation* 48,49.

³⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation* 77/78. *Vac* is feminine, and comes forth from the Absolute to which it is wholly surrendered and manifests through the divine ardor (*tamas*) to create an other. *Vac* in Panikkar’s words is, “the total living word,” “the primordial mystery,” “the *cosmotheandric*

There is here the concept of a unified creation which has the character of a person who embraces the whole universe and at the same time transcends it.³⁹

All that comes forth from the One, the void, the primordial darkness, is held in the embrace of the One and ultimately returns to the One.⁴⁰

The movement of all creation is a journey out from and a return to God. This essentially is the Vedic Revelation. It is expressed in the *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad*:

That is Fullness, this is Fullness,
From Fullness comes Fullness,
When Fullness is taken from Fullness,
Fullness remains,
Om, peace, peace, peace.⁴¹

The high point of the *upanisadic* experience/wisdom is the realization of the I/thou relationship. It begins with the discovery of the space, like that in the heart of the lotus, within the human heart. The inner space is found to be as vast as the space outside and it is here through an act of grace that the *atman* is revealed (reveals [himself]).⁴² For illustration, we turn to the *Mundaka* and the *Svetasvatara Upanishads*:

MundU II, 2, 5-8

He consists of spirit; he guides the life powers
and dwells within the heart, being based upon food.
Him do the wise perceive by means of wisdom,
the immortal, the radiant, whose nature is bliss.

SU III, 7-21

I have come to know that mighty Person,
golden like the sun, beyond all darkness.
By knowing him a man transcends death;
There is no other path for reaching that goal.

A Person of a thumb's size is the inner atman,
ever dwelling in the heart of beings.
He acts by and through the heart, mind, and spirit.
Those who know that become immortal.

reality par excellence." It reveals that "God, man and the universe . . . are constitutively connected . . . (in a) *cosmotheandric* communion." See Raymond Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 89-92.

³⁹Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, 66.

⁴⁰Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, 57.

⁴¹BU V, 1. Griffiths' translation (*Cosmic Revelation*, 68) differs slightly, "That is full, this is full. From fullness, fullness proceeds. Removing fullness from fullness, fullness alone remains."

⁴²Raimon Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 718, 719.

Subtlest of the subtle, greatest of the great,
 The atman is hidden in the cave of the heart
 of all beings. He who, free from all urges,
 beholds him, overcomes sorrow, seeing
 by grace of the creator, the Lord of his glory.⁴³

In this profound interior experience, the truth may be revealed that the true “I,” the true self, is *neti neti*, “not this,” “not this,” not anything material – the *mahat*, nor the individual ego – the *ahamkara*, but the Self of selves, the *atman*, who is *Brahman*. Initially, the *atman* is “in the last analysis the discovery of the third person . . . (still) . . . the fruit of a predominantly objectified investigation.”⁴⁴ Finally, though, in answer to the existential question, “*who am I?*” truth is informed by a mystical experience of total unity, of union with the One, with *Brahman*, the source of the whole creation and One who is now discovered to be pure consciousness. In this contemplative state, *Brahman* is experienced as the “I,” (*aham*),⁴⁵ indeed is “known” as the “I am” (*aham-asmi*) which reveals *Brahman* as relational through whom the whole of reality is relational and personal.⁴⁶ There is a difference, that is, between saying “I am the *atman*,” and “I am you.”

This completion is found in the *Chandogya Upanisad*, expressed as *Tat Tvam asi*.⁴⁷ In *Brahman*, there is a “*thou*.” This is written in the third great saying or *mahavakya*. A little differently from Panikkar,⁴⁸ Griffiths translates this pivotal insight as, “*thou art that*,” where,

⁴³ Raimon Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 734, 735.

⁴⁴ Raimon Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 725.

⁴⁵ The *aham*, the “I,” is the principle of unity in the Absolute, but is so only because this I of the Absolute is radical openness. Within the One, the “I,” there is consciousness, *Aham Brahman*, opening up “the possibility of existence for the whole universe . . . Between *brahman* and *aham-brahman* lies the entire temporal universe.” Raimon Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 738, 743.

⁴⁶ Raimon Panikkar, in *The Vedic Experience*, 752, says that here it is shown that “the whole of reality subsists in this relational or personal structure.”

⁴⁷ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 64; *Cosmic Revelation*, 57.

⁴⁸ We refer to the Sanskrit case, parts of speech and word order. Panikkar translates, *tat tvam asi*, as “*that art Thou*.” Svetaketu’s true identity resides within, is discovered through acknowledgment and identification with the Self, the *atman*. Svetaketu is the “*Thou*” of *Brahman*, the Beloved. This is the key to the mystery of differentiation within the *eka* (the void), “this tension and polarity within the One, making it really non-dual but without breaking its oneness.” See *The Vedic Experience*, 753. As the epitome of the created order, for which the *purusha* stands, Svetaketu/Man/the cosmos, is the third person, *vac* (the primordial word) manifested in the material creation, the bridge between the *atman* and *Brahman*. See Raimon Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 751, 752. In Griffiths’ case, this particular translation would much better serve his constant reiteration of the difference between the Hindu tradition of a radical *advaita*, in which there is no distinction in unity and another tradition such as upheld by Aurobindo, which would be consonant with the Christian tradition as reflecting John 17, expressive of unity in distinction, a qualified *advaita*. Bede uses the same translation as

in the explanation of the guru to his disciple, Svetaketu, it is revealed that the disciple through the *atman* is One with Brahman. This deep mystical experience of union with the One through the *atman* allows for Svetaketu's utterance of "*aham-brahman*," that is, "I am Brahman." Particularly, in Panikkar's translation and interpretation, it describes the "thou" as beloved, infinitely beloved, the "Thou" of God's "I."⁴⁹ It is the core of the experience known as *advaita* and is also the most profound depths of the infinite "embrace," the experience of *satcitananda*, "being consciousness bliss." This is an "endless bliss" which, Griffiths points out, the *Upanisadic* writings compare with "the bliss of a man in the embrace of his wife."⁵⁰

Moreover, all that is, comes forth from this unity that is relationship, like sparks from a blazing fire or the web from a spider and returns constantly renewed and generated afresh.⁵¹

In the *Svetasvatara Upanisad*, the *purusa*, comes to be identified with the cosmic Lord, Shiva. It is round this same time, that the *Bhagavad Gita* takes shape. The author/s of the *Gita*, were most likely *Kshatriyas* not *Brahmins*, as also were the founders of two new contemporary belief systems, the *Jains* and *Buddhists*. The *Gita*, however, takes quite a different path from the latter two, which continue the impersonal and abstract tendency of the earlier *Upanisads*. Instead it pursues the insight expressed in the later *Svetasvatara Upanisad* which was influenced by a popular movement arising from the mingling of the northern nomadic Aryans and the southern indigenous agrarian people.⁵² The focus of this movement of devotion to a personal God in the *Gita* is the Lord, Bhagavan, who takes the form of, is incarnated as, is, the *avatara*, Krishna. The particular Yogic experience centred on this personal form of worship is *Bhakti*.⁵³ This kind of development that happens in the

Mascaro's *The Upanishads*, 12, in Juan Mascaro, ed. trans., *The Upanishads* (London: Penguin Books, 1965).

⁴⁹ Panikkar here directs attention to a unique insight (to what must surely be the most profound basis for any discussion of complementarity, or unity in diversity): "From this point of view to call God the Other or, even worse, the totally Other is perhaps sheer blasphemy and blatant anthropomorphism. 'He who worships the divinity as another,' says one *Upanisad*, 'and thinks that he is one thing and God another, does not know.'" Raimon Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, 728, 729, 730.

⁵⁰ Bede Griffiths, *Essential Writings*, 60.

⁵¹ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 50.

⁵² Bede Griffiths, *River*, 3, 4,

⁵³ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 2,3.

human journey was ever of interest to Griffiths who regarded the *Bhagavad Gita* as expressive of the most developed religious Hindu insight.⁵⁴

Sacrifice now is closely associated with thanksgiving. All of life is divine gift to which the only right response is self-giving. Involvement in thanksgiving in worship leads to self-surrender in a spirit of detachment, *asat*, an abandonment to the Lord such that when all is done in honour of the Lord, the person's life is characterized by a certain rhythm reflecting a holistic personal integration and integration with life in general.

The wisdom of the *Gita* presents the one Spirit present in all life throughout the cosmos as the union of male and female principles, *purusa*, and *prakriti*⁵⁵:

Do thy work in the peace of Yoga and, free from selfish desire, be not moved in success or in failure. Yoga is evenness of mind – a peace that is ever the same.⁵⁶

The practice of the spiritual discipline, Yoga, brings peace or equanimity, *Samatva*.⁵⁷

Krishna speaks of *Samadhi*, the goal of yoga, its final state, which is a deep embrace, the union of the one with the One, the full flowering of that detachment expressive of putting love of the Lord above all else:

Those who love pleasure and power . . .
have not the determination ever to be one with the One.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 86, 87. *River*, 184 – 188, 253.

⁵⁵ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 157, 158. Griffiths explains this, and expands the explanation with the aid of Christian insight. "Beyond *avyakta*, the Unmanifest, is *Purusa*, the Person. The *Purusa* is the male or active principle, spirit, consciousness. *Prakriti* is nature, the feminine principle, the unconscious, the womb from which all creation comes. (Griffiths refers to Augustine's *rationes seminales*) - the Father begets the Word and in that Word all things are contained in their "ideas," their "seminal reasons." That Word brings everything to birth through the *sakti*, the power of the Holy Spirit, in which all these powers of nature are contained . . . *mula prakriti*, the chaos, the darkness, the womb, is the created aspect of the uncreated power of the Holy Spirit . . . that highest Person in whom all these things exist is the Word of God, the Supreme Person, the *Purushottama*. And he is to be attained by love, by *bhakti*", 158. Griffiths makes reference to the comparable *Yang* and *Yin* of the *Tao*. In this symbol, *yang* and *yin* form a complete unity and are embedded, the one in the other. Similarly, *purusa*, consciousness and *prakriti*, nature, are interdependent and interpenetrate. They cannot be separated. To act in accordance with the one, oblivious to, neglectful of, or rejecting the other is destructive, and leads even to violence.

⁵⁶ From the *Baghavad Gita*. See Bede Griffiths, *River*, 31.

⁵⁷ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 31.

⁵⁸ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 28. This does not suggest passivity or escape from the world, but the kind of detachment that makes the action sacred. *River*, 45. See also Trapnell's exposition, *Bede Griffiths: A Life*, 171.

It is not a narcissistic love in isolation; for the final embrace, the union with the One means that the person's "love is one for all creation, and he has supreme love for me (Krishna)."⁵⁹

"Divine host" within the Indian tradition is a holistic vision of reality. Creation comes forth from the transcendent source or origin as gift. The whole movement which is a return to the One is, as it were, an embrace within the transcendent source. This transcendent reality is discovered to dwell within as the *atman* as a relational reality. The *Gita* finally reveals how ordinary life can be lived in the rhythm of self-gift and self-giving response.

3. The Experience within Christian Tradition

In order to continue this exploration of what we've named as Griffiths' image of the Divine Host which is outflowing generative Love, we consider now particular sources within Christian tradition which were clearly of assistance to Griffiths in his own spiritual pilgrimage.

The experience of the Vedic seers is in line, as has been shown, with Griffiths' life's work; it displays movement towards a personal God that is most pronounced in the *Baghavat Gita*. Before leaving for India, even while still at Farnborough Abbey in 1947,⁶⁰ Griffiths had shown a keen interest in the worth of comparing the mystical experience of the religions of the East with Christian mystical tradition. Throughout what amounted to a life-time in India, he constantly returned to the writings of Christian contemplatives. These provided confirmation of his insight that the great love of the Father⁶¹ for all of humankind is constantly outflowing and generative, and this truth is mediated through the wisdom inherent in different religions.

The Christian faith is fundamentally Trinitarian. God is One yet Three. As shown above, the experience of the Indian *rasis* documented in the early *Vedas*, the *Upanisads* and the *Baghavat Gita* shows a comparable development which has been briefly recounted. It is understandable that those Christian contemplatives whose writings reflect the mystical experience of union are of such interest to Griffiths. Nonetheless, he refers often to Karl

⁵⁹ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 317.

⁶⁰ Griffiths had been introduced to the spiritual classics, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Dhammapada* and the *Tao Te Ching*, by Toni Sussman, a theosophist friend of his mother and psychologist who had once been a student of Karl Jung. See Bede Griffiths, *The Golden String*, 64. See also Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 90.

⁶¹ Griffiths did refer to God as Father, when he considered it appropriate. As we will see later in the Chapter, "Divine Feminine," he also called for the use of other feminine images for God.

Rahner whom he regarded as the greatest theologian of his time.⁶² Rahner's Trinitarian theology undergirds his emphasis on the huge importance for the world of the twentieth century and beyond, to better understand and appreciate the reality of unity in difference/diversity.

In Christian tradition, three principles of faith can be understood as the basis for the image of God as divine Host constantly pouring forth the divine Self in outflowing, generative love: the first that God is Love; the second that the One is the Trinity; and the third that the Word, the second Person in this relationship, is incarnated in history, and, as the risen Christ draws all creation to ultimate fulfillment through the gift of the Spirit.⁶³ Together, these truths form the basis for understanding how the whole of creation, and most pertinently humankind, comes forth/ comes into being through a dynamic movement or flowing forth of creative love that constantly renews in a process that is transformative and directed towards an eschatological eternal fulfillment where difference is not lost. In addition, what is unique in Christian tradition (as Griffiths consistently emphasizes) is that Jesus is the Christ of history, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Word incarnate, is the absolute revelation of the Father in place and time. Moreover, the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, the gift/friend and helper, whose "coming" is consummate on Jesus' resurrection and return as Christ to the Father in glory, is experienced in Christian community as that "bond of love" which is eternal.

Griffiths understood the Christian Ashram he established at Shantivanam after the death of Monchanin (Parama Arupi Ananda)⁶⁴ and the departure of le Saux (Abishiktanda)⁶⁵ for the Himalayas, as a place where people could come "to experience God."⁶⁶ He believed it is only in and through deep contemplative experience that common ground in the religions can be found. His vision for a "marriage" of East and West, especially important for

⁶² One specific quotation, "Karl Rahner our greatest modern theologian," is found in Griffiths' talk "Communion and Renunciation" at the Christian Buddhist Exchange, Asirvanam Monastery, Bangalore, 25 Nov, 1992. Griffiths speaks thus of Rahner in many other instances, for example, "On Poverty and Simplicity", 24.

⁶³ Hebrew and Christian scriptures nonetheless understand the Spirit as present in creation from all time.

⁶⁴ The name means Bliss of the Supreme Spirit.

⁶⁵ The name means Bliss of Christ.

⁶⁶ Bede Griffiths, "East and West: The Mystical Connection with Fr Bede Griffiths", taped interview with Michael Toms (Ukiah, CA: New Dimensions Radio). Script available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

Christians, also included exploring ways for deeper understanding among the world religions.⁶⁷

Contemplative experience in Christian tradition Griffiths sees as evidence of unique insights into the triune God informing the kind of holistic grasp of cosmic unity that balances disintegrative or deviant tendencies due to fear of, or focus on surface differences. The divine generativity of the Triune One brings forth in lavish, infinitely creative love, difference that is yet profoundly connected through its one birth-source.

Bede describes the current of mystical theology that had remained constant throughout the history of the Church. His primary source is John 17:21-23:

That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.⁶⁸

Similarly, Bede points out how Origen understood the return of all things to God based on 1 Cor. 15:28:

When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.

While Origen emphasises freedom in his rejection of Gnostic determinism, there is a simple replication of the initial condition of humankind.⁶⁹ His philosophical use of neo-Platonism limited him to a view of the Trinity whereby the Son and the Holy Spirit, being derived from the Father tended to be subordinate.⁷⁰

Significantly, though, Griffiths finds a link with the “immense originality” of Origen’s theology and the Oriental view because Origen understands God as “absolute unity and simplicity above thought and essence.” He uses the language of St Paul speaking of the Son as the first-born of all creation and the mediator between God and humankind. His sense of

⁶⁷ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 24, 25, 33.

⁶⁸ Bede Griffiths, “East and West” an Interview. The current had slowed, “receded to the background” during the seventeenth century with the growing emphasis on rational objectification. However, in the post-modern context of the present day the renewed interest in Eastern forms of meditation that were heralded in the twentieth century has developed in the Catholic Church as an obvious movement oriented towards meditation and contemplation and bringing back into focus, to the foreground the riches of this ancient Christian tradition. It is here that interreligious dialogue, Griffiths believes best succeed.

⁶⁹ Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* (London: GBR, Routledge, 1999), iv. *On First Principles*, 1.6.2. <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/australiancathu/Doc?id=10070709&ppg=5> (Accessed May 4, 2008)

⁷⁰ Anthony Kelly, *The Trinity*, 72. Griffiths believes that while there is a “subordinationist trend in Origen . . . it is only a tendency rather than his full doctrine.” Griffiths, however, understands Origen’s explanation of the Son as “the first-born of all creation,” after St Paul, and “the archetype of humankind and the whole creation” as “very profound”.Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 234.

creation as gift, a living whole, a world “soul” in an ordered hierarchy of being, Griffiths regards as being, “particularly remarkable,” in view of the new science. Bede believes that some of Origen’s ideas such as the soul as “naturally divine” – a “gnostic view” may have been an exploration of “new ideas” from the East.⁷¹ While his understanding of the three spiritual ways: ethics – the moral life, physics – philosophy or knowledge of creation, and *theoria* - contemplation, correspond to some extent with Gregory of Nyssa’s ideas, Griffiths believes Origen is not a mystic “in the full sense” as his is more an intellectual knowledge of the divine.⁷²

Origen’s disciple Gregory of Nyssa, whose use of sexual imagery we have already noted, provides a better synthesis. Griffiths credits him as being the “founder of Christian Mysticism” and the three consecutive ways for the mystical or inward journey, purgative, illuminative and unitive which he received from the Greek tradition, itself indebted to the Oriental tradition.⁷³ Gregory finds a means of approach in his search for God which is experiential and in the final analysis based on faith alone.

He is thus regarded as the Father of apophatic spirituality.⁷⁴ God, who is “found” in the darkness in the interior journey through deep faith, is ultimately beyond any discursive thought, “beyond names and human speech”⁷⁵ and is only available to the understanding through spiritual intuition. The Father is the original *hypostasis*; everything originates from this “person”; there is perfect unity of being and each has all in common. The differentiation within the unity of the three is one of relationship. Finally with Gregory, together with two other Cappadocians, his brother Basil, and Gregory Nazianzen, the understanding developed of three distinct *hypostases* within the one divine *ousia*. The dynamic indwelling, one within the other, termed *circumincession*,⁷⁶ is described as a *perichoresis*, understood as the deepest spiritual intimacy.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Bede Griffiths, “East and West.” See also, *A New Vision*, 229-243, Griffiths connects the line of thought of Pythagorus, Plato and Clement of Alexandria with Origen to suggest an Oriental influence in Origen’s thought.

⁷² Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 233 – 239.

⁷³ Bede Griffiths, “East and West: The Mystical Connection,” New Dimensions Audio Tape, #1811, San Francisco, CA.

⁷⁴ Meredith (139) points to Lossky, in *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 33, as attributing to Gregory “the apophatic basis of all true theology.”

⁷⁵ Anthony Kelly, *Trinity of Love*, 83.

⁷⁶ The Latin derivation is both *circumincessio* “to proceed around and through,” and *circuminsessio*, “to settle around and within” and the depth of meaning is so “far beyond the reserve of the dance” that “to think further upon the divine concourse is to evoke a spiritual blush” In Edith M.

Gregory's idea of grace, given so that we may advance along the stages of return to God that is a "restoration of the image of God, the *ikon*," is significant for Griffiths' image of divine hospitality. The return is an ascent by way of three stages and involves a constant "going beyond" or *epekstasis* to the Father "beyond creation." This is led by the Holy Spirit through the church. This return is a "total vision" for the whole of creation through the indwelling Spirit.⁷⁸

It seemed to Griffiths that Denis the Areopagite⁷⁹ who comes after Gregory has an intensely apophatic spirituality that is more markedly comparable with the *Upanisadic* insight; the ultimate reality transcends being. All of reality flows out from and returns to this source.⁸⁰

It is interesting that Griffiths compares Dionysius with Shankara and Shankara with Thomas Aquinas.⁸¹ Dionysius' "radical criticism of language" moves him to speak of "knowing by unknowing," that is by "transcendent knowledge." However, this transcendent "Beyond" is manifesting through the "celestial hierarchies" and the whole of the universe. This incomprehensible Godhead, which is an insight that communicates with the mystical vision of India and also other mystical traditions such as Sufism, is revealed in a particular historical point in Jesus of Nazareth.⁸²

Other writers to whom Griffiths turns from Medieval times demonstrate on one hand a profoundly experiential exploration of the God beyond being and on the other a greater emphasis on a personal encounter with a God of love.

Like a Zen guru, Meister Eckhart pursued the goal of mystical union "within a hermeneutical situation in which the exegete-preacher and the attentive hearer 'break through' the surface of the biblical word to reach the hidden meaning that negates ordinary

Humphrey *Ecstasy and Intimacy When the Holy Spirit Meets the Human Spirit* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2006), 92,93.

⁷⁷ Edith Humphrey, *Ecstasy and Intimacy*, 83.

⁷⁸ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 237 – 243.

⁷⁹ Dionysius was a sixth century Syrian monk who as Griffiths points out was fortuitously mistaken for a disciple of St Paul and assumed as an authority by Thomas Aquinas thus entering into the mainstream of Catholic doctrine. See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 164.

⁸⁰ Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* (London, GBR: Routledge, 1999), iv.

<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/australiancathu/Doc?id=10070709&ppg=5>

⁸¹ Bede attributes to Shankara, the insight *saccidananda*, and comments that his "idea of God . . . is almost identical with that of St Thomas." In Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 171.

⁸² Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 164, 165, 242 – 247.

reason and the created self.”⁸³ Eckhart is prescriptive; those who long for God must become “empty and bare as the desert.”⁸⁴ This is the preparation for the birth of God in the soul’s “most secret part,” its “silent middle.” God is beyond all gender and so could just as well be regarded also as Mother, “eternally pregnant in his (sic) foreknowledge” of creation. On the other hand, the deep and empty silence of the Father is so infinitely profound, the descriptive image Eckhart uses is, a woman who “lies in childbed . . . who has given birth.”⁸⁵ The Son/the Word, is born/begotten in the innermost core of the Father that is total oneness and simultaneously the outer creation is manifested, sustained, renewed and restored to God. This is a “dynamic reciprocity,” a “flowing forth” of all from God and a “flowing back” to the divine unity.⁸⁶

It is on account of the hidden ground of the soul and the unique relationship of the Son with humanity that return is possible.⁸⁷ Within the divine unity of the mutual love of Father and Son is the Holy Spirit, a “folding over” or “reduplication” where this reduplication in the inner silence is also a breathing forth of love in creation.⁸⁸ Therefore the love by which we are drawn back to God is the love of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁹ Again, “the soul must empty herself of all createdness . . . (to become) equal . . . to be taken up into univocal relationship with the divine.”⁹⁰ For Griffiths, the experience/idea of the whole creation as “the self-expression” of the Father – “the source, the origin,” is central to Meister Eckhart’s thought.⁹¹

John Ruysbroeck, the Dominican mystical theologian who follows Eckhart, emphasizes divine generativity. There is an eternal birth of all creation in God through the

⁸³ Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart. The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1937) 24. Here, Alain de Libera citing Niklaus Largier in *Maitre Eckhart a Paris*, 109-40.

⁸⁴ Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 70.

⁸⁵ Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 85.

⁸⁶ Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 56-85.

⁸⁷ Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 123.

⁸⁸ This compares with Panikkar’s “third person” in Hindu spiritual tradition and also, as will be seen with physicist Bohm’s concept of the implicated, explicated creation.

⁸⁹ McGinn, *Mystical Thought*, 89.

⁹⁰ Hollywood, *The Soul*, 139. Griffiths points out the popularity with Hindus of Eckhart who “comes nearer to the Vedanta than any other Christian.” See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 247. Griffiths believes it is particularly significant that Eckhart uses “the *Godhead*” rather than “God.” The “personal God” says Griffiths, “is a limited form”. Beyond this is “the *Godhead*, the ultimate, the one.” In Bede Griffiths, “Integration of Mind, Body and Spirit: Balancing Duality,” “An occasional paper of the Fetzer Institute,” 9 September 1992. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

⁹¹ Bede Griffiths, *A Human Search*, 91.

begetting of the Son. In the Father, “the divine silence . . . is pregnant with the Word”⁹² for “the almighty Father has perfectly comprehended himself in the ground of his fruitfulness.”⁹³ Here, “God contemplates himself and all things in an eternal now”⁹⁴ that is at once dynamic with the eternal generation of the Son:

Through this eternal birth all creatures have gone forth eternally before their creation in time. God has thus seen and known them in himself – as distinct in his living ideas and as different from himself, though not different in every respect, for all that is in God is God.⁹⁵

In the deepest most interior state of union, Ruysbroeck emphasises the experience of love in bliss. Although the soul encounters God in “the fathomless abyss,”⁹⁶ in “darkness” and “nothingness,” the experience of bliss is one of infinite love:

From out of these riches there flow into the unity of the higher powers an embrace and a fullness of felt love, and from this fullness of felt love there flows into the heart and into the corporeal powers a felt and deeply penetrating savor.⁹⁷

Such a profound experience, Ruysbroeck, like Eckhart, insists is only possible through detachment and humility. He stipulates three things that are necessary, “peace,” “interior silence,” and “loving adherence.”⁹⁸ With the deep experience of union with God, the person’s life is permanently changed and marked by the attainment of virtues and righteousness, so that they live “the common life” ready for both contemplation and action.⁹⁹ This insight inspires Griffiths’ mature theology.¹⁰⁰

A more personalistic tradition is to be found in Julian of Norwich’s descriptions of the “showings,” she was given by the Lord. These intellectual visions of this thirteenth century

⁹² John Ruysbroeck, *The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works*, trans. James A Wiseman OSB (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), xii.

⁹³ John Ruysbroeck, *The Spiritual Espousals*, 149.

⁹⁴ John Ruysbroeck, *The Spiritual Espousals*, 149.

⁹⁵ John Ruysbroeck, *The Spiritual Espousals*, 149.

⁹⁶ John Ruysbroeck, *The Spiritual Espousals*, 183.

⁹⁷ John Ruysbroeck, *The Spiritual Espousals*, 133.

⁹⁸ John Ruysbroeck, *The Spiritual Espousals*, 182.

⁹⁹ John Ruysbroeck, *The Spiritual Espousals*, 184.

¹⁰⁰ In *A New Vision of Reality*, Griffiths refers to passage from Ruysbroeck which for him expresses well the “rhythm of the universe” - the outpouring of the Father in love from which creation is made manifest and the return to the Father in “the embrace of the Holy Spirit”: “All things are loved anew by the Father and the Son in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and this is the active meeting of the Father and the Son in which we are lovingly embraced by the Holy Spirit in eternal love.” The “Christian experience” is that “we become persons by loving” and as in *bhakti*, this includes all our relationships and all our endeavours. See *A New Vision*, 251, 253.

Anchorite emphasise the profoundly tender love of the Lord which is the source of all that is:

He is our clothing that, for love, wrappeth us up and windeth us about; embraceth us, all becloseth us and hangeth about us, for tender love.¹⁰¹

God's loving intimacy with creation is such that, at one time, God was revealed to her on earth as though "on a pilgrimage . . . leading us . . . until he has brought us all up to his bliss in heaven."¹⁰² All things are made to flow out from the "Ground" and will be restored through "the salvation of (man) by the working of grace."¹⁰³ The seemingly insignificant and vulnerable smallness of all that has been created was shown to her as a round ball in her palm, "the size of a hazelnut" but she was reassured, "It lasts, and ever shall last; for God loveth it. And even so hath everything being - by the love of God."¹⁰⁴

Julian stretches the limits of coherence in her effort to express the very being of God that is "the Goodness which is Kind," the one who is "the Father and Mother of all kinds." Christ feeds and nurtures humanity for whom earthly life is merely, "childhood," and so Christ is "our precious Mother" for whom "this fair kind (humanity)" was "prepared."¹⁰⁵ This Mother Christ's merciful love is for all his/her children and this is understood in the words to Julian, "All shall be well . . . all manner of things shall be well."¹⁰⁶

Thus was I learned that love is our Lord's meaning. And I saw full surely in this, and in all, that before God made us, he loved us. Which love was never slaked, nor ever shall be. And in this love he hath done all his works. And in this love he hath made all things profitable to us. And in this love our life is everlasting. In our making we had beginning: but the love wherein he made us was in him from without-beginning. In which love we have our beginning. And all this shall we see in God without end.¹⁰⁷

How closely Griffiths identified with this image of God as great outpouring generative love that is so powerfully expressed in the mystical theology of the early Church and in later

¹⁰¹ Julian of Norwich, *The Revelations of Divine Love of Julian of Norwich*, James Walsh SJ. trans. ed. (London: Burn and Oates, 1961).

¹⁰² James Walsh, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 174.

¹⁰³ James Walsh, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 168.

¹⁰⁴ James Walsh, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 53.

¹⁰⁵ James Walsh, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 169.

¹⁰⁶ James Walsh, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 171. Also, a slightly different translation in *Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Elizabeth Spearing (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 136 – 147. Here, God is Mother - of universal mercy.

¹⁰⁷ James Walsh, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 209.

Medieval theology described above will become more clear. He sees this as basic to an appreciation of holism.

4. Griffiths' Position

Griffiths was particularly concerned with the detrimental influence of the growth in confidence in the rational mind and its practical partner, scientific empiricism that started with the Renaissance and increased in momentum into the Enlightenment. It signaled the withdrawal into "the background"¹⁰⁸ of conscious reliance on the intuitive mind. It points to a rejection of a non-empirically defined kind of knowledge as authoritative. The disintegration in society today is due to this dispossession of holism.

Paradoxically, in the post-Christian, post-Modern times, a continuing growth of interest in Eastern meditation practices and/or alternative therapies and more holistic approaches to human interaction and environmental structures heralds a re-imaging of reality. Capra, whom Griffiths follows and frequently quotes, calls this "turn" momentous, a "paradigm shift."¹⁰⁹ It is a present tension that recognises on the one hand, the value of relationship - in all its diverse levels and expressions, on the other, a refusal to compromise with the freedom to apprehend reality as such.

In Dialogue with his Journey Partners

It is in just this arena we find that Griffiths' two dialogue partners, Karl Rahner the systematic theologian, and Panikkar the exponent of inter-faith dialogue, have a vital area of common ground. Basically this is that the absolute origin and the finalé are absolutely open and, moreover, both theology and Christian life in practice must proceed with this foremost in mind.

As someone who insists that the Christian of the future will be a mystic,¹¹⁰ Rahner himself, one assumes, is no stranger to meditation and contemplation. At any rate, the ontological-experiential basis for Rahner's argument for a profoundly sympathetic interaction within the secular society of our day suggests this.

¹⁰⁸ Bede Griffiths, "East and West: The Mystical Connection with Fr Bede Griffiths," taped interview with Michael Toms (Ukiah, CA: New Dimension Radio, 1990).

¹⁰⁹ Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point*, 30. In this respect, for example, Bede Griffiths refers to Capra in *A New Vision of Reality*, 9.

¹¹⁰ Hanson, B.C. *Modern Christian Spirituality Methodological Historical Essays* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 17. See Sandra Schneiders, "Spirituality and the Academy."

In his terms, it is precisely on account of “the realization that God does not belong within the world view” that there has developed “this troubled atheism . . . fundamentally only the growth of God on the spirit of humankind.”¹¹¹ And it follows that if we are not to “picture God . . . in an image that has been carved out of the wood of the world,”¹¹² then the right disposition must be towards “hope in the absolute future . . . the eternal mystery which love alone can receive.”¹¹³ This puts us in a position where “we Christians can be bound by a feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood . . . to those who are agonized by the question of God.”¹¹⁴ The singular non-negotiable of a common humanity is understood. It is a conviction that is to be discovered in “the experience - that the abyss protects, that pure silence is tender, that the distance is home and that the ultimate question brings its own answer, that the very mystery communicates itself as pure blessedness.” For ultimately, it is here “we call the mystery . . . Father.”¹¹⁵ For Christians, the divine out-pouring love of the infinitely generous Self-giving divine Host to whom we tend is revealed in and by the Word Incarnate. Rahner’s insistence on the openness towards and of an absolute future as that which is quintessentially Christian is demonstrated in a formula he provides:

Christianity is the attitude of abiding openness to the question of the absolute future which seeks to bestow itself, which has definitively promised itself as coming in Jesus Christ, and which is called God.¹¹⁶

Likewise, the singular constant in Griffiths’ theological perspective is his assertive reiteration of the need always to “go beyond.” He understands it in terms of incomprehensible self-giving divine love. It is the basis of his Benedictine charism of hospitality.

A clear acknowledgement, appreciation of the reality of the Trinity and the profundity and extent of the meaning this has for divine/human/cosmic reality is vital for Raimundo Panikkar. He distinguishes the “Christianity” which has for so long been identified with the history and context of the western world, from “Christian Faith” where it is “only one form among other possible ones of living and realizing” that which “lives within time in the hearts of all people.”¹¹⁷ The idea is contained in Panikkar’s term, “tempiternity.”¹¹⁸

¹¹¹ Karl Rahner, “The Content of Faith,” 213

¹¹² Karl Rahner, “The Content of Faith,” 214.

¹¹³ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 189-201.

¹¹⁴ Karl Rahner, “The Content of Faith,” 215.

¹¹⁵ Karl Rahner, “The Content of Faith,” 258.

¹¹⁶ Karl Rahner, *Investigations*, 190.

¹¹⁷ Raymond Panikkar, *The Trinity and World Religions* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society), 4.

“Christianity” as Rahner defines it above, is comparable with Panikkar’s “Christian faith.” This is a trinitarian faith for which Panikkar can provide a “pure algebraic expression . . . openness in both directions.”¹¹⁹ The whole problem of Christianity today for Panikkar is that it simply has not properly assumed and acted upon the mystery of the Trinity that ought to be its very essence.

Further, Panikkar indicates inherent inadequacies in the kind of religious personalism that has characterised Christianity in recent times. Griffiths agrees.¹²⁰ This is not to “impugn” religious personalism as such, but to point out that personalism, “a refinement of iconolatory” when not well grounded in and balanced by insight into the utter transcendence of God, becomes false.¹²¹ The experience of the Absolute, found within Christian tradition and in other religions has its own integrity that is vital for all religions, for humanity, ultimately for the entire cosmos.¹²²

Panikkar’s articulation of his understanding of the Absolute in terms of an inner trinitarian¹²³ dynamic is formed in dialogue with the *Vedic* insight. It is on account of this that he opts for dispensing in a new way, old categories from mystical theology within Christian tradition. To begin with, on the one hand, Panikkar describes a dependence on Augustine - the divine substratum that “imparts unity to the Trinity” is common to all three persons; on the other, a dependence on *Vedic* insight – divine *immolatio* is integral to the Absolute. From this Panikkar draws a central metaphor, “the Cross in the Trinity.”¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ Raimon Panikkar, *The Gifford Lectures 1988/89*. The University of Edinburgh. L10, 7.

¹¹⁹ Raymond Panikkar, *The Trinity and World Religions*, 42.

¹²⁰ In Bede Griffiths, “Integration of Mind, Body and Spirit: Balancing Duality, An occasional paper of the Fetzer Institute”, Sep 9, 1992. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

¹²¹ Raymond Panikkar, *The Trinity and World Religions*, 22. “Iconolatory” is a word Panikkar has coined as distinguishable from a derogative usage of “idolatory” in order to indicate the “primary and primordial attitude of man in front of the divinity or the mystery (whether *fascinans tremendum* or any other sort),” 11. He further defines *iconolatory* as “cosmo-anthropomorphism,” 15.

¹²² The basis for Panikkar’s argument is his explication of “iconolatory,” “personalism,” and “mysticism” as “three forms of spirituality,” which correspond to action, love and knowledge and in *Upanisadic* terms, *karmamārga*, *bhaktimārga* and *jñānamārga*. See Raimon Panikkar, *The Trinity and World Religions*, 10. The temptation in iconolatory which Panikkar sees corresponding to *incarnation*, is towards idolatory; in personalism, corresponding to *immanence*, it is anthropomorphism, 23.

¹²³ As regards a full catholic theology, Panikkar prefers to use “theandric” rather than “Trinitarian” which can tend to an abstraction to the wholly transcendent nature of God rather than God’s “temporal manifestation.” See Raymond Panikkar, *Trinity*, 70.

¹²⁴ Raymond Panikkar, *Trinity*, 45,46.

Transcendence and immanence are polarities of the one reality whereby the very intensity of the integrity of each rests on the independent integrity of the other.¹²⁵

It is as immanence that the Holy Spirit is best expressed, or in *Upanisadic* terms, the *atman*. The other pole, the Father, is apprehended as the deepest apophatic reality, that is nothingness, the Absolute, the one, who “*is not*” who has no “*ek-sistence*,” no being. The Father gives all in generation of the Son and that is total; the Son receives all from the Father in mutual self-giving. The Son is the “I” of the Father; the Son is a “Thou.” The Spirit is the divine immanence in the Father and in the Son, and the communion between them, the mutual and simultaneous passing from the one to the other. The Trinity is not closed, however, because the Son is the Word of the Father in whom the Father is made known. The Father’s “calling” – to the Son is simultaneously a calling to creation; in the Son/the Word, all created being has its source as existing “virtually” always as a participation in the life of the Trinity and to which it returns. In this sense every being that “is” is a *Christophany*.¹²⁶

In this way, Panikkar can affirm the ineffable unity, the One in Paul’s “trinitarian formulation of God” from Ephesians 4:6 – “above all, through all, in all” by indicating God as: *super omnes*: Source of Being and the Father; *per omnia*: the Son, Being and the Christ;

¹²⁵ Raymond Panikkar, *The Trinity and World Religions*, 29-31. There is a clear correlation here with Eckhart’s *bullitio* and *ebullitio* (*the Soul as Virgin Wife*, 136); the terms he conceives to explain the ontological significance of the virtual existence in God of all that is and the coming forth in formal existence. It also compares with Panikkar’s emphasis on the vital need to distinguish form and essence. In *The Trinity and World Religions*, 3. Panikkar’s insight in regard to transcendence and immanence mirrors Eckhart’s: “Everything which is distinguished by indistinction is the more distinct the more indistinct it is, because it is distinguished by its own indistinction. Conversely, it is the more indistinct the more distinct it is, because it is distinguished by its own distinction from what is indistinct.” See Bernard McGinn, with Frank Tobin and trans. Elvira Borgstädt, *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 169. Griffiths calls this “the mystery of love” and “the rhythm of the universe.” He finds Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, which speaks of “love which moves the sun and the stars,” the great literary exemplar, along with Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. *Return to the Centre*, 60 – 63, *Golden String*, 59, 187 – 189. Love bears within itself the passion of sacrifice.

¹²⁶ Raymond Panikkar, *The Trinity and World Religions*, 53,66. In a cosmic sense, the supreme bridge (*pontifex maximus*) between the *atman* and *brahman* (Panikkar joins Latin and *Upanisadic* traditions), is “the *Mediator* unknown by his true name.” Alternately, Christ, *Isvara* (also *purusa*), *Tathagata*, . . . “even” Jaweh, Allah . . . In, Raymond Panikkar, *The Trinity and World Religions*, 52.

in omnibus: divine Immanence, return of Being and the Spirit.¹²⁷ Similarly, Griffiths argues that the Trinity represents different aspects of the One.¹²⁸

With some trepidation, we move from such a beautifully articulated mystical faith position, to the world reality of Post-Modern societies for comparison. These are often described as fragmented and fearful of being preyed upon, without the kind of confidence that is built on a unifying vision. However, Post-Modernist philosophy in conversation with theology more and more makes forays into the territory that characterises the very stance Griffiths believed was vital for humankind to truthfully envision the new, and appropriate the new consciousness, the next stage in the journey of human self-transcendence. Griffiths' prophetic stance finds its place in the early stages¹²⁹ of a movement¹³⁰ that would appear to be growing in breadth and momentum.

Cohesion with New Ideas

Today, Griffiths would likely have agreed with John Milbank,¹³¹ who believes that openness both to the presence of diversity as a given and to change and renewal are vital for the continuation of life. The unity that is co-extensive with Christ's life in community with his disciples is remembered in a particular language that "allows us to *escape* from the dominating effects of human discourses which totally subsume all differences, new occurrences, under existing categories." This is necessary because essentially, "atonement means . . . that the *Logos* only really speaks with its real intent in the ever-different articulation of our responses."¹³² The transforming power that is available to humankind,

¹²⁷ Raymond Panikkar, *The Trinity and World Religions*, 67.

¹²⁸ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 220. We can also make a comparison here with Panikkar's "third person" in the Hindu tradition as noted above, 114.

¹²⁹ The seeds of this movement are apparent in other voices besides Griffiths. *Catholic Life and Culture* by I.E. Watkins and first published in 1942 carries a similar message. Watkins looks with "hope, in the Word made Flesh" towards a spring-time of synthesis of the rational/analytical, the intuitive/contemplative and the historical/cultural. It would be a synthesis of linear, vertical and cyclic expressive of "the Divine Sun" rising once more on "the human horizon." 182, 3.

¹³⁰ Griffiths refers specifically to his awareness of such a movement in theology – "I don't think you can stop it", but elsewhere extends it to other disciplines especially science. See Bede Griffiths, "Communion and Renunciation," the Christian – Buddhist Exchange, Asirvanam Monastery, Bangalore, 25 Nov., 1992.

¹³¹ John Milbank, "Postmodern Critical Augustinian: A Short *Summa* in Forty-two Responses to Unasked Questions," in *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, Graham Ward ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997).

¹³² John Milbank, "A Short *Summa*" No 32. This can further be related to Judson Trapnell's talk, "Bede Griffiths, Mystical Knowing and the Unity of Religions," where he points to Griffiths' thesis that "the various religions are not only unique and therefore plural, but as in intricate relationship to one

through its participation in God as trinity, which is itself a “community in process’ - infinitely realized,” is trust in and through this very process, “the metahistorical context for all historical reality.”¹³³

Griffiths would also agree with Luce Irigaray who argues that life-giving change and renewal demands “a cultural marriage between the sexes.” However, such “an alliance based on mutual respect”¹³⁴ which would result in greater “concern for the earth and its natural resources,” is still a long way off.¹³⁵ Respect for the whole of human life, including sexuality, Irigaray insists, characterises Jesus’ message.¹³⁶

Griffiths’ Experience

Bede Griffiths is first and foremost a monk and moreover, a *sannyasi*, which means that by Western standards, his life is poor and simple to the extreme. He does not write as an academician.¹³⁷ His public work which is the outward-turned face of his inner pilgrimage – to the One, is constantly in pursuit of a synthesis, within the whole ambit of life, in and among religions and peoples, science and culture. Now, having explored some particular contributions to Griffiths’ life and thought we are in a better position to appreciate the strength and resonance of the image, the divine Host as all-embracing, generative love that is part and parcel of his message.

We must start at the end, which, in a sense is also the beginning. This is his integrative experience in 1990 of God as an overwhelming love, a love which produced in him an evident burst of new life.

The experience although given medically a specific technical description was understood and described by Griffiths quite differently. He spoke of it in terms of “the Dark Night” and “the void of Buddhism.” “The ego (had) collapsed” and he felt “totally free” and it was the eternal feminine which as a “Power,” “cruel and destructive” yet “deeply, loving,

another within a greater wholeness.” See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 286. Trapnell points to Robley Whitson and Paul Knitter as having described a similar thesis as “unitive pluralism,” 375.

¹³³ John Milbank, “A Short *Summa*”, 32-41.

¹³⁴ Luce Irigaray, “Equal to Whom,” in Graham Ward ed., *The Postmodern God*, 211.

¹³⁵ Luce Irigaray, “Equal to Whom,” 213.

¹³⁶ Luce Irigaray, “Equal to Whom,” 205.

¹³⁷ With regard to his books, which are for the most part put together from his talks, one is hard-pressed to find indices or foot-notes. For example, in his introduction to the German edition of *A New Vision of Reality*, Panikkar writes, “You do not claim to do the work of a scholar. The beauty of the book lies in its simplified overview; it is the work of a sage . . .” (Unpublished English article by Roland R. Roper, Christmas, 1994, Kreuth.)

nourishing and protecting” had produced in him a state of complete self-emptying and surrender.¹³⁸ Following this experience, Griffiths describes his life as an extraordinarily intense period of growth.¹³⁹ Most of Griffiths’ life seems to have been “geared” for such experience/revelation.¹⁴⁰ Nonetheless, it is from what he himself understood as an increasingly more mature perspective as being directly the result of this last extraordinary experience and its ramifications that the image must first be drawn. This is most clearly recorded in, *A Human Search*,¹⁴¹ in the section, “The Stroke – Discovering the Feminine.”

Griffiths describes an experience of great love that remained with him as an embrace. The initial sense was of *advaita*, nonduality, “everything was flowing into everything else.” Later, the acceptance and understanding remained of a unity despite the distinctions. “All the diversities are contained in the one.” At the deepest level of consciousness, the multiplicity remains, it is not jettisoned; rather it is “taken up into the unity.” For Griffiths, the best explanation for this sense of the whole multiplicity being contained in the unity of the one – not one, not two, is that put by Tibetan *dzogchen*.¹⁴² *Dzogchen*, which he understands as “direct transmission of supreme wisdom,” also expresses “most of (his) ideal of Christian contemplation.” Griffiths learned of this Tibetan

¹³⁸ Bede Griffiths, in Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 228. Judy Walter’s journal.

¹³⁹ John Swindells, *A Human Search*, 102.

¹⁴⁰ For an insightful expression of mystical knowledge *scientia sacra* that was articulated as the universal wisdom and developed as the *perennial philosophy* Griffiths refers to Seyyed Hossein Nasr. This sacred knowledge is “illumination” through participation in the Divine Intellect and this is only available in and through contemplation. See Wayne Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths: an Introduction*, 58-62.

¹⁴¹ John Swindells is a Sydney man who made a documentary of Bede Griffiths at Shantivanam in 1993. He was assisted by Andrew Harvey who is, in Swindell’s words an, “accomplished poet, novelist and academic.” The film was first aired only two months after Griffiths’ death and, on public request, the uncut interviews published in book form, *A Human Search*, two years later. The Forward was written by Wayne Teasdale.

¹⁴² Perhaps the most ancient tradition in Buddhism, *Dzogchen* as Griffiths explains from Chogyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche comes from Tibet and is a combination of the most ancient Shamanic religious tradition and Tibetan Buddhism but also influenced by Chinese Chang that became *Zen* in Japan. It names this One that is wholly beyond thought, the *Primordial Reality*. There is no means of expressing this reality that connects everything. It has “the innate capacity to manifest . . . the created universe that we experience is like a mirror (and it) reflects the divine reality.” *Dzogchen* explains this with the image of the crystal. Griffiths came across this teaching 1992. The crystal remains one but the light is refracted, split up, diversified. From Griffiths’ talk, “Communion and Renunciation,” the Christian – Buddhist Exchange, Asirvanam Monastery, Bangalore, 25 Nov. 1992. See Namkhai Norbu, *The Crystal and the Way of Light: Sutra, Tantra and Dzogchen* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988).

Buddhist teaching from the Dalai Lama in Australia in 1992. A tradition of “pure contemplation,” it is a late influence which helped him clarify terms and concepts.¹⁴³

God, the “Father” beyond all projections is “the ground, the source, the origin . . . beyond name, beyond form.” The “self-expression . . . self-revelation . . . self-manifestation” of the One is the Word. It is here, in the mature vision at the end of his life that Griffiths returns again to Meister Eckhart as the person in Christian tradition who best expresses this mystery: “the whole of creation is present in the universe and expressed in the Father’s Word . . . is contained in that one Word.” Father and Son are “union in relationship.” Eckhart says, “God only spoke one word and in that word the whole of creation came into being.”¹⁴⁴ The Hindu insight expresses it in terms of the movement of *pravritti*, the coming forth of the world of multiplicity, and *nivritti*, the drawing back of all things to the unity beyond thought.

Now it is clearer to him how the Trinity is “the key” to the “nondual reality. . . The Trinity . . . is the nearest we could come in human understanding to the original structure of the universe and the source of the universe.”¹⁴⁵ From “the source, the origin, the *sunyata*, the abyss of being, the void, the emptiness, the darkness” which we call, “Father,” “comes forth the Word – the wisdom, the light, the sun.” This is the source of the kind of interdependent relationship that today is coming to be seen as characterising the whole universe.¹⁴⁶ All that is latent in the Godhead as “seeds” is revealed in the Son and “come(s) to life” in him who mirrors the whole of creation. Paul can say that Christ knew us from the foundation of the world because “every detail of human existence is already present in that one reality.”

In this Word, the “ideas” are manifested in the Spirit which is *shakti*.¹⁴⁷ It is the further manifestation of the “simple ideas” in space and time through this Power that we refer to in the “Big Bang”¹⁴⁸ . . . or “the beginning of creation.” In this sense, the divine is

¹⁴³ Bede Griffiths in “Four Days in Saccidananda: The Christian Ashram of Fr. Bede Griffiths,” by Br Harold Thibodeau, Gethsemani, 1992. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

¹⁴⁴ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 171.

¹⁴⁵ Bede Griffiths, *A Human Search*, 110, 111.

¹⁴⁶ Wayne Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction*, 51. This provides an excellent short summary of Capra’s view of the new physics, and Bohm’s explanation of the hologram analogy, 53, an analogy which Griffiths uses to support his idea of the intrinsic connectedness of the parts as integral to the whole as being reflective of ultimate Truth.

¹⁴⁷ *Sakti* is the feminine divine principle.

¹⁴⁸ Griffiths uses for an apt symbol, the analogy which David Bohm utilises for the physical reality of the cosmos: “. . . the consideration of the difference between lens and hologram can play a

wholly present “in every atom, every proton” in such a way that each part can be seen to “make present” the whole.¹⁴⁹ This enables Griffiths to see with “wonderful” clarity the idea of the human being as a microcosm. It also provides him with a better appreciation of Shankara’s real meaning in speaking of the world as “neither *sat* nor *asat*.”¹⁵⁰ This means that only when the universe is apprehended apart from the Divine is it an illusion; in the sense that the universe has no being *in itself*,¹⁵¹ it is an illusion. But it “has being in relation to the Divine, to the Brahman.”¹⁵²

Griffiths posits the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas,¹⁵³ the teaching of Gautama, and the Universal Man¹⁵⁴ in Sufi Tradition as representing this same “universal wisdom.” For the kind of unity that he believes possible based on this mutual deep understanding he gives the image of the fingers and the palm of the hand:

significant part in the perception of a new order that is relevant for physical law. As Galileo noted the distinction between a viscous medium and a vacuum and saw that physical law should refer primarily to the order of motion of an object in a vacuum, so we might now note the distinction between a lens and a hologram and consider the possibility that physical law should refer primarily to an order of undivided wholeness of the content of a description similar to that indicated by the hologram rather than to an order of analysis of such content into separate parts indicated by a lens.” See Wayne Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction*. Teasdale cites Michael von Brück, “Reflections and Prospects,” in *Emerging Consciousness for a New Humankind: Asian Interreligious Concern*, ed. Michael von Brück (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corp.), 122-25.

¹⁴⁹ Griffiths further defines this as “Matthew Fox’s ‘panentheism.’” “Cosmic Person and Cosmic Lord,” *Alternatives Programme*, St James’s Piccadilly, quoted in *Human Potential*, 1992, Summer Edition. See also, *A New Vision*, 18,19.

¹⁵⁰ Neither “being” nor “non-being”.

¹⁵¹ My italics.

¹⁵² Bede Griffiths, “Cosmic Person, Cosmic Lord.”

¹⁵³ “Thomas Aquinas who is our greatest authority in theology was absolutely clear that no image . . . of God is remotely adequate to the reality. . . God is ‘*omnia ignotus*’ . . . we know God through God’s reflection in the universe and the revelation (God) has made to us . . . the teaching of Aquinas is that the world . . . has no being in itself . . . it exists in relation to God.” In Bede Griffiths, “Communion and Renunciation,” Furthermore, Griffiths compares Aquinas’ comments in regard to his mystical experience and the *Summa* - that all he had written was but straw - with the aim of putting the content of the Catholic faith into the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* . . . an aim which is “illusory.” Bede Griffiths, “The New Consciousness” *The Tablet*, January, 1993. (Like the development that took place between the *Upanisads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, Aquinas’ reasoned metaphysical work nevertheless shows a similar development towards inclusion of the personal. In the last years of his life he wrote a commentary on Aristotle’s discourse on friendship which displays his insight into the universal call to mystical contemplation, through Christ, to discover the intimacy of friendship with God; a friendship and insight we can model and share with others. See Mary Ann Fatula OP, *Thomas Aquinas Preacher and Friend* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993).

¹⁵⁴ This is *al-insan al Kamil*.

The baby finger is Buddhism, the next is Hinduism, the middle one is Islam, the forefinger is Judaism, and the thumb is Christianity . . . they are all divided separately, but as you go deep into any religion, you converge on the centre . . .

The apophatic darkness of Gregory of Nyssa, Griffiths compares with death¹⁵⁵ which is “the process” of the Resurrection. “Resurrection is, precisely going through death.”¹⁵⁶ This experience of death is wholly purifying because it is none other than “the darkness of love.” The rhetorical elements which we earlier analysed in relation to the “journey” are here in evidence:

Jesus went through the darkness into total love. At that moment he became total love because he surrendered everything. Body and soul have been totally surrendered in love. Then he is taken up in the life of the Spirit.¹⁵⁷

However, Griffiths emphasises, “Jesus didn’t say ‘I am the Father’, but rather ‘I am in the Father and the Father is in me, who sees me, sees the Father, but I am not the Father.’” This is not an identity, but a communion in love which is communicated in the Holy Spirit:

“In the Holy Spirit” as Fr John Main says, so beautifully, “we participate in the stream of love which goes between the Father and the Son and the Son and the Father.” We are taken into the inner life of the Trinity and that is our Christian calling. . . The Godhead is mutual love . . . which embraces us and calls us into its own intimacy, an intimacy of love . . .¹⁵⁸

This “Christian calling . . . into the intimacy of love” in the Godhead, is the basis for the image of the divine Host. All are called to share in the banquet, the communion of love. The mystical Body of Christ “embraces all humanity in the unity of the One Person of Christ.”¹⁵⁹

Articles and talks that Griffiths produced after the life-changing 1990 event, clarify his meaning. Our specific “Christian calling” is participation in the life of the Trinity which means also communion with others and ultimately the whole of creation. However, all of humankind can come to understand the love of God for all people through the revelation of “the Cosmic Covenant” the origin of which is the original state of harmony in God; it is

¹⁵⁵ He also compares it with Plato’s assertion that human existence is a preparation for death.

¹⁵⁶ In death all the experiences of body and soul/psyche are taken up in the life of the spirit. See Bede Griffiths, “Cosmic Person and Cosmic Lord,” *Human Potential*, 8. Griffiths cites also Thomas Aquinas as having shown how “the divine essence is totally present in every particle of matter in the whole universe”.

¹⁵⁷ Bede Griffiths, “Cosmic Person and Cosmic Lord.”

¹⁵⁸ Bede Griffiths, in Interview for *Monos* Vol. 3, No.8, Sep 1991, by Fr Patrick Eastman.

¹⁵⁹ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 93.

essentially a covenant of love.¹⁶⁰ The primary revelation is within the hearts and consciences of humankind, and the world itself is the medium.¹⁶¹ This is because behind the universe that we construct through the projection of our minds is “the hidden presence, the divine mystery.”¹⁶²

In reality the physical world is not object outside of us but contained within us. Griffiths refers to the saying in the *Chandogya Upanisad* for illustration:¹⁶³

In this castle of the body there is a little shrine. And in that shrine,
There is a lotus. And in that lotus there is a little space. What is that
Which lives in that little space in the heart of the lotus? That is what
we have to find.

What we find is that “the whole universe is in that little space . . . because the Creator, the Source of all is in the heart of each one of us.”¹⁶⁴ Moreover, “when one goes beyond the

¹⁶⁰ The movement in theology, Griffiths sees manifesting as a response to the universal call for all people to the nondual experience which *Dzogchen* recognises has been experienced by human beings from prehistoric times, to a return to the One, to the original unity before “the Fall.” See Bede Griffiths, “Communion and Renunciation,” the Christian – Buddhist Exchange, Asirvanam Monastery, Bangalore, 25th Nov., 1992. *Dzogchen* “speaks of an awareness of the presence . . . (of the Godhead) . . . a simple awareness that at every moment, in every situation, you’re in that presence.” Bede Griffiths in “Integration of Mind, Body, and Spirit: Balancing Duality” an occasional paper of the Fetzer Institute, 9 September 1992. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

¹⁶¹ Griffiths cites both the documents of Vat II, and the work of Aquinas for this in *Cosmic Revelation* 27-31. Griffiths’ is certainly not alone in his understanding of mysticism and the secular. Raimon Panikkar states in support, “They (Christians) prefer to speak a secular language and feel so comfortable with the scientific world.” See Raimon Panikkar, in the Preface to *A New Vision*, Kreuth. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust. Griffiths is supported by Franciscan Father Richard Rohr, founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1986, who says, “When religion doesn’t move to . . . the mystical level . . . ((which is) when you move beyond external belief systems to inner experience . . . (of) a love and a life and a quality of being that we would call God, for yourself) . . . almost always the substitute of mysticism is morality . . . Secularism is a child of Christianity . . . (the material world) is the locus, the hiding place of God . . . I meet scientists who are much more humble before mystery . . . in awe of mystery and in love with mystery than most clergymen I know . . . they’re very generative people for the life of the world, the sickness of the world, for the health of God’s people . . . just because you wear the shingle ‘Christian’ doesn’t mean you’re a generative person, a life-giving person . . . which are the real indicators of whether the spirit is operating in you, through you, with you . . . I’m convinced Jesus was the first non-dual teacher in the West . . . revealed in lines like ‘My father’s sun shines on the good and the bad. His rain falls on the just and unjust.’” In “The Religion Report”, Nov. 15, 2006, ABC Radio National <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/religionreport/stories/2006/1788767.htm> (accessed Jan 20, 2008).

¹⁶² Bede Griffiths, “Integration of Mind, Body and Spirit”.

¹⁶³ CU VIII, 1. Mascaró’s translation which Griffiths uses differs a little from Panikkar’s: “In this city of Brahman there is a dwelling in the form of a lotus flower, and within it there is an inner space. One should search for that which is within that inner space; it is that which should be sought, it is that which one should desire to know.” Raimon Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, 718.

outer world of the senses . . . one discovers the inner reality and experiences that the whole universe is within (consciousness).¹⁶⁵ This is the experience of the “Cosmic Man,” the *purusa* of the *Rig Veda*.¹⁶⁶ It is expressed in the *Chandogya Upanisad*:

As far, indeed, as the vast space outside extends the space within the heart. Within it, indeed, are contained both heaven and earth, fire and wind, sun and moon, lightning and the stars, both what one possesses here and what one does not possess – all is contained within it.¹⁶⁷

This is the reality which is available in contemplative experience. And it is this which Griffiths believes is the gift we have been given that has such power to heal the present divisions and fragmentation of our world. He insists that it is only this that can save it from a major catastrophe: “It is only the contemplative life which can give the world the new direction it needs.”¹⁶⁸

In an article in the *Tablet* (April, 1992), “In Jesus’ Name,” Griffiths gives as “the supreme example of Christian *gnosis*,” St Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians:

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory, he may strengthen you with his spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts in faith, that being rooted and grounded in love, you may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and breadth and height and depth, and may know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with the fullness of God.

He compares this Christ as *pleroma* of God with the *dzogchen* teaching where the Buddha nature is realized, the “Primordial State” of absolute perfection, a state of realisation of everything “contained in perfect wholeness, fullness, bliss,” and with the Hindu tradition of *Saccidananda*, (being, consciousness, bliss).

Both *dzogchen* and Christian contemplation convey the experience of “presence.” In his final years, Griffiths explains how, with the assistance of “the Jesus prayer,” he keeps with him throughout the activities of the day this presence of God experienced in

¹⁶⁴ Bede Griffiths, “Cosmic Person Cosmic Lord,” *Human Potential*, Summer, 1992.

¹⁶⁵ “The physical world is inside us.” Bede Griffiths, “Cosmic Person Cosmic Lord”, *Human Potential*, Summer 1992. Also, *A New Vision*, 69. Also, *River*, 124 where Griffiths describes this reality as “a kind of *circumincession*, or mutual penetration.”

¹⁶⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 74.

¹⁶⁷ Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*, 74. Citing, CU VIII, 3.

¹⁶⁸ In Douglas Conlan, “Dom Bede Griffiths, O.S.B. Cam (1907-1993),” *The Roll newsletter of the Schola Contemplationis* (New Camaldoli, June 1993), 45, from a letter to Beatrice Bruteau, Feb. 4, 1992.

meditation.¹⁶⁹ He describes this as the emergence of love in the depths of one's being, a presence which is love, a presence which heals.¹⁷⁰ The divine Host is never absent from and always considerate towards those who have been called.

There is a healing dimension to the image of the divine Host as outpouring generative love. As *Sannyasi*, Bede Griffiths took the name, *Dayananda* – the Bliss of Compassion. His understanding of a universal call to contemplation encompasses the potential to heal the divisions of the world and the resultant suffering that concerned him profoundly. We can extend his image influenced as it is by Eastern religious forms by demonstrating how deeply Eucharistic it is.

5. The Divine Host, Healing and the Restorative Space

Griffiths' point is that healing takes place in the "embrace" of the divine Host. Both Eastern and Western religious traditions acknowledge a need for healing that is somehow integral to creation. The opportunity for restoration derives from insight into multiplicity and unity on the horizon of infinity. In *Vedic* terms, the healing space is symbolised by *samdhya*, the meeting of the lights. It is interstitial space, dawn, the silent time of promise, and sunset, the silent time of recollection of what has been, between life and death, good and bad, light and dark, the healing space. In Hindu and Buddhist faith, coming to right consciousness, a revelation of truth, effects healing. The *Gayatri Mantra* which is chanted every day at Shantivanam ashram, infers a healing process:

Om bhur bhuvah svah
Tat savitur varenyam
Bhargo devasya dhimahi
Dhiyo yo nah prachodayat.

¹⁶⁹ Griffiths in "In Jesus' Name," *The Tablet*, 1992. (It compares with the experience and teaching of contemplatives such as de Caussade, Laurence of the Annunciation but most especially the anonymous *Cloud of Unknowing* of the late Middle Ages).

¹⁷⁰ Father Patrick Eastman, "Christ is All in All": an Interview of Bede Griffiths, *Monos* Vol. 3, No.8, Sep 1991, 4. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust. See also, *The Cloud of Unknowing* another mystical work which Griffiths refers to in this interview; the anonymous author of the work is informed by Dionysius. "The repose of abiding in God's love" that is grounded in contemplative experience becomes habitual: "With your attention centered on the blind awareness of your naked being united to God's, you will go about your daily rounds, eating and drinking, sleeping and waking, going and coming, speaking and listening, lying down and rising up, standing and kneeling, running and riding, working and resting . . . you will be offering to God . . . the most precious gift you can make . . . whether active or contemplative." See *The Cloud of Unknowing; And the Book of Privy Counselling*, ed. William Johnston (New York: Image Books), 73, 163.

Translated, it expresses an invitation to meditate on the glorious splendour of that divine giver of life that this One may illuminate our consciousness.

For the peoples of “the Book,” Jews, Muslims, Christians, healing most profoundly involves conversion of the heart, a turning from sin and death to the life of grace. In Griffiths’ interreligious milieu, while the healing space is most clearly demonstrated and available in Catholic tradition in the Eucharist it is also the ashram itself, the heart of contemplative prayer, and the rituals of cosmic religions. We have also defined it here as a Sufi safe-house, comparable with a dedicated family home environment such as Griffiths experienced in Vermont late in his life with a small group of companions. As well, the “realised human being” personifies the healing space. Griffiths’ outlook on healing can be recognized as central to Christian tradition where it is part of the whole journey of a progressive development. While healing may be considered most importantly in terms of an inner reality and movement into wholeness, an incarnational and Trinitarian theology includes the well-being of all creation.

Pointedly, the *Vedic* “*Tat tvam asi*” which Griffiths translates as “Thou art that” and Panikkar differently as “That art Thou” is key. Griffiths’ emphasises the experience of union; “Thou art that,” leads to “Aham Brahman,” “I am Brahman” and still has to avoid an interpretation of complete simple identification. For Panikkar these words which are spoken to the disciple Svetaketu (ultimately symbolic of humanity) show the *atman*, *Braman*, “That” as the subject in the demonstrative and therefore the deep meaning is that Svetaketu is a “Thou.” Everyone is the “Thou” of God’s “I”.

Griffiths points out how the Incarnation signifies a restoration of absolute unity:

The Word descends into the depths of the material universe raising up the whole order of nature and initiating that process of ascent through the worlds of sense, imagination and intellect by which we are led back to God.¹⁷¹

He clearly understands this as a union of the whole person corresponding to a profound healing of all disintegrative effects. The tendency of all created things to long for unity is completed through grace. In the “mystery of the economy of grace,” all of humankind is united through Christ in one Body, to form the City of God.¹⁷² Describing the integration of

¹⁷¹ Bede Griffiths, “Imagination, Intuition and Knowledge.” A Paper written at Shantivanam, 1990, 1991, p8. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

¹⁷² Bede Griffiths, “Imagination, Intuition and Knowledge,” 9.

sensual and spiritual,¹⁷³ (which he understands also in Paulian terms – the integration of the body/*soma*, soul or mind/ *psychikos*/ and spiritual/*pneuma*) Griffiths quotes Julian of Norwich:

God is nearer to us than our own soul, for he is the ground in whom our soul standeth, and he is the mean that keepeth the substance and the sensuality together so that they shall never disport . . . And anent our substance and our sensuality they may rightly be called our soul, and that is because of the oneing that they have in God. . . For in the time that God knitted to him our body in the maiden's womb, he took our sensual soul, in which oneing he was perfect man. For Christ having knit in him every man that shall be saved is perfect Man.¹⁷⁴

Related to this, Griffiths regarded the Mass as “very central” in his religious experience.¹⁷⁵ In a talk on “Modern Physics and the Eucharist” in Shantivanam, in 1989 he provides an explanation which I here paraphrase.¹⁷⁶ The Eucharist is the sacramental symbol of the restoration of all things in God, and central to an experience of reintegration and personal and universal health and wholeness. In this Sacrament it is the risen Christ with whom we are united. In communion we are drawn up as the body of Christ, which extends to all of humanity,¹⁷⁷ into the life of the Trinity.¹⁷⁸ Jesus Christ is present in his glorified

“The spirit is the principle which integrates the whole physical universe and the whole psychological universe and brings them all to unity.” Bede Griffiths, in *Cosmic Person Cosmic Lord*, 8.

¹⁷³ Later in the thesis, in the Chapter, “Divine Lord” we note this integration affirmed in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

¹⁷⁴ Bede Griffiths, “Imagination, Intuition and Knowledge,” 9.

¹⁷⁵ From Griffiths’ Australian tour, 1985, in “Bede Griffith O.S.B. A Tribute,” compiled by John Cleary and Stephen Godley. *Compass*, Vol. 1993. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

¹⁷⁶ Bede Griffiths, “Modern Physics and the Eucharist”, Taped lecture, Shantivanam, 1989. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

¹⁷⁷ Griffiths points out that this entry into the mystery of Christ must involve relationship with others, “The body of Christ extends to all of humanity.” Taken from “The Bede Griffiths Sangha Newsletter” Volume 2, Issue 1.

¹⁷⁸ Griffiths quotes St Augustine, “It is you who are laid upon the altar.” See Bede Griffiths, “Modern Physics and the Eucharist.” Taped Lecture, Shantivanam, 1989. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust. For Griffiths, the Trinity is “mirrored in the other great world religions.” The Trinity is also “the very heart of the Christian faith,” and its depth and relevance which has been generally unappreciated can be re-discovered through inter-religious dialogue which will encourage a return to the insights of the mystical theologians of Church tradition who present a “deeper view” than the abstract Greek concepts which have been solidified in Church dogma. In this, Griffiths points particularly to Maximus the Confessor who teaches from his own contemplative experience, that “in moving towards God in knowledge and love we are simply returning to our idea in Him . . . even if we wander . . . the idea (God) has of each of us remains the same.” Taken from, “A Meditation on the Mystery of the Trinity,” Bede Griffiths O.S.B., Cam., 1986. (Bede Griffiths Trust) Similarly, Panikkar holds that, “The Trinity . . . may be considered as a junction where the authentic spiritual dimensions of all religions meet.” See Raimon Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (New York: Orbis Books, 1973), 42.

body, that is, in Aquinas' terms, the reality, *res*, is present under the sign, the *sacramentum*, of bread and wine. Celebration of Eucharist takes us through Christ, into the mystery of God. It is a very special knowledge/experience of God coming to us via this particular symbol "which leads us into the depth of the Godhead and to that communion of love."¹⁷⁹

At the same time, the sacramental is present in all of life: "The whole of creation is a symbol of God, a sign in which the Divine Reality has manifested itself." Furthermore, the risen Christ is the Cosmic Christ present in all parts of the whole:¹⁸⁰

The universe is one reality manifested in an infinite multiplicity of forms, and each individual form has its own value; each is a unique image of God. So each created thing is a particular image. . . . As Blake put it:

To see the world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower,
To hold infinity in the palm of the hand,
And eternity in an hour.

That is to realize God in the physical universe . . . the One is present in every element in a different way . . . different in you and in me, in the flower and the tree, and yet all are contained in the whole.¹⁸¹

However, this kind of deep life-giving integration that may be experienced in the Eucharist, Griffiths says depends on the conscious receptivity to what is taking place. It is possible for the transformation of the whole person, with a continual growth and strengthening of the spiritual body present in each one.¹⁸²

Evolution of the consciousness is integral. Consciousness, "present in matter from the very beginning" is evolving as a "world process" so that we can speak of different levels of consciousness which have an organising principle.¹⁸³ What is involved is a transformation of matter "by Spirit . . . into a spiritual reality."¹⁸⁴ This is movement into unity which is a healing of divisions. Not only is a human being a microcosm of the universe, but "all of the

¹⁷⁹ Bede Griffiths, "Modern Physics and the Eucharist," Taped lecture, Shantivanam, 1989. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

¹⁸⁰ We will return to this later, with reference to Bohm's idea of the Implicate Order.

¹⁸¹ Bede Griffiths, "Modern Physics and the Eucharist."

¹⁸² In response to questioning, Griffiths explains the Hindu concept of different bodies, "*kosas*" or "sheaves." There are five of them: the *anakosa* or material body, *pranakosa* or vital body, *manakosa* or mental body, *dnyanakosa* or the higher intellect and the *anandakosa* or body of bliss. Bede Griffiths, "Modern Physics and the Eucharist."

¹⁸³ Similarly, Cambridge biologist Rupert Sheldrake describes an organising "formal energy" in nature, named "morphogenetic fields." See Bede Griffiths, "Modern Physics and the Eucharist."

¹⁸⁴ Bede Griffiths, "Modern Physics and the Eucharist." The prime example for Griffiths is the Resurrection, when Christ's material body was first transformed into a "subtle body" and then at the Ascension finally into the spiritual realm as "a spiritual energy."

energies in the universe are interrelated and interdependent.”¹⁸⁵ As we are transformed in the Eucharist, gradually being built into the mystical body of Christ, so too, the whole of creation is undergoing transformation.¹⁸⁶ This is a movement towards the Eschaton, the final end of “all world processes” when “everybody is taken up into the Spiritual . . . the state of *satcitananda*.” Griffiths refers to the sixth century philosopher Boethius who in his *Consolation of Philosophy* “describes eternity as total and simultaneous possession of unending life.”¹⁸⁷

Bede explains that what we perceive as “a gradual emergence” in time and space is a manifestation of the reality which is “the ultimate state NOW” (*sic*). In this light it is understandable how he sees that the Eucharist, as life-giving gift should be profoundly efficacious; to enter into the death and resurrection of Jesus, into his sacrifice, is “the way . . . humanity is set free from . . . sin . . . all these energies which hold us back (so that) we are opened up to the divine life and the divine consciousness and we enter into the divine bliss.”¹⁸⁸ This is “the one Christ embracing the whole of redeemed humanity in himself, making all one in him in this total wholeness.”¹⁸⁹ Through gracious unconditional love, the divine Host extends welcome to all of humanity.

Accordingly, Griffiths introduced to the Forest of Peace, Indian rituals and chants, and readings from the treasures of divine wisdom of different religious traditions. It reflects his belief that all such wisdom comes as gift from the divine embrace. There is the sacred *Om*. This is a mantra deep at the heart of reality, the primordial word, embracing all things. Beginning and ending prayer-time in the ashram, its significance is essentially sacramental. At the start of Mass,¹⁹⁰ to which all are welcomed, there is the *arati*, when “the offering of light in the dark heart of the temple” is taken out and shared round to the worshippers who

¹⁸⁵ Bede Griffiths, “Modern Physics and the Eucharist.”

¹⁸⁶ Griffiths understands *dzochen* in this light.

¹⁸⁷ Bede Griffiths, “Modern Physics and the Eucharist.”

¹⁸⁸ Bede Griffiths, “Modern Physics and the Eucharist.”

¹⁸⁹ Griffiths states this is the best understanding we have of the resurrection and he quotes Augustine: “at the end there will be one Christ loving him-self.” In “Modern Physics and the Eucharist.”

¹⁹⁰ One of the three daily times of prayer at Shantivanam. Griffiths regarded the morning and evening prayer as fundamental, “the two pillars of the day.” See Bede Griffiths, “The Laughing Man interviews Fr Bede Griffiths” (CA: The Laughing Man Institute in cooperation with the Dawn Horse Press, 1984), 36.

report the experience as one of psychological and spiritual healing.¹⁹¹ With out-stretched hands they receive the light and warmth bringing it close in a symbolic gesture to their minds, receiving as it were, the divine love and illumination. At the Preparation of the Gifts, another ritual acknowledges the interdependency of the whole universe: eight flowers signifying the eight points of the compass/universe, are brought and the priest takes one at a time, touches it to his heart to symbolize the peoples' interrelationship and interdependency of all things, and places it with the offerings. There is also the inclusion of the four elements with the offering of the bread and wine, incensing, sprinkling of water, and blessing of the fire to represent the cosmic sacrifice. Once again this represents the sacred, primordial unity.

For Western visitors to the Ashram,¹⁹² differences included simplicity of general attire, style and surroundings, and the intimacy of the gatherings. The village people who have a sense of ownership towards the ashram attend regularly. All this in Griffiths' time was for many people conducive to the experience of intimate fellowship and God's loving presence. Though numbers are reduced, it continues today.

Transformative experience in the Eucharist as in other forms of prayer and also in self-less service of others¹⁹³ is consummate on transcendence of the ego. Griffiths believed Shantivanam to be a destination for visitors that afforded an experience of the asceticism of simple life lived in community.

To "go beyond" the ego, the *ahamkara* or "I-maker" that is "the basis of the 'personality' the external self which works through senses and reason," enables a realisation of communion with one another and all creation.¹⁹⁴ It is a means of overcoming the fear and anger prevalent in society in our times.¹⁹⁵ Griffiths hoped that the simplicity of life at Shantivanam Ashram, the purpose of which is "to create a centre where (right) values can be lived," could be replicated in other small communities throughout the world. He found

¹⁹¹ Beata Reynolds, in "A Recent Visit to Shantivanam," "The Bede Griffiths Sangha Newsletter," Volume 2, Issue 1, P4.

¹⁹² Visitors stayed for days or months, some up to a year at Shantivanam.

¹⁹³ Besides contemplative prayer, Griffiths acknowledged that a life lived in self-less service of others' needs is an authentic means of ego-transcendence.

¹⁹⁴ Bede Griffiths in the Forward to, John Main, *The Inner Christ* (London: Darton Longman and Todd), 1987.

¹⁹⁵ Bede Griffiths, "Inner Disarmament and the Spiritual Warrior," *Contemplative Review* 17 (1984):20. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

support in Rahner's emphasis on the human universal capacity for self-transcendence.¹⁹⁶ The task is "precisely to allow the tradition to grow, and to be open to all the new insights which are offered to us."¹⁹⁷ It is for this reason that an ashram and similar small communities can be "a leaven, inconspicuous, feeble, but essential . . . called to bear witness to the mystery of Christ, hidden in the heart."¹⁹⁸

He understands the calling of the core monastic group in the ashram is to "awaken" others to "this mystery" at the heart of the Silence.¹⁹⁹ The special characteristic of the ashram that allows a unique freedom for this kind of witness is its non-judicial status. Griffiths differentiates it from a religious community, in that it does not belong to the hierarchical or sacramental church but is rather "a community called to transcend the sacramental order. . . An ashram is a lay community of men and women, married or single, centred on prayer and meditation." It follows the example of Jesus in John's Gospel who says, "I have no authority of myself".²⁰⁰

The ascetical simplicity of such a community, is not intended as a radical renunciation in the sense of a dismissal of this world - a past tradition that Griffiths rejects. He is in search of a "more balanced spirituality, (neither) rejecting the world nor indulging the senses (a) middle path" that he sees as the way of Buddha, of Benedict, and of St Anthony of the Desert.²⁰¹ In fact, Laurence Freeman was to say of the monk, Bede Griffiths, in the face of "his plain distrust for modern industrial society (which he thought) contained too many self-contradictions to survive," that "India was (his) desert . . . he turned no-one away."²⁰² It was characteristic of his tolerant approach that Griffiths saw the excesses of

¹⁹⁶ "On Poverty and Simplicity, Views of a Post-Industrial Christian Sage, A Dialogue between Father Bede Griffiths and Renee Weber," *ReVISION* Vol 6. No 2. Fall, 1983.

¹⁹⁷ Bede Griffiths in a letter to Rupert Sheldrake, All Soul's Day, 1992. With regard to new insights, Griffiths believed that the present challenge was "to create a theology which would use the findings of modern science and Eastern mysticism . . . to evolve from that a new theology which would be much more adequate." See "A Dialogue between Father Bede Griffiths and Renee Weber."

¹⁹⁸ Bede Griffiths, "The Ashram as a Way of Transcendence" in Vandana Mataji, *Christian Ashrams – a movement with a future?* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), 30-33.

¹⁹⁹ Bede Griffiths, "The Ashram as a Way of Transcendence," 30-33.

²⁰⁰ Bede Griffiths, "The Ashram as a Way of Transcendence," 30-33.

²⁰¹ Bede Griffiths, "America and India, the Balancing of Extremes," in *Creation Spirituality*, Sep/Oct, 1991, 42. This is a later development for Griffiths in India. Initially, he set out to imitate the details of the lives of the very poorest people. Later, however, he chose to use a desk for writing and a chair for meditation.

²⁰² Dom Laurence Freeman OSB, "Homily at the Mass in Thanksgiving for the Life and Teaching of Bede Griffiths at Westminster Cathedral," June 15, 1993, 1, 2. (Bede Griffiths Trust)

American culture as an extreme reaction to traditional religious negative attitudes towards the world, and especially the body and the senses.²⁰³

So there was no heavy labour for visitors to Shantivanam. The local village people were paid to work there. The manual activity for the day expected of visitors was a very simple procedure that involved a group focus on preparation of vegetables for meals.

Griffiths admits that the capacity of every human being for self-transcendence is expressed in the love of beauty, in art, poetry, literature, architecture and so on. At Shantivanam, (as also at Kurisumala), the surroundings are beautified by flowering plants. Bougainvillia falls in magnificent cascades at Kurisumala, a backdrop to well tended, luscious roses and dahlias; at Shantivanam, tall palms cast a fretted shade on the broad swaying banana leaves and cool cement paths which connect living quarters, dining hall, recreation spaces and library to the central chapel.

Griffiths was outspokenly critical of modern architecture that was divorced from natural surroundings. He considered it ugly and soul-destroying:²⁰⁴

Beauty does matter. When you are living in the context of beauty your character changes. When you are living with ugliness, it is oppressive.²⁰⁵

At Shantivanam, great care was taken to ensure the buildings harmonised with the natural surroundings. This goal has also been admirably achieved at Osage Monastery, at Oklahoma in the US. The disintegration or damage that occurs subconsciously through incessant contact with bleak, harsh and discordant surroundings can often only be recognised when there is a refreshing experience of the reverse.

Consequently, Griffiths was also very critical of the expansion of cities, not only Mumbai (Bombay), with its population then of 30 million people, but similar great centres in

²⁰³ Bede Griffiths, "America and India, the Balancing of Extremes," *Creation Spirituality*, Sep/Oct, 1991, 41. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

²⁰⁴ It is now a "given" that beauty in surroundings facilitates healing. This is obvious in hospital Children's wards, where the dull all-over grey came to be replaced by bright colours, eye-catching mobiles and so on. In regard to mental health, not only is disinterest in personal cleanliness and attractive apparel an indicator of sickness, but mental-health workers take a keen interest in the quality of the surroundings for those who are recovering from illness. The powerful modern city architecture of 20th century le Corbusier with its innovative cantilevers is now regarded as soulless and is being replaced by more organic styles.

²⁰⁵ Bede Griffiths interview with Michael Toms.

the West.²⁰⁶ He believed Schumacher's²⁰⁷ decentralized vision which most constructively employed people's different abilities without introducing deleterious modern stratagems based on profit and progress was the ideal to work towards. Griffiths notes that while Schumacher's proposed system of "Intermediate Technology" is particularly meaningful for developing countries it is also highly significant for all nations in terms of humane working conditions.

It is particularly significant that Schumacher, "well known . . . Economic Advisor of the National Coal Board from 1950 to 1970"²⁰⁸ should write at the close of his book, that "clear-eyed objectivity . . . cannot be achieved and prudence²⁰⁹ cannot be perfected" except by an attitude of "silent contemplation" of reality, during which "the egocentric interests of man (sic) are at least temporarily silenced."²¹⁰

6. The Divine Host Represents Healthy Community

Griffiths saw the return to the subject as heralding a feminine receptivity. In prophetic mein, he gravitated towards this principle in particular in his journey to "find the other half of (his) soul" considering how it would provide the necessary balance for the world overall. He insisted such change was vital for the church if it was to continue to be the embodiment of Christ's saving mission.

Griffiths speaks of the challenge for the Church today to move "from being western to being a Church for the world."²¹¹ Without this, inter-religious dialogue can only remain a longed-for ideal. It is not that Christ has been rejected in India; "It is Christianity, or as they sometimes say 'Churchianity' they object to." In post-Colonial India Christianity is identified

²⁰⁶ Here again we find a recurrent theme for Griffiths. Just as in *The New Creation in Christ*, he says, "Our greatest danger is tension," 44, so also in *Marriage*, 133, 134, he describes the passage to freedom from the slavery of world powers such as capitalism and communism as being symbolized by the passage through the desert. (This is Eckhart's "desert" experience described above, 128).

²⁰⁷ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 282, 283. Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, in the Introduction to *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (London: Sphere Books, 1974). Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* was first published in 1973.

²⁰⁸ E.F. Schumacher, Introduction to *Small is Beautiful*.

²⁰⁹ Schumacher is here speaking specifically of one of the four cardinal virtues, *prudentia*. Ernst Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, 249.

²¹⁰ Ernst Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, 249.

²¹¹ Bede Griffiths, "Your Church is too Western." *The Tablet* Vol. 240 No. 7640 ISSN: 00398837. Dec. 13, 1986.

with material power.²¹² A church for the world would represent another power, the gift of the Holy Spirit who comes through Jesus from the Father as communion, that is, forming community centred on *koinonia*. Jesus' communication of the Holy Spirit is "the essence of the church." Whereas the institutional church changes under historical conditions, "the eternal church" centred in this presence of the Spirit is an eternal reality. In an earlier letter to *The Tablet* Griffiths advises a return to the patriarchates of the early church in communion with a Rome which would be "a point of reference"²¹³ not a centre of power. Centred on the One who embraces all of humanity, his concern is to transcend divisions and to achieve unity.²¹⁴

For this reason, he sees contemplation, that is, "knowledge by love" as "the goal of all life." While, "the Christian "can pray and relate in terms of love and intimacy" to Jesus of Nazareth in whom they "can find a personal form of the Word," the divine reality is also "known to others under different names and forms."²¹⁵ Opening the mind and heart to God demands self-surrender;²¹⁶ it is a kind of death reflective of Jesus' surrender in death; it leads to the sort of freedom from the law as taught by St Paul. It means giving up the ego, and it is a movement into unconditional love, the life of the Spirit where mercy is the supreme authority.²¹⁷ It is a movement from death to rebirth, from brokenness to wholeness. It is "simply surrender in love . . . (with) . . . Jesus (as) the model for us all" but "it is open to everybody . . . in all religions and . . . outside all religions."²¹⁸ Griffiths believes that this is the inner spirit of the eternal church which is the ideal we must constantly strive towards. It is also "the hope of the future of the world."²¹⁹

²¹² Bede Griffiths, "Your Church is too Western."

²¹³ Bede Griffiths, "The Church," transcribed tape-recording, July 1992, Osage Monastery, Sand Springs, OK.

²¹⁴ These ideas are strongly supported by one such as Cardinal Walter Kaspar who recognises the need for the church to continually adapt to "a plurality (not of faith) but of styles, forms of piety, rites, theology . . . (which) . . . will increase considerably in the future . . . a sign of life and inner richness." In *The Helder Camara Lecture the Future of Christianity, "A Meditation on the Church and Contemporary Pluralism in the Post Modern Era,"* 2003.

²¹⁵ Bede Griffiths, "How I Pray," A talk given at Osage Monastery, 1992. *The Inner Directions Journal* (1996): 14. The copy is available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

²¹⁶ Bede Griffiths, "How I Pray."

²¹⁷ Bede Griffiths, Homily, Osage Monastery, July 1992. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust. This connects with Bob Plant's idea of a way of justice as "more than ethics," above, 90.

²¹⁸ Bede Griffiths in a taped talk, The Scientific and Medical Network, Garden Cottage, Newhouse Farm, Northington Down, Alresford, Hants, SO24 9UB. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

²¹⁹ Bede Griffiths in a taped talk, The Scientific and Medical Network, Garden Cottage, Newhouse Farm, Northington Down, Alresford, Hants, SO24 9UB.

A way of life that is “open to all, married or single, men and women, even children” is the Benedictine ideal which Griffiths proposes as the means to happiness and peace in the world, witnessing the culmination of a right response to the divine Host. It is a vision which “integrates normal human life, human companionship, work, service and prayer in a whole.” Griffiths shows how the Benedictine religious vows which aim to set a person free from self-centredness, can be applied to ordinary life: the vow of poverty is intended for freedom from desire of possessions; the vow of chastity from the desire of the senses; the vow of obedience from the desire to be a separate self; the vow of conversion – a turning to God in the heart; the vow of stability – a stabilising of the attitude of the mind. These are the means for transcendence of the ego and the way to contemplation.²²⁰

This, he believes, is the way the world is being called that would signal a new stage of consciousness, another step in universal maturation of humankind, a further movement away from disintegration and into wholeness.

On the same grounds, Shantivanam was a mixed community where all were welcome.²²¹ Coming to terms with the body, the senses and sexuality, and finding the right balance is very much a part of the way of contemplation.

Generally speaking, the *Vedas*, *Upanisads* and *Bhagavad Gita*, have the same patriarchal bias as Christianity in the West that Griffiths believes is expressed in certain kinds of ascetical practices which deny the body and matter generally. He finds that in contrast, ancient cultures which were wholly agrarian, or which understood the earth as Mother, like the Aborigines, were matriarchal. Griffiths believes the integration of these two different approaches is vital for the future of the world.²²²

As a result he abandoned the traditional Yogic method which despises the body and material world as purely *maya*, for the tantric ritual which he understands as deriving from

²²⁰ Bede Griffiths, a talk for *Satsang*, Osage Monastery, August 17, 1992. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust. The commitment referred to can be further formalised by becoming an Oblate of the Order which would entail a promise of self-offering in a life of prayer based on meditation, study and work. See Bede Griffiths, “Renewal of the Monastic Life,” Talk for Saccidananda Ashram: in “A Garland of Letters” 3-6, Tirucharappalli, India, 1991.

²²¹ However, we met one elderly Benedictine Sister who had lived most of her life as a religious in the associated community across the road from Shantivanam who confided a sense of deprivation in that she, unlike female visitors, who came to stay for short periods at Shantivanam, could not share in the communal living. The situation probably reflects on Griffiths’ wish to maintain the autonomy of Shantivanam.

²²² Bede Griffiths, “Cosmic Person, Cosmic Lord.” See also, *A New Vision*, 40 – 42, 286.

an ancient Shamanism and which “emerges in the third century as a correct(ive).”²²³ He describes a particular form of tantric yoga, *kundalini*, as being a positive means of transforming bodily energies, in contrast to repression or suppression.²²⁴ The energies are enabled to “flow” through centres of energy or *chakras* so that the person achieves integration with life generally; it is a harmonising power. Controlled breathing and a chosen mantra are part of the exercise. Griffiths describes how the kind of energy which can thereby be channelled is powerful. As no one is fully integrated, this can be dangerous and so it is best and safest to work with a guide or guru to avoid negative results. Similarly, he suggests channelling the energy downwards through focus on the presence of Christ with a suitable mantra from the highest *chakra* at the crown of the head, to the lowest and then rising back up through them. This provides spiritual control.²²⁵

Griffiths’ own experience supported his belief that most people suffered from either sexual repression or suppression which makes it “a terribly negative force.” This is both psychologically debilitating and an obstacle to surrender to God in life. One’s sexuality has to be faced “either alone or with the help of a psychological counselor.” This will bring an end to “all attempts at conscious suppression” so that “surrender to God becomes possible.” Bede insists it is most important to realise “that sexual energy itself . . . is essentially pure and holy.” The surrender of the ego, or the separated self, is consequent on such self-acceptance and only then can there be union with the divine.²²⁶

Generally speaking, therefore Griffiths was “very suspicious” of ascetical practices. Indeed in Christianity, the body makes a significant contribution. Griffiths argues that only in certain exceptional cases do such strongly ascetical practices lead to experience of God in contemplation. For most people, however, he considers it is “disastrous.” “The total human being . . . is to enter into the life of the Spirit” and the words of St Paul, “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit” underline this belief.²²⁷

Griffiths seems to apply a certain simplification in response to questions of sexuality which he sees are, as all things, subject to a higher order. His article, “On Homosexual Love”

²²³ Bede Griffiths, “Tantra and the Mystical Marriage,” a taped lecture at Shantivanam, 1988. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

²²⁴ Repression is unconscious, whereas suppression is conscious rejection. “Tantra and the Mystical Marriage.”

²²⁵ Bede Griffiths, “Tantra and the Mystical Marriage.”

²²⁶ Cited in a letter to Sr Pascaline Coff, Nov 21, 1990.

²²⁷ Bede Griffiths, in “The Silent Guide, An Interview with Father Bede Griffiths,” *PARABOLA: The Magazine of Myth and Tradition*. Vol. XI, No I, Spring 1986: “The Witness.”

begins with the assertion, that homosexual love is “just as normal and natural as love between people of the opposite sex.” It is depth of communion in love which people ultimately long for. He quotes the Christian friendship of the 12th century English Cistercian monk, Aelred of Rivelaux for whom fraternal love was “fulfillment of (his) love of God.” And in this context, he warns against “spiritualising the gospel.” Some might feel uneasy with Griffiths’ example. However, he explains that as love involves the whole of our being, body, soul and spirit, “there is an element of sex in all human love,” something that demands acceptance and respect rather than shame. On the one hand, it can be quite degrading if the sexual instinct dominates the relationship; on the other, “a spiritual love without any basis in sex would be inhuman.” On the one hand, Griffiths regards this last as “one of the greatest dangers in the spiritual life.” On the other hand, integration of the whole person depends on the emotions being “guided by the spirit and opened to the presence of the Holy Spirit.”²²⁸

From the Camaldolese Monastery in Big Sur California, Fr Bruno Barnhart wrote a detailed response to Griffiths’ paper in which he lists a number of concerns specifically with regard to religious communities in the USA today. He sees a major problem in that “most of the candidates – or rather inquirers, aspirants, are wholly or partly of homosexual inclination.” Interestingly, he finally arrives at a conclusion much the same as Griffiths. There is a need to consciously integrate sexuality, “as that deepest human energy . . . an incarnation of the Holy Spirit” in the religious life. “And this implies the presence of both sexes in community.” It would also mean recognition of “the emergence of the feminine” in our time. “What we are speaking of here is the realization of the energy of the human nucleus.” From the Australian Catholic University, Kelly writing in 2006 expresses the same idea in evocative language, “Sexual passion . . . is a matter of being embodied in the passion of all being for life and wholeness. It delights in the divine joy-in-being from which the universe arises.”²²⁹

²²⁸ Bede Griffiths, “On Homosexual Love” (Unpublished Manuscript), 1991. See also, “Comments on BG Paper” by Bruno Barnhart, OSB, Cam. (8 May 1991): 1-6. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust. Although Griffiths is purposefully, accommodatingly using “homosexual” in a broad sense, his, and Bruno Barnhart’s more pointed comments (as given) are relevant. Donald Cozzens has explored at length the significance of Barnhart’s point in regard to homosexual orientation of aspirants for the priesthood today in *The Changing Face of the Priesthood* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000).

²²⁹ Anthony Kelly, “Sex: Toward a Bigger Picture”. This is from a private manuscript given to the author of this dissertation.

Because of the importance of such understanding and acceptance of the human condition, Griffiths was diametrically opposed to judgmentalism. Stern rebukes expressed directly or in the style of deep irony were penned to Newspapers and Journals to confront such attitudes, in particular when they surfaced in Church authority.²³⁰ At Shantivanam, Griffiths insisted: "Please understand that everyone is the image of God. For that reason alone you accept anyone. In spite of the weaknesses of people, we should not disregard anyone."²³¹

A Sufi Comparison

An article of Sufi practice²³² at this juncture may serve to provide important affirmation of the argument by Griffiths that at the core of all religious faith we find commonality. It begins with a passage from the 12th century Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi with whose writings and spirituality Griffiths was very familiar:

O marvel! A garden in the heart of flames!
 My heart has become bearer of all forms:
 A pasture for gazelles, and an abbey for monks,
 A temple for idols, and Mecca for the pious,
 Tablet for the Torah, and a page of the Quran.
 My religion is that of Love:
 Whatever way Love's Camel may take,
 That is my path, that's my destiny.

"A garden in the heart of flames" refers to the experience of Paradise in Hell. Using as illustration the story of a well-known Turkish woman who had suffered for twenty years from schizophrenia, the article describes *Tasawwuf*²³³ as an "obvious point of reference" for mental health.

The author describes the "unfathomable spaces" that Sufi discourse provides "within the fullness of the ruling orders of meaning and power." This is a discourse of resistance

²³⁰ Two examples are proffered: Griffiths' argument for primacy of conscience and the right to dissent with regard to the "ordinary magisterium" in "The Case of Fr Curran," *The Tablet*, Sep 20, 1986; second, Griffiths' article sent to the *National Catholic Reporter* in response to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's statement on homosexuality: "Some Considerations Concerning the Catholic Response to Legislative Proposals on Non-discrimination of Homosexual Persons" (NCR, July 31). Griffiths' short deeply ironic article ran with the title, "For those without Sin."

²³¹ Griffiths' words to Fr Christudas in, "My Experience with My Guruji, Fr Bede" by Fr Christudas OSB Cam. *Ashrama Aikiya Newsletter*, No 28. Special Issue in Memory of Dom Bede Griffiths, Sept. 93.

²³² Sadeq Rahimi, "Intimate Exteriority: Sufi Space as Sanctuary for Injured Subjectivities in Turkey," in *Journal of Religion and Health*, 2006, DOI: 10.1007/s10943-006-9073-2.

²³³ Sufism

which he terms “extimity”, a combination of two terms, “exteriority” and “intimacy.” It refers to “the existence of the ‘Other’ in the very heart of the ‘Self.’” It means that there exists “at the very heart of the system . . . that which is supposed to be most foreign to the system.”

The case history provided to illustrate this truth is that of a Turkish woman Esas Esya. Following a severe break-down, Esas was diagnosed with schizophrenia which she called her “cocoon.” This description is accepted by Sufi discourse which helped by providing in fact a “psychological cocoon.” This was a “Sufi House,” one of a kind supposed not to exist since their closure by Ataturk’s repressive project of “cultural engineering.” But the Sufi Houses remained as “underground orders” because the signs outside now read, “Welcome to the Museum.” After twenty years of illness, exposure to Sufi literature specifically Ibn Arabi, led Esas to the Sufi House “a space that altered and healed her shattered multiplicity.”²³⁴

The point is that, like the Forest of Peace, the Sufi House is a safe place, a space which “has historically come to be known as a place where friend and enemy alike are accepted and sheltered from objective or symbolic aggression.” On account of this, Esas has come to terms with her illness though it still persists and considers herself healed. As one with schizophrenia has said, “We have to learn to embrace the shadow.”²³⁵ It coheres both with Griffiths’ spirit of charity as described above and his insight into the underlying interdependency of the whole.

Growth as Process that Includes Specific Loci

An acceptance of the physical reality and the need to integrate every stage or level of development in order to become a whole or holy person, Griffiths saw as being supported on the one hand by contemplative insight and on the other, the trans-personal psychology of Ken Wilber and David Bohm’s new physics and psychology. Similarly, he often quoted

²³⁴ There is a point of reference here to the “commonality” at the basis of all religions considering that Esas was assisted by Sufi guides to understand how her experience of absorption into the fragmentation of multiplicity was but one side of a whole, the other side being simplicity. She learned how “to live in both worlds simultaneously.” For this reason, “the madwoman has the privileged possibility of being a bridge between the daily world of reality and a different, exotic reality. Madness is another locus of extimity, another meeting of contradictory significances.” See Rahimi, “Intimate Exteriority.” Similarly, the pearl “Net or Necklace of Shiva” represents the same web of complicated relationships and unity in difference as does the Tibetan *dzogchen* teaching that the external world and the inner world are “only two sides of the same fabric.” See Bede Griffiths, “Communion and Renunciation,” Christian-Buddhist Exchange, Asirvanam Monastery, Bangalore, November 11, 1992.

²³⁵ This is a family member, diagnosed with schizophrenia at the age of 20.

Freud and Jung. Erikson's later work (which was not always well received in America) of stages of growth in the process of full adult maturation is also comparable with Griffiths' views.

For Erikson, "the caring, generative person was the developmental pinnacle for each adult."²³⁶ (This is recognizably centrally characteristic of the divine Host.) In fact, Erikson maintained that so nongenerative were the environments of various associated civil systems that "(in) many instances, mainstream standards for adult normalcy were so askew that many of the mentally ill and deviant seemed less abnormal than those who expected such social outliers to conform." For Erikson, the fully mature adult shows "a generosity of being, a vital interplay with cherished others, and a we-ness instead of asceticism." Furthermore, "Some older adults can maintain a sense of wonder and of childlike wisdom." Erikson describes this mature wisdom as making up the persona of Albert Einstein and also expressed "by the name and teachings of Lao-Tse, the ancient Chinese sage whose name means old child."²³⁷

Clearly there is a connection with Erikson's assertions and Griffiths' late stage of personal maturity and his teaching on health and wholeness. Pascaline Coff, OSB reports Griffiths as saying the last third of his life was best: "the most wonderful years of my life."²³⁸ Similarly, Griffiths described his meeting with Elder Gaboo in Australia in 1992, "as one of the most meaningful connections in his life."²³⁹ They had shared thoughts on reality, love, sharing, care of nature and meditation. Whereas Griffiths spoke of "the cave of the heart," the Aboriginal elder described a mountain ritual and pointing to his heart said, "The place of the mountain is here." Griffiths told Elder Gaboo, "We are kindred Spirits."²⁴⁰ This meeting with Aboriginal exponents of a very ancient cosmic religion is expressive of Griffiths' understanding of humanity's journey together towards the Eschaton. Elder

²³⁶ The images are what the adult is and might become. They are, "the prejudiced adult, the moral-ethical, spiritual adult, the playing, childlike adult, the historically and culturally relative adult, the insightful adult, and the wise adult."

²³⁷ Carol Hren Hoare, *Erikson on Development in Adulthood: New Insights from the Unpublished Papers* (Cary, NC, USA: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2001, accessed 3 March 2008), 194. Available from <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/australiancathu/Doc?id=10084777&ppg=211>; Internet.

²³⁸ Pascaline Coff OSB, "More on Dom Bede Griffiths, Wisdom Remains while Radiant Prophet Passes to Further Shore." See "Dom Bede Griffiths," 113. (Bede Griffiths Trust).

²³⁹ Meath Conlan, *Bede Griffiths Friend and Gift of the Spirit* (Springfield, Illinois: Templegate, 2006) 98.

²⁴⁰ Meath Conlan, *Bede Griffiths Friend and Gift of the Spirit*, 92 – 98.

Gaboo's image of "the mountain" connects with Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*, "The Divine Ascent: the Mountain." The journey of love is "a story of progression and development."²⁴¹ As one stage is successfully completed the next grows out of it.

Conclusion

The image of divine Host that evokes Griffiths' understanding of divine Love was enacted in the daily life of the Forest of Peace community. It is seen to have a universal evocation that joins the deepest religious dimensions of different traditions. God who is intimately present in all of creation conveys this invitation in a great diversity of ways through the details of ordinary life. Thus, human beings are in no position to judge one another's individual journeys.

Griffiths became conscious of God's invitation when Christ, the Golden String was "put into his hand." This image for him not only expresses the origin and goal of life but provides a basis and direction for the present stage of the journey. It finds a balance in the tension between the One who is "beyond" yet intimately near. For Bede, Christ represents both host and recipient; both the benefactor and the needy. Within the embrace of the divine Host, interior and exterior journeys are one movement of growth to wholeness and full maturity in which all people and all details of life are implicated. It represents the expansive Christology that Griffiths espoused that is not limited in any way.

In both Christian and Hindu mystical traditions, the image is holistic. Ritual sacrifice is understood in terms of thanksgiving, self-giving, and integration with all that exists as God's gift of Gods-self. It is Trinitarian and communitarian emphasizing unity in difference and involvement in interfaith dialogue.

Inspired by the Spirit, Christian tradition finds a way of response to the invitation of the divine Host that is comparable with other faith traditions. The divine generativity in both Christian and Hindu traditions evokes God who is both Mother and Father. God's invitation to all into a profoundly intimate relationship demands change and reaching towards the "beyond." It integrates the whole as organic interdependency.

Natural surroundings and architecture as metaphors of divine healing beauty are incarnational. The design of Shantivanam reflects Griffiths' vision for future human societies

²⁴¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, Translation, Introduction and Notes by Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 115,116.

and his understanding of the bonded community and the church herself as being vehicles of the healing Spirit; the deepest reality of church is a spiritual communion.

Bede proposes lay contemplative communities that are holistic, integrative and open to all as essentially representing the divine Host; a love that is non-judgmental, tolerant and hospitable to a radical degree.

Shantivanam or Forest of Peace and the Sufi Houses are expressions of the incarnation of the saving Word that evoke the divine Host who is outpouring generative love. Griffiths hoped others could achieve something similar to Shantivanam in their local environments. He was satisfied that this had been developed at Osage Monastic Ashram in America and interested in a similar model which was being explored in Australia. He also pointed out that such communities were still fragile.

This chapter has shown Griffiths' understanding of the outpouring generative love of the divine Host that draws all to unity within a Trinitarian dynamic. The idea that creation with humankind as the apex is a journey that exists as an interdependency is the image to which we now move, the *Imago Dei*.

Chapter 6

The Imago Dei

Please understand that everyone is the image of God¹

We come forth from the eternal ground of the Father in an unmanifest state into manifestation in the Son.²

Introduction

In respect of “the Golden String,” this image is deeply traditional and profoundly incarnational. For an articulation and analysis of Griffiths’ use of the *Imago Dei*, humanity itself as an image of God, I have mainly used his mature work, *A New Vision of Reality*.

The two reasons for this choice which are further elucidated below, relate to Griffiths’ understanding of the journey of consciousness and the perennial philosophy and the style, mode and time of writing. There is a burning question for Griffiths which is reflected in the chapter headings below. It centers on whether, through “the dynamic point of receptivity in humankind, receiving the imprint of the Spirit of God – we can open to the divine light and grow . . . or turn upon ourselves and become . . . obscured by ignorance and sin.”³ This is the vital challenge that humankind faces today and it is significant for Griffiths’ understanding of *Imago Dei*.

The headings then for this chapter are:

1. Background Context and Issues
2. The Perennial Philosophy
3. The New Consciousness
4. *Imago Dei*
5. Comparable interpretations of the *Imago*
6. Griffiths and the *Imago* and the New Creation

¹ Bede Griffiths, in “My Experience with My Gururji, Fr Bede” by Fr Christudas O.S.B. Cam. *Ashrama Aikiya Newsletter*. No 28. “Special Issue in Memory of Dom Bede Griffiths”, Sept. 93.

² Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 250.

³ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 85.

1. Background: Context and Issues

For Griffiths, the whole idea of humankind made in the image and likeness of God presupposes a continual growth in consciousness and further stages of the journey towards union with God because “the real object of human search is . . . the city of God, the state of transformed humanity . . . a ‘heavenly country.’”⁴ This means that the whole of reality with the integral place of humankind is ever available to be grasped anew with deeper levels of understanding. This is the subject matter of *A New Vision of Reality* which necessarily includes the idea that another unique development in consciousness is beginning for humankind in this particular point in time. It is in this unique time of transition that Griffiths believes “we are beginning to discover that human consciousness can develop far beyond its present level and that, for instance, the ways in which consciousness affects matter are immeasurably more complex than we had previously imagined.”⁵

The work which is about 300 pages and first published in Great Britain in 1989, four years before Griffiths’ death at age 87, is a synthesis of the thought of his own life-time’s journey. As it was produced from a compilation of taped talks in Shantivanam Ashram there is some repetition. Nevertheless, in the editing process, Griffiths was fortunate to have the assistance of scientist Dr Felicity Edwards of Rhodes University, reknowned biologist Rupert Sheldrake, and Michael von Brück, German scholar of Hinduism, and this he expects contributes to the accuracy of detail and precision in expression in a book intended as a synthesis of his thought.

Here then, more than his other works, we find his interest in and understanding of the *Imago Dei*. We find that it is a particularly resonant image for today able to exert all the power of a living symbol as it did in early church tradition while somewhat differently interpreted. Profoundly integral to Christian self-understanding, it has shifted in meaning through history within the cultural context. Griffiths’ dialogue with Eastern faith traditions, particularly Hinduism, and his interest in contemporary sciences provide the background for his own interpretation and understanding of this image.

Any reference he makes to the *imago dei* centres therefore on his interest in the perennial philosophy, the integration of East and West, the significance of an organic rather

⁴ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 89, 90.

⁵ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 27.

than a mechanistic world view and the evolution of the consciousness. Obviously, while these areas can be succinctly expressed, they are not so arbitrary. Rather, the profound interpretation of this image that comes into focus is based on their integral interrelatedness.

We have to take these areas one at a time. From a Western perspective, as regards the evolution of the consciousness, Griffiths associates in particular modern scientists, such as biologist Rupert Sheldrake, the transpersonal psychologist Ken Wilber, along with Christian philosophers, in particular Teilhard de Chardin. Another dialogue partner whose thought Griffiths regarded as most profound is the contemplative philosopher/mathematician, Beatrice Bruteau.⁶ Her concept of the *imago* is included in this chapter. I have also for clarity's sake included the contrasting though theologically supportive articulation by the Evangelical Scripture scholar and theologian, Stanley Grenz. The integration of East and West is an interest Bede holds in common with Raimon Panikkar, though he finds deep resonances in the works of early Christian mystics especially Gregory of Nyssa. The return to an organic rather than a mechanistic world view he sees heralded in the work of the new scientists, in particular Fritjof Capra. Investigating the perennial philosophy brings him into conversation with anthropology and historical scholarship. The work of the Physicist David Bohm, who is a disciple of Krishnamurti,⁷ and who is involved in meditation and spirituality, probably has most relevance for a vision and a theory of overall integration.⁸

Particularly in Griffiths' case, there is the reservoir of the whole legacy of Hindu Scripture and philosophical thought. How he conceives the image in question is drawn out of this entire gambit. The short book therefore is quite dense with an enormous breadth of diverse information. One could compare it to navigating around the tips of a multitude of ice-bergs aware that below lie the huge bases. A particular criticism from Panikkar,⁹ which will be discussed, is most probably due to the book's structuring on Bede's talks and the

⁶ Griffiths says, "I know of scarcely anybody who goes to the heart of reality as profoundly as Beatrice Bruteau does." Bede Griffiths in *Commendations to God's Ecstasy, the Creation of a Self-Creating World*.

⁷ Griffiths says this is public knowledge. See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 18. He also describes the friendship group as including physicist David Bohm and neuro-scientist Karl Pibram (who compares brain-function with a hologram) who was himself an "associate" of Einstein. Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 30.

⁸ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 18.

⁹ Earlier on in this thesis, we cited Panikkar's preface for the German edition of *A New Vision of Reality*.

sweeping perspective it takes. So a clarification of the perennial philosophy is part of this first area I deal with.

By “perennial philosophy,” Griffiths means a universal wisdom which is an insight into life as profoundly interconnected at all levels, body, soul and spirit; which understands the material world grounded in and pervaded by a transcendent reality that is its whole *raison d’être*; and sees this necessarily interpreted anew with the evolution of consciousness. The earliest form of the concept was influential in Europe only until the sixteenth century.¹⁰ At this point, the intense focus on reason and the sciences from Descartes to the mid 20th century forced its disappearance into the background.¹¹

Panikkar presents a critique of Griffiths’ use of “the perennial philosophy” in *A New Vision*. He notes how Griffiths “extends the terms of reference” to indicate and include a Teilhardian evolutionary process. Griffiths does this, he says, by recalling the masters of this ancient wisdom where he can “prolong their intuition on two new lines: on the line of the contemporary scientific discoveries, and on the line of an evolutionary pattern.”¹² Panikkar admits that this enables Griffiths new insights and interpretation. However, he questions the validity of Griffiths’ combination of a Teilhardian evolutionary approach and a mode of life based on an “underlying core” that is the perennial philosophy. Is this a fresh intuition on Griffiths’ part that provides further illumination for the symbol, the *Imago Dei*, or simply a methodological mistake? We can surmise that Griffiths sees an integrative factor that enables him to “combine” the two to express a previously unacknowledged connection in order to throw new light on God revealed in humankind, the apex of creation. But this is jumping the gun. Perhaps his presumption of such an integration does a disservice to the expression of his own deeper intuitions? To begin with, it is helpful see how this term arose and “evolved.”

2. The Perennial Philosophy

The *philosophia perrenis* does not signify quite the same thing to its various users at different points in history. Huxley and Leibnitz come first to mind in relation to the term in

¹⁰ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 10.

¹¹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 11.

¹² Raimon Panikkar, “Introduction” to the German edition of *A New Vision of Reality*, Kodaikkanal, 1989. This is an unpublished translation by Roland Roper, given to Bede at Christmas in 1994. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

question; however its origin goes further back to a the 16th century Augustinian, Augustino Steuco. He assumed the idea from 15th century thinkers.

Charles Schmitt provides a very good background.¹³ We begin with the idea. Deferring to Plato, fifteenth century Ficino¹⁴ writes of an underlying world unity that is more real than the diversity of appearances. He sees this variously as love, the universal soul and truth. For Ficino this is expressed as part of an ancient wisdom going back to Moses. It underlies classical philosophy and religions, is found in the thought Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus and the priestly successors of Hermes, Pythagorus and Plato and thence to the Neoplatonists, and certain church Fathers, such as Augustine and Lactantius. Later, Steuco's writings carry the echo of Ficino's concern that, "all those who desire to taste of the delicious waters of wisdom must drink from that perennial fountain"¹⁵

Schmitt finds another early influence in Pico della Mirandola who extended the umbrella to include all philosophical and religious traditions as a "syncretistic harmonising tendency"¹⁶ of the Renaissance. At the same time Nicholas de Cusa, through his ecumenism, teaching of the "coincidence of opposites", and his "philosophy of concord", is the link to Steuco whose system, which he names *philosophia perennis*, motivated Leibnitz' later attempt to seek to establish the philosophy of philosophies.

As a theologian and scripture scholar, Steuco's work, *De Perenni Philosophia*, in 1540, exemplifies his liberal outlook (which, as Schmitt points out, he appears somehow to reconcile with his vehement opposition towards the reformers). Steuco's volume describes a single basic sapiential knowledge. Rather than progress in history, there is continuity, as the originating truth must be constantly discovered anew. (This could relate to the "static" form of *philosophia perennis* as Panikkar understands it.) As a Platonist monist Steuco saw the role of philosophy simply and solely in the service of theology. He teaches that this single *sapientia* is attainable through study of the tradition or philosophical contemplation.¹⁷ Griffiths is doubtless familiar with Steuco's concepts. However, Griffiths'

¹³ Charles B. Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy: From Agostino Steuco to Leibniz," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 27, No. 4 University of Pennsylvania Press (Oct. - Dec., 1966, accessed 15 April 2008): 505-532.

¹⁴ Schmitt calls him a "Platonist with reservations," in "Perennial Philosophy," 506.

¹⁵ Charles B. Schmitt citing Ficino, *Opera*, 1945.

¹⁶ Charles B. Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy," 513.

¹⁷ Born in Gubbio in 1498, Steuco was librarian and classical language scholar before his arrival in Rome in 1534. Four years later he was made Bishop of Kisamos in Crete and librarian of the Vatican

understanding that “the great religious traditions, Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Taoist, Confucian, Shinto, Zoroastrian, Judaic, Muslim and Christian . . . based on the perennial philosophy . . . and (which) all embody . . . the ancient wisdom and the wholeness of life” differs somewhat.¹⁸ For Griffiths, basic to the perennial philosophy is an organic interdependency taking in all levels of reality.¹⁹

Steuco’s *philosophia perennis* “has an epistemology in which God is knowable by human reason; it is a religious philosophy which induces piety and desire for the contemplation of God.”²⁰ The most immediate positive response came from the syncretists of the age. A negative reaction grew due to Steuco’s over-confidence in the writings *prisca philosophia*²¹ which were later, however, shown to be forgeries. In the 16th century his work was denounced by Jesuit scholars who took umbrage, among other things, with his comparison of Plato with Moses.²²

Schmitt presents as the “perennial problem” for the “Christian philosopher” a point of contention between Steuco and some of his influential contemporaries: “To what extent are the Christian Scriptures unique teaching truths which are to be found nowhere else; and to what extent are they the most perfect expression of truths which have been known throughout history to men (sic) of all philosophies, all religions, all ethnic backgrounds?” Through his understanding of the *philosophia perennis* Steuco took the liberal view; his detractors the conservative.²³

The term makes a temporary re-appearance in the works of Leibnitz. Schmitt deems the 17th century philosopher and mathematician, “The most eminent defender of the

Library. He participated in the Council of Trent before his death two years later in 1548 in Bologna. Charles Schmitt, “Perennial Philosophy,” 513-520.

¹⁸ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 286.

¹⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 278, 286.

²⁰ Charles Schmitt, “Perennial Philosophy,” 522.

²¹ This was a collection of hermetic writings attributed to an ancient Egyptian priest, Hermes Trismegistus. Finally in 1614, Isaac Casaubon irrefutably proved them to be forgeries which post-dated the New Testament. Cited in Peter Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, accessed 21 May 2010), 115. Available from http://books.google.com.au/books?id=KtBrOdr5p4C&pg=PA116&lpg=PA116&dq=prisca+philosophia+forgeries&source=bl&ots=qnOCXuQ3s&sig=Ap3o6E0A1Pw3RGROwJHKPkXQa8c&hl=en&ei=e4b-S7roLIqOkQW8jMG8DQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=6&ved=0CCgQ6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q&f=false; Internet.

²² Charles Schmitt, “Perennial Philosophy,” 524.

²³ Charles Schmitt, “Perennial Philosophy,” 527.

tradition called by Steuco '*philosophia perennis*.'"²⁴ With his interest in metaphysics and hope for religious unity, much in the vein of Nicholas of Cusa, Leibnitz found Steuco helpful but he relied more on Plessis-Mornay's *de la verité de la religion chrétienne*.²⁵

Of Leibnitz, Leroy Loemke says, "His inclusive motive may be stated in terms of the phrase borrowed from Galen by Robert Boyle (1626-91): 'The investigation of truth is the greatest of hymns to the creator.'" Method is key for Leibnitz. He sought to attain a perennial method for ascertaining truth which was both analytic and synthetic – a unity of metaphysics and logic.²⁶ He did not achieve his goal,²⁷ but Loemke points out that both Steuco and Leibnitz in their own ways make room for the wisdom of the East: both see that a universal way of attaining truth must include the intuitive and the rational modes of thought. Both see it referring to a transcendent and universal harmony.²⁸ Leibnitz's view however differs from Steuco's in that it has opened up to a further process of expansion of the philosophy itself.

Writing as early as the 1960's, Schmitt regards the undercurrent that is the perennial philosophy during the 16th 17th and 18th centuries when it was out-of-stride with rational and modern thought and presaging the later post-modern vision, as being "underestimated and imperfectly understood."²⁹ For hundreds of years, the term which originated with Steuco was rarely used until it was taken up in the 20th century.

As the term became more widely used, its philosophical precision decreased. When Aldous Huxley adopts it in *The Perennial Philosophy* of 1945, it is defined as an ancient wisdom which is centrally mystical. It refers specifically to the meaning of existence involving a deeper level of existence than what is apparent. Openness to this wisdom presupposes an act of faith and while the belief systems built on it take different formal

²⁴ Charles Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy," 531.

²⁵ Charles Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy," 531.

²⁶ Leroy E. Loemker, *Dictionary History of Ideas*, Volume 3, 461, 462. Available from <http://etext.virginia.edu/cgi-local/DHI/dhi.cgi?id=dv3-56>; internet; accessed 6 April 2008.

²⁷ Leroy Loemker, *Dictionary History of Ideas*, 461. Loemker says of Leibnitz's method to achieve his goal to establish a perennial philosophy, "It was analytic in its reduction of all experience and all questions to the primary notions and first principles entailed in them. It was then synthetic in its generalizing these principles and their application, through the appropriate definitions, to the various fields of knowledge and practice to be investigated. The unity and harmony of the results were assured by the simplicity and universal applicability of the principles."

²⁸ Leroy Loemker, *Dictionary History of Ideas*, 462.

²⁹ Charles Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy," 532.

expressions, the life of faith is transformative.³⁰ Griffiths read Huxley's book and recommended it to others but found it somewhat immature.³¹

Loemker points out the importance of perennality of thought within history, in the existentialist philosophers, empiricists and process philosophers and sees Huxley's "looser" religious interpretation as just one part of the field.

In his Introduction to *The Bhagavad Gita*, translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, Huxley defines what he sees as "four fundamental doctrines" of the Perennial Philosophy:

the phenomenal world . . . is the manifestation of the divine ground; . . . human beings . . . can realise its existence by direct intuition, superior to discursive reasoning; . . . man *sic* possesses a phenomenal ego and an eternal Self; . . . man's life on earth has only one end and purpose . . . to come to unitive knowledge of the Divine Ground.³²

For Huxley, "The practice of mysticism . . . is the realisation of the perennial philosophy." One can now venture to say that while comparable with it, this does not fully satisfy Griffiths' use of the term.

In the past history of the term "perennial philosophy," therefore, we are referring to 15th century Ficino's underlying world unity that is part of an ancient wisdom going back to Moses, Pico della Mirandola's "syncretistic harmonising tendency," de Cusa's "philosophy of concord," Steuco's religious philosophy, a unity of reason and revelation as an ideal both regulative and directive to be retrieved, Leibniz's attempt at a synthesis of truth in all philosophies, and "Huxley's eclectic combination of religious and philosophical ideas from East and West."³³ For Loemke:

In all cases (together), the term stands for the notion of a philosophy of philosophies, an enduring set of intellectual and personal insights which is repeated in all variations of

³⁰ Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1944). See Chad Walsh, *Journal of Bible and Religion*, Vol. 16, No. 1, Jan., 1948 (Oxford University Press JSTOR, 1948, accessed 15 April 2008), 3-12.

³¹ Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 116. In Bangalore, Griffiths studied the work of exponents of the perennial philosophy, Schuon, Guénon and Coomaraswamy. Later at Shantivanam he was impressed with Seyyed Hossein Nasr's work, *Knowledge and the Sacred*. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Online Book (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1980-81, accessed 6 April 2009). Available from <http://www.giffordlectures.org/Browse.asp?PubID=TPKATS&Cover=TRUE> ; Internet.

³² Aldous Huxley, Introduction to the *Bhagavad-Gita: The Song of God*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (Sth CA: The Vedanta Society of California, 1944, accessed 6 April 2008). Available from <http://members.tripod.com/~parvati/perennial.html>; Internet.

³³ Leroy Loemker, *Dictionary History of Ideas*, 463.

thought and conviction and which serves as an ideal of unity for thought and life . . . (which) must . . . be universal and inclusive, internally coherent, fruitful of new insights and applications, and reasoned so conclusively that attacks cannot refute, and written or presented so convincingly that reasonable minds cannot resist it . . . A perennial philosophy must offer a unity which relates the total plurality, in particular the unity of theoretical and practical concerns, of knowledge, wisdom, and piety; it must be theoretically complete and of sufficient detail to guide to successful action.³⁴

Loemker's comprehensive though general definition would include Griffiths' perspective. None of this he would reject as an ideal to strive towards.

However, he would insist that, while the perennial components within philosophy and the philosophical process within history itself can and must today be included within the question of a "perennial philosophy" as a constant in the human quest for meaning, there is, as well, a core element essentially basic to the term, a profoundly human and unifying sub-stratum, the wisdom discerning the transcendent "ground" that has always been present in human history and which can be objectively identified. From this basis an argument/hypothesis can be developed as to how this relates ultimately to the human place in the journey of the cosmos.

Within Griffiths' particular framework for the term, Randal Studstill's analysis in his *Unity of Mystical Traditions* is helpful. Alternately termed "essentialism" which can be separated into different types - phenomenological, doctrinal, epistemological, therapeutic - it is distinguished from "constructivism"³⁵ in approach to mystical experience.

Griffiths' understanding of the perennial philosophy is akin to the therapeutic and epistemological position Studstill himself takes, whereby there is agreement on common transformative processes. While similarities may be found, and certainly Griffiths finds those, "common doctrines or phenomenologically identical experiences"³⁶ are not necessary. The most important significance lies in personal transformation through transcendence of the ego and re-alignment with the Real. As with Teilhard de Chardin, this underlies a unitive movement for the whole of humankind which happens in history through

³⁴ Leroy Loemker, *Dictionary History of Ideas*, 458.

³⁵ Randall Studstill, *Unity of Mystical Traditions: The Transformation of Consciousness in Tibetan and German Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, N.H.E.J., N.V. Koninklijke, Boekhandel en Drukkerij, accessed 15 April 2008), 2005. Available from <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/australiancathu/Doc?id=10171647&ppg=16> ; Internet. Studstill points out that the constructivist approach "is limited to explaining the phenomenological content of mystical experience."

³⁶ Randall Studstill, *Unity of Mystical Traditions*, 20.

time. Studstill distinguishes the “Real” from the “real” – epistemologically (rather than ontologically) as “different modes of apprehending the single, ontological Real.”³⁷ The kind of transformation that takes place is understood here as “an increasingly sensitized awareness/ knowledge of Reality that manifests as (among other things) an enhanced sense of emotional well-being, an expanded locus of concern engendering greater compassion for others, an enhanced capacity to creatively negotiate one’s environment, and a greater capacity for aesthetic appreciation.”³⁸ This is comparable with Griffiths’ concept and experience. Both, as has been pointed out above, vary in emphasis from Loemker and Leibnitz who represent a leaning towards a more precise definition in today’s philosophical terms.

Clearly “the perennial philosophy” is a term used differently by exponents of different disciplines and even within a purely religious perspective is variously used. The term itself at least is not static. Griffiths’ use of it does not express a concept the core of which is *stasis*; his use of the term may indeed be compatibly combined with an evolutionary process. The key to this use is Griffiths’ embrace of Teilhard de Chardin.³⁹

As we have seen, Panikkar argues that the *philosophia perennis* and the Teilhardian evolutionary scheme may be incompatible elements which Griffiths has nevertheless combined to support his theological approach. If this is the case, it would undermine the basis of Griffiths’ exposé of a new vision of reality.⁴⁰

Panikkar declares that the *philosophia perennis* that was the preserve of ancient traditions deals with layers of the real and states of consciousness. It does not entail the linear movement in time upon which Griffiths’ and Teilhard’s evolutionary process is based. On the other hand, Panikkar states it is also possible that Griffiths has discovered a “break-through.”⁴¹

³⁷ Randall Studstill, *Unity of Mystical Traditions*, 19.

³⁸ Randall Studstill, *Unity of Mystical Traditions*, 19.

³⁹ Griffiths understands that the core wisdom is there, but present structures must change in order that a “world culture” and a “universal religion” – which would represent unity in diversity – can develop. This whole organic structure of interrelationship, taking in the three dimensions of reality, would represent the perennial philosophy. Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 286 – 296.

⁴⁰ Taken from Roland Roper’s unpublished translation of Raimon Panikkar’s Introduction to the German edition of *A New Vision of Reality* which he wrote at Kodaikkanal, in 1989. Ropers gave the translation to Bede at Christmas in 1994. It is available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

⁴¹ From Roland Roper’s unpublished translation of Raimon Panikkar’s Introduction to the German edition of *A New Vision of Reality*.

Whether or not it is a “break-through,” one may surmise that in Teilhard’s own writings Griffiths finds compatibility for these two approaches to life which gives him a foundation to describe an ontological unity and promise of integration for created being based on this very combination. In what follows, we now argue in favour of Griffiths’ interpretation of Teilhard’s writing in this vein.

In his 1917 essay, “The Mystical Milieu,”⁴² Teilhard describes a series of five circles that represent both different stages in the journey of life and different levels of being attained in the journey of the soul. These are the Circle of Presence, the Circle of Consistence, the Circle of Energy, the Circle of the Spirit and the Circle of the Person. Together this is the milieu in which the soul finds life. The transformations do not necessarily happen in this order, but it is the cumulative experience that brings fulfillment. For illustration, I have included the stages of Bede’s development that correspond with these levels.

The first, “Presence,” corresponds with the experience of the numinous. It is an awareness of immanence, of “a supra-real unity diffused through the immensity of the world.”⁴³ We can reflect that it also pertains to Griffiths’ awakening to the Golden String as a student when alone in the Oxford countryside.

The next, “Consistence,” is awareness of “a universal substratum . . . through which the totality of beings exists.”⁴⁴ This circle admits of ultimacy. Joy is derived from an encounter with “a universal and enduring reality.”⁴⁵ Nevertheless at this stage there is a realisation how of all material existence, the world of multiplicity dissolves and passes away, and pain is attached. However, this is accompanied by a deeper realisation of the enduring transcendent Reality which brings freedom. Moreover, the experience of pain and suffering, not invited or entertained, permits a more acute awareness of support by the Absolute. Representative of this stage are Griffiths’ experiences in the Cotswolds and at Bethnal Green.

The “Circle of Energy” describes a stage whereby “creative action” is seen as God’s true essence. This is born of the realisation of how all participate in a web of interactivities

⁴² Teilhard de Chardin, “The Mystical Milieu,” in *The Prayer of the Universe* (Fontana Books: New York, 1973), 107-140.

⁴³ Teilhard de Chardin, “The Mystical Milieu”, 114.

⁴⁴ Teilhard de Chardin, “The Mystical Milieu”, 114.

⁴⁵ Teilhard de Chardin, “The Mystical Milieu”, 115.

throughout the universe which entails a uniquely human “freedom of choice.” However, the human being is not alone in this. There are links, “forces” which assist freedom of choice and also all to gravitate together, as like with like, in “vast cosmic trails” wherein “collective souls” exert an inexorable and subtle influence. This includes the recognition of the force of history and culture. Science and philosophical thought cannot bring about a synthesis. *It takes the mystical awareness of the reality, described by the first two circles, to perceive humankind as part of the web of the cosmos caught up in an evolutionary process and also empowered in the immediacy of experience of divine immanence as being two facets of the one reality.* (My Italics) “The creative act is one huge continual gesture drawn out over the totality of time.”⁴⁶ Because of this, for human beings what is most exhilarating is “the joy of finding and surrendering to a beauty greater than man (sic); the rapture of being possessed.”⁴⁷ Because of this all the disappointments of this life, “the inexorable bondage of time” and the horror of death itself, are “blessed.”⁴⁸ This leads to the experience of communion in action through adaptation to God’s will. While an “irrepressible homogeneity”⁴⁹ that is coming to be is experientially understood, it does not mean a dissolution of the unique self but ultimate fulfillment. Griffiths’ eighteen years of monastic experience at Prinknash, Farnborough and Pluscarden, and his urge for integration and travel to India, are encompassed in this circle.

Next, the “Circle of the Spirit” describes the realisation of human beings as co-creators. Humankind’s “creative restlessness” is due to God’s spiritualising and penetrating the world. Here there is a change from dualism, to a need to “feel” and “form” the divine milieu, with the “insatiable ardour” akin to a “passion for progress.”⁵⁰ The work of human beings in the service of the reign of God is the very condition of God’s presence in, with and among humanity. In this way evolution, which is a self-centred movement in time that does not naturally participate in the divine milieu, becomes divinised. In this way there is a continual movement towards the fine point of spiritual “condensation.” As all things are thus given their “highest possible degree of reality . . . their proper being,” Teilhard approves the mystic as “the supreme realist.” In union with God but in deeper surrender,

⁴⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, “The Mystical Milieu”, 121.

⁴⁷ Teilhard de Chardin, “The Mystical Milieu”, 122.

⁴⁸ Teilhard de Chardin, “The Mystical Milieu”, 123.

⁴⁹ Teilhard de Chardin, “The Mystical Milieu”, 126.

⁵⁰ Teilhard de Chardin, “The Mystical Milieu”, 128.

the human being becomes God's very action in the world whatever form this takes. This circle could be said to cohere with Griffiths' taking on the role of *sannyasi*, and experience of "self-surrender," his deepening involvement in interfaith dialogue and his exploration in India of the possibility of a Christian *advaita*.

In fifth place, de Chardin introduces the "Circle of Person." Here the recognition of a coming to be of a universal soul has a name, Jesus, who in his "superabundant unity" possesses all the virtues of the five circles. Through this Person in the union of this unique relationship, the cosmic body of the universe is "divinized, divinizing, and divinizable." Teilhard points out that while there are "infinite degrees in the loving initiation of one person into another unfathomable Person . . . Jesus must be loved as a world."⁵¹ Griffiths' experience as described in the prior circle continues here culminating in the integrative time of the stroke and the following final two years of his life, making global journeys in the hope of encouraging and initiating the formation of lay contemplative communities. It encompasses his theology of complementarity.

3. The New Consciousness

What I now venture to call Griffiths' Hermeneutic of Encounter directs us towards achieving special bifocals, what I see as a kind of graduated lenses which will enable us a participatory awareness in a seamless integration of two modes of being. Two views must become the one view. There is the view based on the traditional "perennial philosophy" which has insight into the transcendent reality as the ground of being and looks to "illumination" that is a movement into different levels of consciousness within the "now" with an awareness of the divine immanence. It apprehends the unity of body, mind and spirit and the interconnectedness of all realms and dimensions of reality. For Griffiths, it includes all authentic inquiry. However, Griffiths' more comprehensive understanding of the perennial philosophy encompasses the guiding awareness of movement in linear time that pursues meaning as derived from an evolutionary process of recapitulation where new stages integrating and maximising the gains of previous stages mount towards a final telos. Griffiths believes that such an integrated vision is now available to humanity; it would give

⁵¹ Teilhard de Chardin, "The Mystical Milieu," 139. This also means going beyond "mental consciousness," *nirmanakaya*, into and beyond the psychic realm, *sambhogakaya*, to gain entrance to the higher "supramental" stage, the *dharmakaya*, where reality it experienced as non-dualistic. Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 48-56.

access to psychic powers; a psychic gift that does not devalue material reality, or the historical process. It is a particular access of, and authority in the psychic realm centered in contemplation that reveals deeper meaning in the daily exigencies of life.⁵² While it is “transrational” and “interpersonal,” it helps the human person to become “more fully personal” because, as de Chardin says (and Rahner agrees), “union differentiates.”⁵³ What is being described is entry into a new level of consciousness that is a new stage of growth for humankind in reciprocal correspondence with the life of the world and of the cosmos as a whole. It means to discover in ourselves “the ground” and “the scope” of human consciousness, the potentiality of Sri Aurobindo’s “supramental consciousness.”⁵⁴

Griffiths found this idea presaged in Teilhard’s writings. An entry to the “supramental consciousness” or “Supermind” will finally bring creation to its ultimate fulfillment that is comparable with Teilhard’s “Omega Point.”⁵⁵ The level of consciousness held out now for humanity will signify an acute awareness on the one hand of journeying into a greater way of being, and on the other that the Ultimate Reality is immanent, present and available as unique communion all along the way.

However, there can be no “utopia” for creation in its present state. On the one hand Griffiths evokes divine immanence, on the other he emphasizes transcendence:

Every moment of time is the coming of God into our lives. Everything is a coming of God. Every person we meet is a coming and every breath of wind a coming of God. God is manifest in everything. . . . The destiny of the human being does not lie in this world.⁵⁶

Teilhard names Jesus as personifying this vision. It is matched by Griffiths’ understanding of the *imago dei*. He says, “The death and resurrection of Christ is the death of that first human being and his resurrection – ‘the new man who is created after the image of God in holiness and truth.’” Eph.4:22, 24.⁵⁷ Significantly, this involves interrelationship and cosmic unity.

⁵² We use Bede’s definition here from *The Golden String*, “Contemplation is a habit of mind which enables the soul to keep in a state of recollection in the presence of God whatever may be the work with which we are occupied. In this sense it’s the true aim of every Christian life.” 148. Christ himself is the “Golden String . . . the grace – given to every Soul and hidden under the circumstances of daily life.” See *The Golden String*, 11.

⁵³ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 93-95.

⁵⁴ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 27.

⁵⁵ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 93, 107.

⁵⁶ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 195. *Marriage*, 128.

⁵⁷ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 208.

Bede understands in the perennial philosophy a wisdom innate and accessible, that is common to all peoples of all times and which reveals the transcendent ground of all of life and is, as it must be, constantly re-interpreted at different stages in history. He first quotes Ruysbroeck, "Our created being abides in the eternal essence and is one with it in its essential existence." He then elaborates to include all philosophies:

Our created being has its eternal being in God, which is exactly the doctrine of the most profound thinkers in Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. It is important to realise that this is not simply the teaching of a particular person but a universal tradition. When the human mind reaches a certain point of experience it comes to this same understanding and this is what constitutes the perennial philosophy, the universal wisdom.⁵⁸

In Panikkar's defence, we can argue that the concept is not without ambiguity. Whereas Griffiths speaks of a "certain point of experience," his exploration of such "readiness" in our day includes the concept of life in the universe as evolving. This is not to say that he argues for Charles Darwin's "Theory of Evolution." Darwin's scientific theory specifically presents two concepts in the area of biology: that the different species of life today have descended from a common ancestry; and that variations come about over vast periods of time in whole populations due to natural selection based on survival of the fittest.⁵⁹

Griffiths uses the concept of evolution⁶⁰ in the sense of a process of change coming about in humanity over time which includes but radically augments Darwin's theory. David Bohm's theory of the implicate order together with Sheldrake's concept of "morphogenetic fields" contribute towards his particular synthesis of understanding. According to Bohm, all of material existence is originally implicated (folded up as it were). This includes all the possible variations of development. In the explication/unfolding, that which continues in the process of becoming can be understood as evolving over time in accordance with the exigencies of time and place. However, the possibilities of the implicated state remain as such.⁶¹ Sheldrake's postulation of "morphogenetic fields" or "formative causes"⁶² suggests

⁵⁸ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 248.

⁵⁹ Neil A. Campbell and Jane B. Reece, *Biology*, Sixth Edition (San Francisco: Benjamin Cummings, 2002), 13.

⁶⁰ From the Latin, *evolvere*, "unrolling."

⁶¹ No doubt this is the source of the theme of parallel universes which provide the content for the plots of a number of modern stories.

⁶² Griffiths admits to this being still hypothetical and not in accordance with mainstream thinking. *A New Vision*, 24.

that like Aristotle's "form" and "matter," original disordered "indeterminate" and "unpredictable" matter is ordered according to a "formative power" that "exists as non-physical, non-energetic fields." Through "morphoic resonance," like forms are structured within a particular morphogenetic field in reciprocal relationship which also gives rise to trace memory.⁶³

It is possible to see how Griffiths works to bring these ideas together in a synthesis. While evolution in material existence means a continual process of change, Griffiths' understanding of the perennial wisdom together with the parallel insights of interconnection at deep levels of material reality provided by the new science, suggest a profound web of interconnections. Not only do other possibilities exist in potential but among those that develop, variations which occur are communicated as a "morphoic resonance" within like groups. This relates to Rahner's, Panikkar's and Griffiths' theological insights into human/divine freedom. Griffiths believes there is a depth of interconnection, a deeper unity of relationship, which circumvents the purely mechanistic view⁶⁴ of the "theory of evolution." It allows for the revelation in the human mind of the transcendent Ground of Being.⁶⁵ Furthermore, when Griffiths adds to this mix Ken Wilber's concept of the evolution of consciousness whereby the next stage of development recapitulates all the past stages, reflection at a sub-conscious level means that when such deep connections are raised to the level of consciousness, human freedom is enhanced. The freedom lies in response to the deeper relationship which presents itself again and again with ever subtler nuances. Most profoundly, this relationship is the dynamism of love in the Trinity, a communion of love. The process of growth and change involved in opening to infinite love includes communion with all of life. It means "becoming" the *imago Dei*. For Griffiths this is the final eschatological fulfillment in Christ. Does it necessarily mean for him the end of the process?

⁶³ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 20, 21.

⁶⁴ To illustrate the difference between the mechanistic concept and his own, Sheldrake gives the example of the working parts of a radio and the signal coming from outside. To someone, say from "a primitive tribe" who came upon such a device never before seen or heard of, listened, and took it apart, its function would seem to lie solely in the now hopelessly disassembled mechanism. Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 21.

⁶⁵ Interestingly, this idea is central in Charles Foster's recent work, *The Selfless Gene* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2009). Foster's belief in a God of radical love and compassion precludes any theological short-cuts. Finally, his theology and cosmic vision in dialogue with *Genesis* and science demonstrate a remarkable similarity with Griffiths' mature vision.

Is humankind, as Gregory of Nyssa averred, infinitely journeying more deeply into the Divine or is the final beatitude a final completion? Is the “*imago dei*” an infinite process, an eschatological infinite state of becoming? The latter may be implicated in Teilhard’s expression of “infinite degrees in the loving initiation of one person into another unfathomable Person.”⁶⁶ It involves the idea of a “qualified” *advaita*. Beatrice Bruteau’s background in mathematics and philosophy provided her with insights Griffiths regarded as very profound. Her contribution brings a degree of clarity with regard to the connection between evolution *per se*, the new science and the perennial philosophy.

What is the origin of the image itself? We now explore the development of the image and the reality that it represents. This involves further determination of the relationship between evolution and the perennial philosophy.

4. *Imago Dei*

Griffiths understands the ancient approach to the material world as having both an experiential and a rational basis. Understood as pervaded by a transcendent Reality, the world was also accessible through careful scientific observation.⁶⁷ Both approaches were integrated holistically. While the meaning of life could be experientially accessed, its conscious appropriation, articulation and communication could develop in accordance with evolutionary process. This makes it open to deeper understanding and further realisation which come about by means of transcendence of earlier states of being. Both are represented in the earliest conceptualization of the *imago*, that is, *Genesis*.

The Imago Dei and Creative Indwelling

Bruteau argues in support of an Incarnational theology which sees the infinite and the finite as two sides of the one Reality. She writes concerning a “science for Christians,” which is not presented as classic doctrine but to demonstrate scientific knowledge of the natural world as part of religious life, in that the universe “knows the holy Oneness of Being.”⁶⁸ It is “the original Adam, a great body of dust, organized into a system and energized by the ‘breath of God’ so that it keeps on developing, becoming more complex –

⁶⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, “Mystical Milieu,” 128.

⁶⁷ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, 10, 11.

⁶⁸ Beatrice Bruteau, *God’s Ecstasy*, 15.

more diversified, more interactive, and therefore more unified.”⁶⁹ Insight into the infinite creative relationship which characterises the Trinity, and scholarly examination of a physics and chemistry that demonstrate a “self-creating” world convince her that the world of multiplicity “emerges” as the manifestation of divine Self-Expression. As “the paradigm of interpersonal love,”⁷⁰ the Trinity shows Being as, “dynamic . . . radiant.”⁷¹

In a return to a recognisably Cappadocian insight, especially Gregory of Nyssa’s, Bruteau bases her argument for an Incarnational theology and a “self-creating world” on the “enstatic/ecstatic”⁷² reality of the life of the Trinity. This is characterised by “the tendency of Being, to be in every possible way, and this has to include being finite.”⁷³ At the same time, the agapic relationship of the Trinity “means that God will be present in this finite being.”⁷⁴ Rather than the idea that God Self-sacrifices, diminishes or shrinks in some way to allow for finite creation, Bruteau understands God’s creation as “emerging” from the Trinitarian creative ecstasy. This is more an “unfurling” or “blossoming.”⁷⁵ She agrees with Jack Miles,⁷⁶ that the divine utterance to Moses from the Burning Bush, is not simply translated as “I am who am,” but “I am what I do.”⁷⁷ She uses the analogy of dance. That is, just as we can say that the dance is the dancer dancing, so from its formless origin the world of multiplicity, with its observable innate tendency to be in every possible way, is the visible manifestation of the invisible Reality of the Trinitarian God.

God’s ecstatic expression is manifest as finite existence which is a process. From the beginning this process is seen as characterised by gathering to unity, an evolution to newer more complex forms through a process of natural selection based on the pressure to

⁶⁹ Beatrice Bruteau, *God’s Ecstasy*, 14, 15. This reminds of Augustine’s, Rahner’s and Pere Teilhard’s emphasis, “Union differentiates.”

⁷⁰ Beatrice Bruteau, *God’s Ecstasy*, 29.

⁷¹ Beatrice Bruteau, *God’s Ecstasy*, 30.

⁷² Bruteau (reflecting the theology of Gregory of Nyssa) explains this as Being as “enstatic,” while “May-you-be” is ecstatic. “My enstatic reality is expressed in my ecstatic love for the other, which is a will to union with the other’s enstatic reality, which in turn is an ecstatic movement out to yet another.” 31 This “shared being, shared life” as “a paradigm for the cosmos . . . will be the pattern repeated on all the levels to various degrees.” More significantly for us, it defines community as “a network of interactions” which has to be seen in terms of the whole not as a collection of parts. While it has “internal differentiation” it is one. Pp31, 32, 35. For Griffiths’ own short description of Gregory’s theology in this respect, see *A New Vision*, 242, 243.

⁷³ Beatrice Bruteau, *God’s Ecstasy*, 37.

⁷⁴ Beatrice Bruteau, *God’s Ecstasy*, 37 .

⁷⁵ Beatrice Bruteau, *God’s Ecstasy*, 39.

⁷⁶ In Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 98-99.

⁷⁷ Jack Miles, *God: A Biography*, 30.

be. An integral consciousness too evolves until ultimately there emerges the self-consciousness⁷⁸ that is unique to the species *homo sapiens* which provides the way for revelation of the divine Ground of Being pervading and sustaining all of life.⁷⁹ This opens up freedom to choose the way of transcendence, the way of conscious co-creators. As Griffiths points out, it also indicates the opportunity for “creativity, improvisation, novelty, adventure, life at the fullest.”⁸⁰ It is a new “emergent” facilitated and supported by hidden “memes,”⁸¹ a new consciousness that traces another way of being in every possible way, not dictated by natural law.⁸² It is no longer the way of the “selfish genes and memes” but in accordance with insight into agapic love and a horizon which promises ultimate union with the Ground of Being. Agapic love and the integral life-urge “to be in every possible way” mean this cannot be accomplished in isolation. Once again, the Trinitarian “dance” is made manifest as human understanding of the significance of community develops.

How does this clarify the question of the *philosophia perennis* in relation to evolution as set out above? “Perennial” refers here both to the wisdom disclosed and also to the human experience and conscious grasp of that wisdom. There is a mutual resonance. History and tradition show people have to be disposed to receive such insight. While the influence of positive “memes” may play a part, for it to be received as a “perennial philosophy,” there has also to be the capacity to analyse and coherently communicate it for the sake of social cohesion, for the continuation of human life. An unchangeable aspect is the basic human insight into transcendent Reality that pervades all of life. The human capacity to “know” this Reality at an experiential level is a given. However, consciousness itself can be said to ground in an essential way all of material existence. Therefore, this uniquely human capacity to experience the transcendent Ground of Being can be said to have “emerged” at a certain time in the process of evolution of material existence when the conditions were right. Moreover, when humanity in general and a human being in particular

⁷⁸ Also supported and discussed in Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 24, 25, 93.

⁷⁹ Griffiths says, “A human being is a form of matter which has reached a very high order of complexity and is so organised as to become conscious.” *A New Vision*, 24.

⁸⁰ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 40.

⁸¹ Memes spread out from purely biological functions as human interactions and finally can be expressed as fragments of culture. In *God’s Ecstasy*, 160-172

⁸² Bruteau is not saying that human awareness of the transcendent reality as Ground of Being represents a separate dimension from natural evolution, a kind of deviation, but rather emerges as the truly natural movement ordered towards self-transcendence and transformation of creation. It is the refusal of humans as the pinnacle of creation to respond to, or (probably more in line with Bruteau’s emphasis on sin as ignorance) blindness towards this call that is unnatural.

recognise their identity as “child” of this infinite “Ground of Being,” a process of further stages of transcendence is opened up. Bruteau quotes the Talmud: “Under the sun there is nothing new, but over the sun there is something new.”⁸³ The natural processes of evolution are predictable and demonstrate a “self-creating” world which reflects the Trinitarian character “to be in every possible way.” However, this activity is unconsciously self-protective. Human encounter with the divine Ground of Being, introduces a movement that is consciously self-transcending. Whereas the modes of choice are now changed because a new element is included, there is still an evolutionary movement that leads to unknown, new ways of being. Human beings can participate in creating, can truly choose to be co-creators. Recognising the full history of their coming to be in the universe they can celebrate all of life as sacred and all of humanity as one family of God.⁸⁴

All Griffiths’ work includes his study and discernment of history and culture. He notes that, starting with the Renaissance, a train of thought was set in motion which more and more proved inimical to the kind of subjective experience basic to a society’s understanding and accepting the *philosophia perennis*. Griffiths recognises that the objectivity of the Renaissance and post-Cartesian times have been advantageous for human life in many ways. On the other hand, recognition of the deficiencies, of the separation of mind and matter and the dismissal of a transcendent reality, has led at last to a renewed appreciation of other human ways of being that we have tended for long to associate with the East. Yet, these are by no means absent from Western philosophical/theological tradition. Humankind along with the whole of creation is seen now to be evolving as a global entity though with a conscious recognition of this process, and the capacity, imagination and creativity to direct changes for the well-being of all of life. As a whole the *philosophia perennis* can be said to develop in concert with this evolutionary process.

For Bruteau, while “humankind as community made in the image and likeness of God who is Trinity”⁸⁵ is the apex of finite existence and the carrier of the *imago Dei*, it is important for humanity to keep their origins and their continual deep interconnections with

⁸³ Leviticus Rabbah 28:11. See Beatrice Bruteau, *God’s Ecstasy*, 175.

⁸⁴ Bruteau introduces the idea of the icon, *Theotokos*. She interprets this here as the reality of multiplicity, finite existence, with human-kind as the apex, as the carrier of God’s image, the material manifestation of the Trinity expressing itself. In this sense, creation is *Theotokos*, pregnant with God coming to be in fullness in God’s creation which is continually evolving through self-transcendence, emergence and integration. *God’s Ecstasy*, 174.

⁸⁵ Beatrice Bruteau, *God’s Ecstasy*, 17.

all creation in mind. The whole finite existence of multiplicity is *Theotokos*,⁸⁶ pregnant with God coming to birth in creation. This is an emergence dependent on the evolution of human consciousness as a whole. Individual mystical insight in this sense is “natural” phenomenon in that it represents a precocious kind of awareness of the Real. This is the experience of a unifying life-affirming “presence” within multiplicity, and the realisation that all aspects of finite existence have a transcendent Ground of Being which Christians first and foremost recognise in the Holy Trinity as an interpersonal God.⁸⁷

5. The *Imago* and Eschatological Hope

Bruteau eschews an eschatological underpinning to her concept of the *imago dei* in order to focus on the hidden reality of God dwelling in creation. In *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, Stanley Grenz does the reverse and in so doing brings into clear focus being-in-relationship as the essence of the *imago dei*. We have found it helpful for the sake of clarity to introduce his work for comparison. As he traces a Christocentric development backwards from the revealed eschatological finalé to the “historical” pronouncement of the *imago dei* in Genesis 1:26-27, his emphasis, while by no means excluding the immanent Trinity, is on the economic Trinity. Understandably, Bruteau’s emphasis is the immanent Trinity and she takes as her starting point the dynamic of the divine trinitarian Being.

Bruteau draws attention to the sacred creative impulse of every detail of manifest finite being from its earliest form as expanding energy; Grenz on the other hand explores the historical development of the concept of the *imago dei* along an anthropological trajectory towards an emphasis on inter-relationship in the post-modern context of the de-centred self. Together they demonstrate two central aspects of the *philosophia perennis*, experiential and rational within a broad evolutionary schema. At the close of *A New Vision of Reality*, in the face of the present threat of global annihilation through natural disaster or global aggression, Griffiths offers the perennial philosophy as the *only* solution. “The only

⁸⁶ Bruteau here seems to be relating the feminine principle to diversity and the next stage of consciousness.

⁸⁷ Bruteau quotes well-known Jewish Kabbalist and author, Gershom Scholem, “There is nothing in [all the worlds] that is not God’s manifest glory and essence,” *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), 147. And also Moshe Braun, “God’s Kingdom is hidden in ‘every particle of nature and if people would see it they could not possibly sin.’” See Moshe Braun, *The Jewish Holy Days: Their Spiritual Significance* (Northvale, N.J.: Aronson, 1996), 397, 372-73, 403.

way of recovery is to rediscover the perennial philosophy, the traditional wisdom, which is found in all ancient religions and especially in the great religions of the world.”⁸⁸ Recovery of the perennial philosophy is for Griffiths a return not to a static concept but to the proper process of humanity (in correspondence with all of creation) realising itself as the *imago dei*.

Reading Grenz’s account makes it clear that though Griffiths has not specified it, the subject of *A New Vision of Reality* is the *imago dei*. Griffiths is clearly indebted to Bruteau’s explanation which expands and clarifies aspects of his dialogue with the new science that show creation in the process of evolution as a profoundly dynamic network of relationships. We see here respect for different theological approaches which enters into partnership. I have suggested in the thesis introduction, that Griffiths, in his mature theology, represents such a dialogue. Grenz’s emphasis on and careful articulation of the essential value of the eschatologically-centred faith community to human well-being and transformation has implications for Griffiths’ understanding of Christian community. As a Benedictine monk in the Indian context, Bede’s primary witness to the Gospel, his way of mission, was pronouncedly experiential, a mode of personal realisation within a welcoming community. Church, for Griffiths is the movement of the Spirit, the manifest transcendent presence of Christ. As such it is transformative, being representative and in service of a whole cosmic coming to be.⁸⁹ The personal transformation Bede underwent towards the end of his life led to a new kind of relationship in community that reveals a change comparable with that which is explored by Grenz as an intellectual historical process of understanding the *imago Dei*.

Writing in 2001, Grenz begins with the general assumption today by Christians, of God as “person in relationship.”⁹⁰ He quotes W.Norris Clarke showing the classical line of doctrine:

The most fruitful starting point of Thomistic metaphysics is the “We are” of interpersonal dialogue (which concludes that) the full dimensions of what it means “to be” can be found only in *personal being*, in its *interpersonal manifestation*.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 296.

⁸⁹ Bede Griffiths, “The Church”, transcription of a taped talk given at Osage Monastery, July 1992. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

⁹⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self. A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 5.

⁹¹ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 6. Grenz cites, W.Norris Clarke S.J. *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being, God, Person* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 42. He also quotes

Griffiths acknowledges a great debt to Thomas Aquinas who, he says, continues to be an inspirational, spiritual and theological guide:

We cannot afford to reject any of our western heritage, as it took shape in the thought of Aquinas, but at the same time we have to open our minds to what will be a genuine development of Thomism, bringing out vast potentialities which are latent in it.⁹²

Here, in a *A New Vision of Reality*, Griffiths quotes the relevant Thomist insight: “The ultimate reality is the fullness of interpersonal being, which is also interpersonal consciousness.”⁹³

While Grenz’s work explores the image in the Christian theological tradition, he makes mention of the ideas of philosophers of our present time such as Buber, Polanyi and Macmurray who have moved away from the individualism of the modern era and are exploring the meaning of the person because Christian thought is embedded in the prevalent historical/intellectual context. In fact, Polanyi’s understanding of the need for “personal commitment . . . to obedient listening or submission to the claims of reality” for accessing knowledge and “a process of indwelling” for the emergence of meaning,⁹⁴ is certainly significant for the kind of developing community that Griffiths led as a *sannyasi*. Although Grenz’s account is strictly within a Christian perspective, it nevertheless is particularly relevant for Griffiths’ second two concerns expressed above: the significance of an organic rather than a mechanistic world view and the evolution of the consciousness.

The biblical assertion of humankind made in the image and likeness of God appears first in Genesis 1:26, 27:

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

John Gresham, “This provides the strange sight, in the pluralistic world of contemporary theology, of Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, liberation, feminist, evangelical and process theologians agreeing on a particular trinitarian model of God!” Cited in John L. Gresham Jr., “The Social Model of the Trinity and Its Critics,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46/3 (1993): 327.

⁹² Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, 73.

⁹³ *A New Vision*, 94. In *A Christian Ashram*, Griffiths acknowledges his debt to Thomas, the need to “go beyond,” and also that by doing so we will find Thomas has more support to offer.

⁹⁴ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 12.

Very early on, Griffiths represented a now prevalent mixture of foreboding, grief and hope due to human assault on the earth and the revolt of the eco-systems. Today's movement towards a global response reflects the *Genesis* sentiments and lends his words heightened poignancy:

The universe is not a machine; it's an organism and the society that has been produced by this mechanistic model is revealing its dangers more and more . . . the problem of pollution . . . and using up the world's resources . . . living off our own capital all the time . . . the system cannot work . . .⁹⁵

The way the concept of the *imago dei* changes and has shifted remarkably in recent times is encompassed as reality in Bruteau's exposition and also appears in the work of Griffiths and Grenz.⁹⁶ All three would agree that the dominance of a rationalist-objective approach to life and an emphasis on the self, as self-reliance, self-assertion and self-introspection in the West has tended to miss the mark. Together these have become a distorted intellectual endeavour causing a panoply of disintegrative problems which have spread throughout the world.

I have described a vision, one that is shared by Grenz, Griffiths, theologian/mathematician, Beatrice Bruteau, and also, among others, feminist theologian, Catherine Mowry LaCugna of an organic unity underlying creation that directly bears on the *imago dei* as a process of becoming. It extends to the whole of creation. It looks to recent Trinitarian theology which owes much to the contributions of theologians worldwide. This includes Australia.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Bede Griffiths, "Christianity and the New Society", taped talk, Australia, 13 May 1985. Available, Eremos Institute, Centre for Ministry, North Parramatta, NSW.

⁹⁶ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 14. Griffiths was 86 when he died in 1993 and Evangelical Stanley Grenz died suddenly of a brain hemorrhage in 2005. He writes in response to the de-centred self of today that is most expressed in the fragmentation prevalent in contemporary Western society. His "social-personalistic *theological* anthropology" is a positive theological response to a problem that has prompted Griffiths' censure of the West.

⁹⁷ For relevant Trinitarian theology see: Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1:1; Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroad, 1999); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Christiaan Mostert, *God and the Future: Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine of God* (London & New York: T & T Clark, 2002); John Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution on Trinitarian Theology," in *Trinitarian Theology Today*, edited by Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995); Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us: the Trinity and Christian Life*; Anthony Kelly, *The Trinity of Love, a Theology of the Christian God*. Vol. 4 New Theology Series, ed. P. C. Phan (Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1989); Anne Hunt, *The Trinity and the Paschal Mystery*, 1998; Denis Edwards, *The God of Evolution: A Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999); Neil Ormerod, *The Trinity: retrieving the Western tradition* (Milwaukee, Wis.:

Theological anthropology as “the constitution of the self, or stated in Christian anthropological terms, the character of the *imago dei*”⁹⁸ is profoundly Trinitarian and presents today the acute challenge. Griffiths stresses that wholeness (or holiness) in and through right relationship is imperative. Grenz describes the reverse in terms of “misery”: “Nothing accomplished by way of individual fulfillment and aggrandizement can fully compensate us for the misery suffered when the structures supportive of genuine community are compromised.”⁹⁹ Like Griffiths, for Grenz and Bruteau, in a world context where “the advent of the Global Soul” marks the end of security in the modern individualistic self, the *imago dei* centres on creation rather than the Fall.¹⁰⁰ We continue with Grenz’s comprehensive theological exposition relating it to Griffiths’ ideas because this will assist in extending the image within the Christian tradition.

The pattern of evolution is evident in the development of the image of the *imago dei* that resists a simple definition. Grenz distinguishes three views in the intellectual development of the image, structural, relational and eschatological. The image has played a crucial role in the construction of a Christian anthropology throughout the history of the church and yet exegetes and theologians have not been in agreement as to what the concept entails . . . as to the very meaning of the term and also how many distinctive understandings of the divine image have come to be proposed in the Christian tradition.¹⁰¹

What becomes clearer is that the *imago* reflects in some measure each historical context. Hendrikus Berkhof notes with irony that “by studying how systematic theologies have poured meaning into Genesis 1:26, one could write a piece of Europe’s cultural history.”¹⁰² In this way, the understanding of the “likeness” shifts, the image evolves, so that what it means to be human emerges with the evolution of human consciousness.¹⁰³

Marquette University Press, 2005); Patricia Fox, *God as Communion* (New York: Harper and Collins, 1991).

⁹⁸ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 20.

⁹⁹ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 20, citing Leroy T. Howe, *The Image of God: A Theology for Pastoral and Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 38.

¹⁰⁰ We will see how Griffiths’ realignment with a holistic grasp of reality in India moves him to understand the “Fall” in a new and positive light.

¹⁰¹ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 142.

¹⁰² Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, trans. Sierd Woudstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 179. In Grenz, *The Social God*, 143.

¹⁰³ As early as 1958, Karl Rahner pointed to a dialogue that must exist among the “several sciences which can and must treat of man.” Karl Rahner, *Hominsation: The Evolutionary Origin of Man as a Theological Problem*, trans. W.T. O’Hara (Freiburg: Herder, 1958), 21.

The formal theological concept of the *imago dei*, however, begins with Irenaeus. But the idea existed long before that and is not only central to New Testament Christology, but also vitally informs Old Testament understanding of the divine/human relationship.¹⁰⁴ Five biblical texts only, “directly connect humankind to the image of God.”¹⁰⁵

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness . . . “. So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them: male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:26-27)

When God created humankind (Adam), he made them in the likeness of God, male and female he created them. (Gen. 5:1-3)

Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind. (Gen. 9:5-6)

For a man ought not to have his head veiled since he is the image and reflection of God. (1 Cor. 11:7)

With (the tongue) we bless the Lord and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. (James 3:9)

One can also add as a commentary Psalm 8, which includes the words:

What are human beings that you are mindful of them . . . you have made them a little lower than God, crowned them with honour and glory, given them dominion over the works of your hands, put all things under their feet.

And it is implicit in the pericope common to the Synoptic Gospels of Jesus’ response to the question about payment of Roman taxes. (Matt. 22:18-21; Mark 12:15-17; Luke 20:24-26).

As a further preliminary to gauging the metamorphosis of this image we look at a few points of contemporary scriptural exegesis of Gen 1:26 and Gen. 2:18-25. These two passages have a complementary purpose. In 1:26/27 the use of the Hebrew terms *selem*, “image,” and *demut*, “likeness,” are basically synonymous. The inclusion of *demut* is most likely for the purpose of differentiation from the ancient near-Eastern representative image of a god that did not need any obvious comparative similarity. However, human being in its totality is somehow profoundly similar to God, “God’s counterpart.”¹⁰⁶ This is one who

¹⁰⁴ Griffiths points out that the restoration of the image of God, the *ikon*, is Gregory of Nyssa’s central theme and is also essential teaching for Ruysbroeck and Origen. In *A New Vision*, 240, 248.

¹⁰⁵ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 184.

¹⁰⁶ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 195. Grenz cites Edward M. Curtis, “Image of God (OT),” in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al., 6 volumes (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 390.

communicates with God, who listens to God, to whom God can speak.¹⁰⁷ The role of humankind as representative of and as having dominion as God's agent in the world flows from this priority.¹⁰⁸ The continuation of a moral directive to humankind that reaches a height in the Old Testament in the prophets is sourced in the One who is both *hesed*/mercy, and *zedek*/righteousness, wholly transcendent yet involved in an intimate love relationship with creation, as we see in Hos. 2:19-20, "I will betrothe you to me . . ."¹⁰⁹

Genesis 1 and 2 is a complementary doublet. While humankind being formed from the earth is a very common creation story, the separate account of the creation of the woman is unique in Near Eastern literature. The separate creation of male and female is intrinsic to the meaning of the *imago dei*.¹¹⁰

Exegesis of Gen.2:18-25 reveals that firstly humankind is created a social creature, "It is not good that the man should be alone." Secondly, the idea of "a helper suitable for him," is the basis of mutual supportiveness of community. Two Hebrew words used here prompt this interpretation. "Ezer" suggests help from a strong one, while "kenegdo," which may also be translated "alongside" or "corresponding to," has the idea of "the mutual understanding in word and answer as well as in silence, which constitutes life in common."¹¹¹ As well, Walter Brueggemann points to Adam's cry, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen.2:23) as being a "covenant formula that speaks of a common, reciprocal loyalty."¹¹² Indeed it is on Adam's very sexuality that his sense of isolation is centred. "For only as he gazes on his female counterpart, on *'ishshah*, is he

¹⁰⁷ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 196.

¹⁰⁸ In this Barth sees in *Genesis* 1 "a prologue to a narrative" the theme of which is the covenant relationship with humankind. Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 202. Grenz cites, Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1, trans. J.W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and Harold Knight, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T and T. Clark, 1958), 181-182.

¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Griffiths points out how the justice or righteousness of God, *zedek*, which is perfectly balanced by God's loving mercy, *hesed*, are proclaimed by the Hebrew prophets, calling humankind back to the loving God. See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 213 – 216. The references both to "the whole of creation" and to "the one to whom God can speak" hold significance in respect to Griffiths' ideas on the sacredness of all creation and a theology that upholds all sentient creatures and animal welfare. We look at this briefly in the chapter, Divine Lord.

¹¹⁰ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 269-273.

¹¹¹ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 275. Grenz cites Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1984), 192.

¹¹² Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 276. Grenz cites Walter Brueggemann, "Of the Same Flesh and Bone (GN 2,23a)." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 32 (1970): 535.

referred to as *‘ish*, and not *adam*, the “earth-creature.”¹¹³ The presence of the woman releases him from solitude. A human being is embodied as male or female and this is the primary experience of their being in the world but it includes a fundamental “innate yearning for completeness,”¹¹⁴ and human biological sex symbolises this. Griffiths’ summary statement: “sex is the energy of love in our nature” is comparable with Kelly’s noted in the previous chapter.¹¹⁵

Primarily involving bonding and solidarity, the union is “a first step” towards the building of community.¹¹⁶ In this way, sexual bonding came to be understood as symbolic of the bonded community. While the relational sexual self is “person-in-bonded-community,” Jesus himself points to a spiritual ancestry and a covenantal loyalty in “the eschatological community” that surpasses marriage, the “primal expression” of male/female bonding.¹¹⁷ As we have seen, Griffiths provided a superlative example in the community of Aelred and his monks.¹¹⁸ As suggested earlier and now more pointedly expressed in Grenz’s terms, “the link between sexually differentiated humans as the *imago dei* and the Creator may be forged through the relationality shared by both human and divine life.”¹¹⁹ In *The Child in the Bible*, Towner, supported by biblical scholar J. Richard Middleton’s emphasis on “the radical universality” of the *imago dei*,¹²⁰ adds that, “it may be said that the gendered nature of

¹¹³ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*. Grenz cites Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, ed. Walter Brueggemann and John R. Donahue (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 76. We recognize here a comparable Hindu insight with the *ishvara/prakriti/sakti* relationship.

¹¹⁴ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 277.

¹¹⁵ Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation in Christ*, 42. In more precise terms, “the word ‘sexuality’ comes from the Latin *sexus*, probably akin to the Latin *secare*, meaning to cut or divide- suggesting incompleteness seeking wholeness and connection that reaches through and beyond our differences and divisions.” James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Longfellow, In the Introduction to *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, ed. James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Longfellow (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1993), xiv. Cited by Grenz, 278. Miki Raver reminds us that the Hebrew *tsela*, in Genesis, usually translated “rib” also means “side.” The feminine was brought forth from the “side” of the androgynous “earth creature” or “*adam*.” In Miki Raver, *Women of the Hebrew Bible* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005), 22.

¹¹⁶ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 279.

¹¹⁷ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 282, 283.

¹¹⁸ Bede Griffiths, “On Homosexual Love.”

¹¹⁹ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 299.

¹²⁰ W. Sibley Towner, “Children and the Image of God,” in Marcia J. Bunge, (ed) *The Child in the Bible* (Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 321. Towner cites J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 207. Middleton says, “All persons have equal access to God simply by being human” See Towner, “Children,” 320. Towner can thus affirm that the *imago dei* applies to children equally, 321.

humankind is revealing of the nature and activity of God.” Both paternal and maternal imagery is used to speak of God, especially Isaiah 40-66.¹²¹

In the “Genesis” myth with the creation of Ish and Ishah therefore, there is the sense of total integration. What does Griffiths make of this stage? He relates it to Ken Wilber’s earliest level of consciousness – uroboric:

In the beginning man and woman lived in undifferentiated harmony . . . still in the womb, as it were . . . undifferentiated . . . In that original state, body, soul and spirit were in harmony.¹²²

The Patristic author, Irenaeus, in the second century, had neither the benefits of modern scriptural exegesis, nor anthropology. In comparison, therefore, his conclusion is especially insightful. He sees in “Adam and Eve” humankind in infancy and distinguishes *imago* “image” from *similitude*, “likeness.” The complete image includes the body, the whole person, and this in its fullness is Christ towards whom we must progress. The *imago* is the innate capacity through the gift of free will, primarily, and reason, to know the wholly transcendent One; *similitude* is the mature growth into unity with the One which is present in “Adam and Eve” only in seed form.¹²³ In the Fall, reason is somehow wounded and *similitude* lost.¹²⁴ In Christ, the reason is healed and through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit humanity receives the *similitudo* which ultimately reaches eschatological full conformity to Christ and union with God.

Griffiths supports Irenaeus’ basic insight into the divine/human relationship. It has a profound personal dimension. A person is “being in relationship,” or, “the social, public embodiment of self.”¹²⁵ Importantly, for Irenaeus, in spite of human disobedience in the Fall, there is not the idea of a complete sundering of the divine/human relationship which we find later in the Reformists. Further exploration later in the thesis shows how a change in Griffiths’ understanding of the “Fall” reflects a deeper appreciation of Irenaeus’

¹²¹ W. Sibley Towner, “Children and the Image of God,” 316.

¹²² Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 97, 98. As Charles Foster points out in *The Selfless Gene*, this concept does require some serious interpretation and deep nuance considering the anthropological and scientific evidence of violence in nature over past millennia.

¹²³ One could say that The *imago dei* is like a work of art where the essence, the artist’s touch is intrinsic.

¹²⁴ Griffiths states that the integrity of the human being is lost in the “Fall”. Disintegration comes about in this early stage of humankind’s development through consciously turning away from the Spirit to the ego. Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 98.

¹²⁵ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 59-61.

cosmic/holistic insight. Irenaeus' theology of the Fall, framed in symbolic language was submerged with Augustine's approach, and later Cartesian thought.

Grenz sees Descartes' *cogito* really originating from the introspection of Augustine which grows into self-determination and a reliance on empiricism. Augustine finds the *imago dei* in the structure of the human soul, where its threefold memory, intellect and will prefigure the Trinity. The purpose, as Augustine envisaged, is to lead humanity through the love of the Holy Spirit into right relationship with God. But there is a change from Irenaeus' focus on Christ as the *Imago* to the intellectual and anthropomorphic emphasis of Augustine. With the Reformists turn to "sola scriptura," the break in relationship with God through sin is seen as final; that by which the *imago* (along with *similitudo*) is fatally lost.¹²⁶

In his dialogue with the Hindu tradition, Griffiths' understanding of creation, in particular humanity as "mirror" of God, is not limited to a formal "elect."¹²⁷ As with Irenaeus, he sees God's love constantly indwelling in the soul of every person.

After the Reformation, there is a retreat from a Trinitarian focus in theology along with a growth of individualism. During this time, as Griffiths points out, an eclipse of the perennial philosophy has taken place in the West.

In the 20th century, Karl Barth's conviction that in the life and mission of Jesus, God is revealed as triune is taken up by Rahner who with disciples such as Griffiths can be seen as a bridge to the present theological focus on the Trinity as communion in relationship. "Rahner's Rule," - "The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity" involves the relational idea of the *imago dei* as reciprocal love in response to God's call and "a fundamental image of human being as being-with-a-destiny."¹²⁸ Griffiths sees "the adoption as sons and daughters, the passing from human to divine consciousness is the destiny of humanity." Moreover, this explains the church, which is human beings become conscious of their being sons and daughters of God.¹²⁹ Towner's focus on the dignity for the child is relevant in regards to Griffiths' earlier dialogue with Wilber. Towner points out that, "conception and birth . . . inaugurate destiny for a child who bears the image of God within."¹³⁰ The stages of maturation and of consciousness

¹²⁶ Grenz, *The Social God*, 158 – 161.

¹²⁷ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 249, 250.

¹²⁸ Philip J. Hefner, "The Creation," in *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 330. Cited by Grenz in *The Social God*, 182.

¹²⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 90. *Marriage*, 193.

¹³⁰ W. Sibley Towner, "Children and the Image of God", 322.

available to each person reflect the journey for all of humanity and Griffiths develops the idea of recapitulation of these stages in the individual from conception, and humanity as a whole. Griffiths describes the next stage or movement of humankind as a whole towards the ultimate fulfillment:

We are destined to pass beyond our present level of consciousness, where we see everything in terms of dualities, of subject and object, time and space, heaven and earth and to enter into the unifying consciousness beyond the dualities of the mind.¹³¹

Ultimately the *imago dei* is communal and community, as Griffiths notes, is expressive of human sexuality at work bringing people together through all sorts of creative relationships in fellowship with Christ.¹³² This understanding includes an appreciation of history in the context of the developing science of evolution.

Grenz sees the dissolution and fragmenting of the modern self “embraced” by post-modernity. In fact, “it is the celebrative response to the dissolution of the self that most clearly characterizes the post-modern ethos.”¹³³ On the other hand, the new “socially constructed” and “narrative self” is “decentred . . . fluid . . . highly unstable . . . impermanent.”¹³⁴

This would be evidence of a positive kind to support Griffiths’ belief in the emergence of a new consciousness in our times which recognises “the dynamic web of interdependent relationships” as being characteristic of created existence. It supports also Bede’s drive for local contemplative communities.¹³⁵ This holistic interdependency points to the transcendent reality inherent in the perennial philosophy which Griffiths insists humanity as a whole must recover.

¹³¹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 89.

¹³² Towner describes three lines of relationship; human beings towards to God, to each other and to animals, plants and the rest of the created order. W. Towner, “Children and the Image of God,” 317.

¹³³ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 133.

¹³⁴ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 136.

¹³⁵ As we have noted, the insights of philosophers of our present time such as Buber, Polanyi and Macmurray who are exploring the meaning of the person are indication of an integrative movement. Polanyi understands the need for “personal commitment . . . to obedient listening or submission to the claims of reality” for accessing knowledge and “a process of indwelling” for the emergence of meaning. See Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 12.

6. Griffiths, the *Imago* and the New Creation

Griffiths recognises the evolutionary movement of the *imago* in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The ascent towards a final goal . . . from creation, through Christ, to new creation has the idea of person at base. The whole of humanity is growing to “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:13)¹³⁶

Bede provides the requisite exegesis: In Col. 1:15 – 20, Christ is “the image (*eikon*) of the invisible God.” In the translation from the Hebrew *kabod*, the Greek *doxa*, the *doxa theou*, is synonymous with *eikon* translated from the Hebrew *selem/similitudo*. God’s radiant glory is thus connected to Christ, both pre-existent and incarnate in Jesus. Believers who, in accord with an ethical imperative, (Col. 3:9-11 and Eph. 4:22-34) have stripped off the “old man” and put on the new, *keinos anthropos* already participate to some extent in Christ and await joyfully full participation together with the whole of creation (Rom. 8:21). In 2 Cor. 4:4-6, “The glory of Christ, who is the image of God,” (v. 4), is further elaborated in “the glory of God . . . in the face of Christ.” (v. 6)¹³⁷

In the Paul’s letter to the Phillipians, Jesus is the *morphe tou theou* (Phil. 2:16), the primordial man in the form of the image of God, the *morphe* of God. As the new man, reuniting in himself a broken humanity, he is the new Adam.¹³⁸ In the letter to the Colossians (1:15), Christ the *eikon theou* is the *prototokos*, the first-born of all creation and first-born from the dead, the *imago dei* in whom “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” (v. 19) He stands uniquely at the centre of creation and salvation history. In Hebrews, specific terms descriptive of the *imago*, “*apaugasma*” and “*character*” present on the one hand – a beaming forth of God in Christ, and on the other, Jesus as “the active impress of God” as God’s agent in creation witnessing who God is. There is in Griffiths’ dialogical perspective an added import. Bede points out that his own exegesis of Paul’s use of *morphe tou theou*, compares with Oscar Cullmann’s exegesis in *Christology of the New Testament*, 1967:

¹³⁶ We are reminded of the Hindu insight, “There is . . . the concept of a unified creation which has the character of a person who embraces the whole universe and at the same time transcends it. So *Brahman*, *atman* and *purusha* are the three terms for the ultimate reality.” Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 66.

¹³⁷ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 209.

¹³⁸ Griffiths points out how Mary’s designation as the “New Eve” in the work of the Fathers, offers a corrective to a too narrow and anthropomorphic patriarchal tendency.

The Greek word *morphe*, form, is the same as *murti* in Sanskrit. God has no *morphe* in Godself. Jesus being in the form of the image of God means not that he was God but that he was this primordial human being who was precisely and by definition the image of God.¹³⁹

In John's Gospel, as Griffiths stresses, the *Logos* is related to the Primordial Word as an expression of the Mind of God in which are found all created things coming forth eternally. It is Colossians 1:16-17, "in him, through him and for him all things were created," that proclaims Jesus as Christ "the primordial human being, the cosmic Person"¹⁴⁰ in whom all flows forth and returns to God.¹⁴¹

Griffiths explains Jesus' self designation as "Son of God" in terms of his being the Word, the Image, the Self-manifestation, the Self-revelation of God as one who is from the beginning "in relation" to the Father as the Son. Griffiths discerns Jesus as identifying himself "not with God but the primordial heavenly man before Abraham." Bede points out that there are indications Jesus was familiar with *The Book of Enoch* in which the Son of Man is the primordial Ancient of the Days who "existed before creation." Furthermore, the Son of Man is here identified as the Messiah.¹⁴² Griffiths attributes to Jesus, the "tremendous insight" which uniquely brings together, the eschatological role of the Son of Man, in the Book of Daniel, "coming on the clouds of glory" and, from Isaiah: 53, the suffering servant of Yahweh,¹⁴³ whereby Jesus is "representative man."¹⁴⁴ As the one in whom the whole creation is made manifest, as the "Son of Man" figure, the "archetypal man," made in the image of God, "Jesus can be seen in relation to those other forms of the Primordial Person, the Universal Man, which are found in the traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam."

We are destined to pass beyond our present level of consciousness, where we see everything in terms of dualities, of subject and object, time and space, heaven and earth and to enter into the unifying consciousness beyond the dualities of the mind.¹⁴⁵

The fulfillment of the *imago dei*, "Christ's pre-eminence among many *adelphoi*," brings Rom. 8:29 together with Gen. 1:26,27 to declare purpose and goal as one in God. Just as Christ

¹³⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 122.

¹⁴⁰ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 128.

¹⁴¹ Griffiths understands "Logos" in this Gospel as having a prophetic significance as reflecting back to the Hebrew *dabar*, God's word that calls the prophets.

¹⁴² Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 120, 121.

¹⁴³ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 118, 119.

¹⁴⁴ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 118.

¹⁴⁵ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 89.

has already been raised to glory, God's promise of humankind's glorification as a familial participation has already been accomplished.¹⁴⁶

Holding centre-stage in Griffiths' understanding and use of the *imago Dei* is a deep, religious love of humanity as a whole. The various aspects of this one complex organism have also to be understood relationally within a wider interdependent whole.

A Bridge with the East: A Bridge with All

Interpreting the "human" being in Genesis as the point where the evolving universe becomes conscious, Griffiths finds support from Ken Wilber whose work seeks to bridge Western psychology and Eastern mysticism. In Wilber's terms, the creation story reflects the earliest human oceanic state of consciousness, named "uroboric."

In humankind matter becomes conscious and forms a human soul (psyche) that is open to the Spirit (pneuma).¹⁴⁷ The integrative unity of the undifferentiated consciousness represented by "Eden" is that of the newly formed infant in the womb.¹⁴⁸

In the end Griffiths was convinced of Ken Wilber's explanation of "the Fall." For Wilber, this represents a necessary fragmentation of the original undifferentiated state of humankind. Griffiths understands the myth as further representing not merely a fragmenting of the undifferentiated state, but an original "falling away from the Spirit into the ego, the soul, the separated self . . . separating from God . . . the essence of original sin."¹⁴⁹ Moreover, as with Bruteau, "the essence of it is disobedience,"¹⁵⁰ the traditional interpretation of sin in Eden still stands. In coming to consciousness and identifying their separateness, humankind could choose to be open to the guidance of the Spirit. Disobedience introduces division. The more complex humanity becomes, the deeper the division. The "necessary fragmentation" that is part of a process becomes an end in itself.

This consequent "appalling . . . fragmentation" Griffiths finds to be supported by other insights. He follows Wilber's line of thought in *The Atman Project* that the *atman* or

¹⁴⁶ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 233. The community as a "cell in Christ's mystical body" is a recurring image for Bede. See *Golden String*, 136.

¹⁴⁷ This is still an anthropocentric theology. Today, many would argue for the earlier emergence of the "soul" in other sentient life forms.

¹⁴⁸ Clearly this resonates with Irenaeus' thought. Griffiths compares Eastern holistic wisdom with Aristotle's interacting primal form and matter, and Bohm's implicate and explicate order to demonstrate a universe which is both "co-ordinated" and "integrated as a whole." Emerging from these ideas for our times is a "new vision of reality." Consciousness is latent in all matter and emerges fully in human beings. *A New Vision*, 10 – 25.

¹⁴⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 83.

¹⁵⁰ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 98.

Spirit is present to humankind from the beginning. This same Spirit urges the human being to infinite transcendence and as this is a goal which remains even when the human being turns away from God, the human being then focuses entirely on the separated self, the “ego.” This for Griffiths explains the “great tragedy” of humankind after the “Fall,” and of the “great tyrants of history, Nero, Stalin, or Hitler who set themselves up as God.”¹⁵¹ Ultimately, the “Fall” is a fall into division and duality, and the history of humankind is evocative of a yearning for unity. Only through suffering and death as humanity learns to surrender to God can restoration take place.¹⁵²

Griffiths believes that guided by the Spirit, the different religious traditions have brought forth stories of origins which cumulatively contribute to the whole. The Christian perspective, that human consciousness only begins to be aware of the depth of the *Genesis* narrative through revelation of Christ in history offers a unique insight centred in the cross. The new chapter that is anticipated in the quest to know what it means to be human involves an opening to the Eastern religious traditions and a more consummate dying to self to rise to greater transformation in the Spirit who is the “bond of love.”

As already noted, Bede was very critical of what he saw as the Catholic Church’s resistance to necessary change. He believed that examples from history of change in “infallible” Papal teaching, such as that centered on “*extra ecclesia nulla salus*,” represent learning models which the Church would ignore at her peril.¹⁵³ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 4th/5th century Byzantine, can be seen as the sort of loss we sustain by not assuming the disciple’s stance of deep “listening”; by allowing fear of change or diminishment to rule judgment and decision. 125 years after his death, Theodore was condemned as a heretic by the Emperor Justinian, at the second Council of Constantinople in 553; both his theology and he as a person were consigned to hell. Yet in 2005, Jesuit, Frederick McLeod, demonstrates how Theodore’s theological insights are “a convincing statement that speaks in a theological way to contemporary ecological concerns.” For Theodore “*imago*” must refer to the whole human being. Christ in the flesh represents all of creation. His description

¹⁵¹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 99.

¹⁵² Griffiths refers to the Pharisees as an example of “separation” that leads to an imbalance. This enables him to pointedly critique any religion today that by clinging to old traditions and centering in on itself “becomes incapable of further growth or of responding to the movement of the Spirit.” See *A New Vision*, 102.

¹⁵³ See Bede Griffiths, “The case of Fr Curran,” in “Letters,” *The Tablet*, 20 September 1986. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

of human beings as “bond of the universe” implies their responsibility towards the natural world, though necessarily joined to Christ who is their head. The understanding of salvation as a communal endeavour which incorporates through Christ’s recapitulation of the whole, the material, human and spiritual worlds corresponds closely with Eastern religions and also with Aboriginal and native American spirituality that understands harmony with nature as a solemn duty.¹⁵⁴

Griffiths demonstrates emerging points of correspondence. The Hebraic religions have a linear historical concept of the human journey towards an eschatological horizon of transcendence and the East has its concept of transformation of consciousness that envisions a circular movement that transcends space/time. But both express in religious terms, that centering on the self, the ego is life-denying. It is opposed to the universal call to self- transcendence. It is in the mystical traditions of the world religions that Bede recognises the capacity to know the transcendent ground of being that is basic to the perennial philosophy.

How does the transcendent source and ultimate destiny compare among the different religious traditions? In Hinduism, in the *Rg Veda*, there is the concept from before 1,000 BC of the one supreme Reality, *Brahman*; round 500 BC, the Buddhist concept of *Nirvana*, the silence of the wholly transcendent state that is, the Void; with the visions of Mohammad round 600 AD we find the wholly transcendent reality, *al Haqq*; and in the Hebrew religion an evolution of the concept of the infinite transcendent place of glory of *Elohim* to the culmination in the revelation to Moses of the singular high transcendent “I am.”

One may also trace a corresponding evolution in the later intuition of the immanent and the wholly personal God. In the Hindu tradition, the *Upanishads* are able to describe the *atman*, the transcendent Self, immanent in the universe. Similarly, Muslim Sufi, Ibn al Arabi speaks of the *nafas al rachman*, the “breath of the merciful” that is breathing forth creation. In Buddhism *nirvana* is immanent in all creation; it connects with Buddha’s teaching on dynamic interrelatedness. In *Madhymika* Buddhism, “the whole universe is in the void and

¹⁵⁴ Frederick G. McLeod, S.J. *The Roles of Christ’s Humanity in Salvation: Insights from Theodore of Mopsuetia* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005.), 126-270.

the void is in the whole universe.”¹⁵⁵ In the Christian mystical tradition for Ruysbroeck, “Our created being abides in the eternal essence and is one with it in its essential existence.”¹⁵⁶

Griffiths describes the cosmic Son of Man idea in ancient Persia, Babylonia and Egypt and in other world religions, specifically Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. The understanding of a threefold unity of material, psychic and transcendent realms, in which humankind stands as the mediator is characteristic of Eastern religions, as it is early in Christian tradition. There is the mystical content in the Hebrew Scriptures in the angelic visions of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and the *merkabah* in Ezekiel that demonstrate a conceptual continuity with the psychic and material realms. Later in the *Kabala* there is the ideal of *Adam Kadmon* which corresponds with the more ancient idea of the *Purusha* in Hinduism, the *Universal Man* in Sufi tradition, and the Hebrew/Christian Son of Man. In Hinduism, *Brahman* the supreme transcendent, is manifest as *atman* - Spirit, and *purusha* - the Great Person, or in later *Vaishnavist* terms, *Ishvara*. The *Bhavagad Gita* particularly witnesses a development in spiritual insight. With Krishna whom devotees adore in love and self-abandonment the myriad details of every-day life obtain sacred significance as part of the one infinite sacrifice of love.

There remain important differences in experience and belief, such as *advaita* and re-incarnation. But even with the idea of *advaita*, Griffiths detects in Kashmir Shaivism, an intuition into relationship in the Godhead. Here in the supreme transcendent union of *Shiva/Shakti* (male/female) there is a *spanda*, a throb in the divine will, and from this come all the forms from which are manifested the material creation.

Griffiths demonstrates in such a brief survey points of comparison and convergence for friendly correspondence and dialogue for members of the one human family.

For Griffiths, such “content of human existence” is a sharing in the one life of the Archetypal “Person,” though each one is distinct. He refers to Augustine’s sense of “persons within the Person, a communion of persons in love.”¹⁵⁷ Grenz’s articulation is comparable,

¹⁵⁵ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 137,138.

¹⁵⁶ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 248. For Gregory, whom Griffiths regards as the greatest mytic of the early church, each person has their eternal archetype in God which is “very near” the doctrine of Ibn al Arabi who teaches that “everything exists eternally in God.” Griffiths likes to quote, Ruysbroeck, “God utters Godself in the Spirit eternally without intermediary and in this Word God utters Godself in all things.” See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 247, 248, 249. Thus Griffiths can explain with the assistance of Hindu insight, that not only does the whole of creation exist in God’s “uttered” Word but all is contained in human consciousness.

¹⁵⁷ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 225.

“Human life is (to be) characterized as human, not by its attainments in the realm of reason, but by the union of human beings in love. That is the content of human existence, which is in accordance with (humankind’s) original divine destiny, and is an earthly reflection of the divine nature itself.”¹⁵⁸

The bonded community encompasses everyone and extends to all creation. Within the rich tradition of the *Imago Dei*, Griffiths understands that the yearning for such completeness is “built in.” The church which is all people signifies a coming to consciousness as self-in-communion in the process of becoming the *imago dei*, through the outpouring of the Gift of the Holy Spirit, the bond of love. It is a process of *theosis*. Persons-in-communion are drawn into the perichoretic dynamic love relationship of the Trinity.¹⁵⁹

Grenz discerns in First and Second Testaments that all four “loves” - “eros,” “philia,” “storge,” and superlatively “agape,” characterise the Trinitarian relationship. This is a further indication of the depth available in human correspondence with God. While agapic love is primary, all four loves are expressed in the ecclesial self. Grenz believes that because “the *imago dei* is Christ and by extension the new humanity . . . the church emerges as in the New Testament as an even more foundational exemplar of the *imago dei* in this penultimate age.”¹⁶⁰ We have noted that this for Griffiths is the Church as the communion of the Spirit. It is not the divided institutional church. He seriously questions whether the Roman Church institution in its present state will survive.¹⁶¹

A Trinitarian/anthropological approach has been shown to be very significant for new insight into the *imago dei*. It sustains an image that is symbolic of both one and many. John Zizioulas’ approach today supports Bede Griffiths’ vision and Beatrice Bruteau’s articulation of the *imago*. He sees the created order grounded in the transcendent Reality as its source and destiny:

By pervading the world through the person of the divine *Logos*, God not only unites it to (Godself) while maintaining (the divine) otherness, but at the same time brings about and sustains a world existing simultaneously as communion and otherness in all its parts, from the greatest to the smallest, from the galaxies to the simplest particle of matter.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Grenz, 313, cites Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1939), 106.

¹⁵⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 232. Here, Griffiths points out the importance of this for interreligious dialogue as it “links . . . immediately with the Indian tradition.”

¹⁶⁰ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God*, 303.

¹⁶¹ Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 254. For the relevant quote, see my Appendix 1, 313.

¹⁶² John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 32.

For Bede, this unity in distinction means the experience of the ultimate truth is different for each person. Each person is:

a unique reflection of the one eternal light and love . . . Each is a unique expression of God, a unique manifestation of the divine, and each is in all and all are in each.¹⁶³

However, the radical fullness of the *imago dei* still promises an experience of total unity, and the utter freedom and privilege “to behold the glory of God, to see the face of God, to share in the divine being, to be ‘one with the Father’”.¹⁶⁴ While to know “that Great Person” means an intimate familial relationship of simultaneously knowing one another and beholding every detail of creation, humanity’s oneness is its “deepest reality”:

We must never forget that in its deepest reality all humanity is one being, just as the whole of creation is one being. As St Gregory of Nyssa . . . proclaimed, “All . . . from the first to the last . . . are one image of the (One) Who Is.”¹⁶⁵

Conclusion

In this exploration of a crucial image which Griffiths uses, the *imago Dei*, I find that the perennial philosophy together with the evolutionary process in history hold the promise of a new way of being, a new consciousness that is profoundly integrative. It is intended for all humanity and by extension for all creation and the integration of East and West is the logical, necessary preliminary step. Like the perennial philosophy, the *imago* evolves over time and is an interweaving of experiential and conceptual aspects which on relational, universal grounds demand dialogical articulation.

Griffiths’ understanding of the radical fullness of the *imago dei* is the goal to which the new consciousness directs. Those in community who have achieved a new level of being which itself assumes the perennial philosophy will take leadership roles in the service of a new humanity in the process of becoming *imago dei*, a communion of persons in love within a Trinitarian schema. Small contemplative communities are essential. Finally, any world *community* based in such a consciousness will more and more resonate a unique

¹⁶³ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, 253.

¹⁶⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 138.

¹⁶⁵ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 106.

justice/equality, balance and harmony, centred in humility. Such a way of being is itself dependant on “integral knowledge” which assumes the integration of the rational and the intuitive, the “marriage of East and West.” This necessarily leads us to explore the third of Bede Griffiths’ images, namely, the “Divine Feminine.”

Chapter 7

Divine Feminine

Women are suppressed really in our culture. And, until that changes, we can't change the situation. Until we have a Mother God, too.¹

Perhaps it is only when we have begun to recognize God as Mother that woman will find her rightful place in the Church.²

Introduction

The Thesis has proposed the overarching image of “journey” evoked by “Christ the Golden String” and indicates how “a pilgrim God with a pilgrim people” is basic to Bede’s theology.³ It explores images of God which are found couched in the journey image in Bede’s books and talks in which a theology of complementarity develops through what we can now name as a hermeneutic of encounter.⁴

For the image of God as “Divine Host, outpouring generative love” in regard to the Hindu tradition, we drew heavily on Griffiths’ familiarity with the *Vedas*. The image emphasises Love-in-relationship as the One, the source of all. For the *imago dei*, we turned to *A New Vision of Reality*. The image represents the insight of humankind in communion

¹ From “Conversation with Bede Griffiths,” 9 November 1990, Hundred Acres Monastery, New Boston, NH. Taped conversation. See Tape 1, side A, August 8. Available in the Berkeley Griffiths Archives.

² Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 171.

³ In *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue*, Judson Trapnell carefully delineates the different stages of this journey as it affects Griffiths’ changing attitudes to his faith and his beliefs, deepens his insight into the divine life and effects a final personal integration.

⁴ Griffiths’ earlier theology of fulfillment is evident in his letter to Peter Anson, dated 6 January 1957 and written from Shantivanam, “We have not come to convert Hindus to Christianity (i.e. to a western religion) but to reveal Christ to them as the fulfillment of their own religion.” Judson Trapnell who followed Griffiths’ development from a theology of fulfillment to a theology of complementarity in his 1993 doctoral thesis, *Bede Griffiths’ theory of religious symbol and practice of dialogue: towards interreligious understanding*, found his starting point in the work of Jesu Rajan in his interview with Griffiths who himself owned this development, “. . . before the Second Vatican Council . . . I, like most others, held this fulfillment theory. Mind you, there is a certain truth in it. . . . Since that time I have adopted the complementarity theory, that all religions are complementary, that each has its own character. I would say honestly that to me there is a fullness and finality in Christ which I don’t find in others, But (sic) I wouldn’t press that on the Hindus obviously. I would rather simply emphasize the distinctive character of the Christian revelation of Christ . . . as the Word of God made flesh.” Bede Griffiths, in Rajan, *Bede Griffiths and Sanyassa*, 246, 247.

growing into the fullness of the *imago*. It is most profoundly incarnational and Trinitarian. The next of Bede's images of God we explore is the "Divine Feminine." While it is an undercurrent in all his work, and especially prominent in *The Marriage of East and West*, we refer also to the earlier *Return to the Centre*, Griffiths' commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* - the *River of Compassion*, and his final major work - *A New Vision of Reality*, along with associated biographies, letters and talks. From these sources, we will examine Bede's concern that representation of the divine feminine is vital for the well-being and destiny of humankind and for the whole world. The chapter sections listed below reflect this import:

1. Background Issues
2. The Emergence of the Image
3. Context: the Divine Feminine East and West
4. The Divine Feminine in Griffiths' Hindu/Christian Dialogue
5. The Divine Feminine and Symbolic Language
6. The Divine Feminine and the Movement into Integral Wisdom

1. Background Issues

The chapter brings together a number of associated threads: Griffiths' integrative experiences of the feminine, which involve his own personal relationships; the issue of gender terminology and related categories; the influence of Ken Wilber, Teilhard de Chardin and Seyyed Hossein Nassr; the Trinitarian schema in both Christian and Hindu traditions; levels of consciousness; repression of the feminine and the instigation of patriarchy; and an appeal for appropriate symbolic language for the necessary movement to integral wisdom.

Because Bede emphasises knowledge of God by participation through successive shift and unfolding, the right balance of the masculine and feminine principles is vital. For him, "Jesus is the supreme symbol in which the divine is as fully present as it can be to a human being." The cross as symbol is the means of transformation which is perfectly represented in the Eucharist. He understands Jesus' death as the breaking of the ego and movement into non-duality:

That's the real symbol of the cross . . . the resurrection is the key to everything . . . total presence (to all) and to the world.

It involves a transcendence of the rational mind and access to the intuitive mind which sees the whole in every part. The integration which Jesus exemplifies is necessary and Bede reflects, "Women are suppressed really in our culture. And until that changes we can't change the situation. Until we have a Mother God, too . . ." ⁵

He struggles with three related areas, one being the effort to reconcile an evolutionary process and the need to return to what he sees as the original unity of Eden; another, the particular gender stereotypes which he recognises and seeks to avoid; ⁶ and the longing to integrate the masculine/feminine principles in his own person.

From the start, Griffiths' interest in relationship was evident and persisted as the "glue" in the living communities he led and founded. Indeed we find that at especially formative times in his life personal relationships are integral. The "new consciousness" that Bede claims is on offer in present times demands a recognition of body, soul and spirit and the integration of these aspects of human reality together with personal transparency and mutual love that must be the basis of Christian community. It insists on the integration of male and female principles in all realms of life along with the recognition of the equality of men and women particularly in areas of decision-making that influence life on this planet whether in secular or religious domains. This is however, especially vital in terms of leadership roles and shared decision-making in the Church. Bede's thought, with a continuing focus on process, ⁷ brings together emphases on Trinity and Incarnation in a way that is comparable with feminist theology. The ongoing development of all these related ideas throughout his life clearly demonstrates his belief that the image of the divine Feminine has profound implications for life in general.

⁵ The quotations in this paragraph are taken from Trapnell's interview with Bede in Waitsfield, Vermont, 8 August 1992. (August 8, Tape 1, side A)

⁶ A certain weakness in Griffiths' correlation of the categories of "Eastern" and "Western" with feminine and masculine, intuitive and rational have, Trapnell points out, been identified by Christians, Hindus, and scholars of religion. Nevertheless, with Trapnell, we respect Griffiths' accomplishment in the brevity of one life-span and his unique contribution as "culture bearer." In Judson Trapnell, *A Life in Dialogue*, 199, 120.

⁷ Griffiths says, "That to me is the Great Principle: to allow things to grow." Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths*, 112, citing Swindells, *Human Search*, 79.

I have described Griffiths' hermeneutic of encounter and my own method respects this way of exploration. The argument finds support in Ken Wilber who, like Lonergan and Rahner, points out that "thought is itself a movement of that which it seeks to know."⁸

We take the opportunity here to trace Griffiths' attitude of exploration that is basic to the theme of journey from his monastic life in England. For twenty years, although in retrospect he is very grateful for the experience of communal meditation, he says a method for real meditation and contemplation was lacking. He points out that the *Lectio Devina* was beautiful but not properly-speaking contemplative.⁹ He travels from the monastery in England to initiate and develop monastic ashrams in India and thence to the Christian monastic ashram of Osage. This journey is also one of continuing encounter with the Feminine. It is poignant that he is finally brought back to Osage where the influence of the native-American spirituality is manifest.¹⁰ There is an emphasis here on organic relationship

⁸ In *A Brief History of Everything*, Wilber pointing to Hegel, refers to the integrative reality of the three worlds, of cosmos, nature and noosphere (Kosmos) involved in the processes of consciousness. In this respect, Postmodern thought rejects the Modernist objectification because, "the mapmaker, the self, the thinking and knowing subject, is actually a product and performance of that which it seeks to know and represent."⁹⁶ Wilber goes further, however, critiquing Postmodernism as also misled through a continuation of the movement of "Descent" in disregard for or even contemptuous of the Ultimate Unity, the wholly transcendent One.

⁹ We need to acknowledge a different context today in English Benedictine monasteries when we read Griffiths' words, "As a Benedictine monk in England for twenty years, I never discovered it (pure prayer beyond words and thought)." From the John Main Seminar, New Harmony Indiana, 1991, *The New Creation in Christ*, "The Monastic Ideal According to John Main". Also, Tape 2, "The Extension of the Monastic Life to the Laity." Our talks with the Abbots of Prinknash and Pluscarden monasteries established the existence today of regular practice at all levels of interreligious dialogue and especially an Eastern form of meditation. MID, Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, is integral now in the monasteries but there is no doubt it was greatly advanced through the ground-breaking initiative of Bede and also of Monchanin and le Saux, as well as John Main, Freeman, Merton and Keating. However, at our meeting at Prinknash, in 2002, as shown in my DVD "Contemplative Pilgrimage," Abbot Aldhelm stated that Bede had the greatest influence and contributed the most to their understanding of interreligious dialogue.

¹⁰ From Vermont, August 17, 1992, Griffiths writes to Pascaline, "I don't think I have ever enjoyed so much solitude and silence (at Osage) . . . I see more clearly how we have to interpret the Bible in the context of this cosmic revelation, (sic) which is found also among the American Indians and the Australian aborigines. The great difference is that God and the world, good and evil, right and wrong are seen as relative opposites, which are transcended in the non-dual vision of reality. So we always come back to *advaita!*" The symbolic Sundance Circle which is a feature of the worship space at Osage Monastery in Oklahoma represents a spiritual insight of the Osage native American tribe from this region.

The circle and the rituals associated with it were centred in a cosmic spirituality that was what Levi-Strauss names as a "cold society". This special "wisdom" that works for the preservation of their identity "keeps history out." The way the opening of the circle of tepees is changed such that the hold of a linear history is broken enables them exchange with what they understand as the larger more complex order of the cosmos. For the Osage, the tepee circle embodies the entire tangible bodily

expressed in the monastery plan, building style and worship space. It is highly significant that he sees the journey to God in terms of evolutionary process. The hierarchy is one not of higher steps with consequent devaluing of lower forms but of greater complexification¹¹ and inclusion through recapitulation and cyclic return, so that the movement is more in the sense of a helix, if we take a Trinitarian perspective – a triple helix.¹² The process integrates prior forms into greater complexity of form through the order of service. Griffiths increasingly looked to Ken Wilber for clarification of his own thought and so we will explore Wilber's transpersonal view of human evolution for the thesis' purpose.

We also refer to Seyyed Hossein Nassr's, *Knowledge and the Sacred*.¹³ This is a work of commendable authoritative research and its central thesis – the need for a retrieval of the perennial philosophy is clearly what most impresses Griffiths. However, he would not support all of Nassr's sentiments, for example, the denigration of the thought of Teilhard de

world, from the stars right down to the insects crawling in the grass: comets, clouds, swarms of pigeons, herds of buffalo, yellow coneflowers, pipes of peace, the spirits of the dead, grains of hail, corn bread, wooden bowls, moccasins, human songs, and so on to infinity. . . . The tepee ring consists of 24 small groups, the so-called We-gatche or fire-places of which 3x7 had descended from heaven in primeval times, while three earth-born ones had been added on later. All 24 fire-places are laid out in a circle to make the tent circle. Every group has its own special location, its place in the "world" which has been fixed once and for all. If any group were to put their tepee elsewhere, the camp police would intervene with drastic methods to teach them their true place in the cosmos. Thus the We-gatche serve as the building blocks of the universe.

Levi Strauss, in Jan Assman, *Religion and Cultural Memor: ten studies*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Online book (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006, accessed 22 July 2009), 12. Available from http://books.google.com.au/books?id=U9M5I6D-WyYC&pg=PA12&lpg=PA12&dq=osage+sundance+circle&source=bl&ots=5oT7Ib84VK&sig=LrnZ4sVnGuQQ7x0FbNJRuq-olEg&hl=en&ei=n_0-StXAKpLq7APJvPSSAg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=10. Osage belief can be compared with aspects of the Hindu tradition such as the *mahat*.

¹¹ As Wilber points out, this is Teilhard de Chardin's expression. In *Up from Eden*, 68, Wilber refers further to Pere Teilhard's use of Huxley's expression, "in (humankind) evolution became conscious of itself." See Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden, A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 120.

¹² Similarly, Elizabeth Johnson, suggests that whereas Walter Kasper can describe Classical Trinitarian theology of the West as a straight line, of the East as a triangle or circle, the triple helix taken from our present knowledge of biology is a better image for the Trinity, "The strands of the helix do not originate from each other but are simply there together, not statically but moving in a dance of separation and recombination which creates new person. The image of a triple helix intensifies this life-giving movement . . . connotes the unfathomable richness of holy triune mystery, inwardly related as a unity of equal movements, each of whom is distinct and all of whom together are one source of life, new just order, and quickening surprise in an infinite mix." In Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 221.

¹³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, from the Gifford 1981 lectures, Online book (Albany: New York Press, 1989, accessed 6 May 2009); available from <http://www.giffordlectures.org/Browse.asp?PubID=TPKATS&Cover=TRUE> ; Internet.

Chardin. Our exploration of the divine Feminine will include the question of how Griffiths can find support in both Nassr and Teilhard; and also why Nassr censures Teilhard de Chardin's perspective on evolution.¹⁴

2. The Emergence of the Image

From his student life, Griffiths' expresses extreme dissatisfaction with industrialisation and the narrow confines of modernity for which he holds Western thought and patriarchy responsible. Taking into consideration the driving focus in his monastic life, which is the integration of feminine and masculine and the marriage of East and West, and his personal longing "to find the other half of my soul," it is perhaps not surprising that a female influence is pronounced in each major transition period. Although there are others (such as Toni Sussman), we present five women who are particularly instrumental in his journey of experience of the divine Feminine; separately they represent stages in his journey of integration and self-transcendence towards the experience of *advaita*.

The first is Bede's mother who represents the ideal and the vulnerability of married life. While his father was in a sense "absent," growing up with his siblings was, because of her faith and steadfast love and loyalty, his first enduring experience of real Christian community.

In 1980, in the Epilogue to the second edition of *The Golden String*, Griffiths writes: "It is only if we are prepared to give ourselves totally in love that Love will give itself totally to us." His life is witness that such complete self-giving first intimated to him by his mother's life is hard come-by, part of an arduous journey and happens in a process where opening up to the Self within the dynamic of Christian community is hindered by unexpected obstacles both within and without. A devotee of Shakespeare, he says, "The basis of all love is self-sacrifice . . . this is why all romantic love when it is realistic is tragic . . .

¹⁴De Chardin's essay in "the Prayer of the Universe" which later was developed into his work *Le Milieu Divin* does not declare him to be an atheist. Rather it shows someone engrossed in the revelation of God immanent in the world and the universe, who has explored the details of this immanence diligently guided by his science background and who in a spirit of awe and wonder feels that should all symbols fail, what he knows as the world profoundly permeated by the Spirit that is bringing it to maturity will endure for him. Towards the end of his life after his integrative experience (the stroke) in the letter from Shantivanam of June 8th, 1990, to Pascaline and Eleanor, Griffiths professes a similar faith.

.¹⁵ For him, full recognition of and immersion in this self-giving Love which in Christ “revealed itself in an agony of self-surrender on the Cross”¹⁶ came in 1991, only two years before his death.

During his childhood, enforced poverty motivated his family’s shift to Hampshire which for the four children turned out a happy misfortune.¹⁷ The close relationship with his mother that the boy Alan as the youngest had enjoyed from the start becomes very clear at the time of her tragic death. The “special affection for him” increased with his earlier plan for ordination in the Church of England and was “the cause of great joy.”¹⁸ Later, however, his conversion to Catholicism he knew would “give pain” to her and he notes sadly that after his reception into the Church, on Christmas Eve, 1931, they were “separated not only in space but also in thought.” Shortly after his final profession as a Benedictine monk, in December 1937, came the tragic road accident from which she never recovered consciousness. Prayer brought the conviction of their being united in a way beyond all the accidents of material existence. He describes an “inner centre . . . source of all life and activity and of all love . . . a love beyond time and change”¹⁹

Some years before the death of his mother during the period of his conversion to Catholicism,²⁰ when he had retreated again to the Cotswolds he had briefly contemplated marriage. He met a South African woman, Barbara Millard, with whom he formed a lasting friendship. They decided against marriage but their friendship remained deep enough for Griffiths to promise at her departure for home that they would forever be united. While she married soon after, this conviction remained even though her sudden death from a riding accident sometime round the end of his novitiate brought an end to three years of correspondence with her.²¹

While Griffiths can be seen at this stage drawing love into the realm of the eternal, he is nevertheless frustrated that he is still constrained in his attempt to bridge in himself

¹⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 142.

¹⁶ Bede Griffiths, Epilogue to *The Golden String*, 1980 edition, 188.

¹⁷ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 19. The shift provided them with fresh sea air, an uncluttered life-style and the exercise of domesticity and affection with their prayerful, hard-working mother who was demonstrably ambitious for her children.

¹⁸ *Golden String*, 99.

¹⁹ *Golden String*, 146.

²⁰ This was round September, 1931.

²¹ This was in 1933/34. Griffiths had a longer than usual novitiate - one year instead of six months - due to his recent conversion to Catholicism. In Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 119.

what he regards as the Western dominant “masculine” rational mind and the “feminine” Eastern intuitive mind which he believes has greater insight into sensory experience and the way to wholeness. He judges industrialisation, as being the fruit of the Western, masculine mind, destructive of the organic whole, relationship and beauty.²² At this time he distinguishes between the life of a hermit and that of a solitary and rejects the former. Traditionally, the life of the hermit means the seclusion of the *eremos*, it is specific to place and furthermore resists human commerce of all kinds; the “solitary” life does not necessarily preclude either. The contemplative reality may be held within as an interior “space,” a state maintained and advanced by a regular personal prayer life from which flows the constant awareness of relationship with the transcendent other which pervades, enhances and adds tone to all other states of awareness. That Griffiths closely identified with this second way of being becomes more explicit in *Shantivanam* and is represented by the adoption of the Christian Ashram by the Benedictine Camaldolese congregation at the end of his life. Without this dimension in his life, the Orient would have remained a distant horizon.

He describes the unexpected surprise, the shock to his senses that India brings. It does not dismay or disgust him. Rather, he is enthralled by the natural sensuousness of the people and the village scenes which he understands as a grace. It seems to him as a beautiful, colourful garden. He understands such grace and freedom of movement derives from men and women living “from the anima as opposed to the animus,” under the influence of the feminine principle rather than the reverse as in the West. In his first impressions of India, Griffiths speaks with a certain revulsion of the grafting of Western Christian ways onto the Indian soul: “To think of those lovely people, with all the grace of their naked bodies and their exquisite saris . . . being forced into Victorian pews!” and also of grace expressed in beauty of form and movement: “What grace there is in everything! The dignity of the human form, the beauty of the women, (their saris are still the loveliest thing I have seen).”²³ The experience frees him from a felt rigidity and provides him with

²² Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 8, 9. Griffiths refers here to Karl Jung and his designation of the “unconscious” as the feminine “anima.”

²³ In “Bede Griffiths and the Indian Foundation”, “Third Installment,” 10 July 1955 and also from the “First Installment,” Bangalore, 17 April 1955. Thomas Matus, OSB Cam. suggests that “although Bede admitted to having repressed his sexual instincts as a young adult, his fondness then and later for the erotic themes in D. H. Lawrence’s fiction and poetry betrayed his fascination with the male-

deeper insight into the Jesus of the Gospels, his sayings, parables and miracles that are so connected with ordinary village life. He assumes a deeper poverty than ever anticipated and finds in the experience, joy and peace, a unique beatitude.

Later, in 1973 when Bede was 67, 17 years after his entry to India, and five years after he arrived in Shantivanam Ashram, an English nurse, Judy Walter came as a visitor. She became a close friend and confidante to Bede, visiting the Ashram a number of times until his death twenty years on. Griffiths trusted Judy to transcribe and document his personal feelings and spiritual insights. She was with him at the time of his stroke, and later during his convalescence at Kodaikanal he asked her to write down the prophetic dreams he had had relating to that *advaitic* experience. She also treasured and protected the relationship of intimate communion that developed between Bede, and Asha and Russill Paul de Silva.²⁴ She was helper and healer, sister and friend who supported him as he negotiated the process of personal integration during the last stage of his life's journey.

Asha Muthayah had arrived in Shantivanam in 1986. In her Griffiths discovered "the archetype of the feminine which I can love."²⁵ There developed such a profoundly loving relationship among Bede, Asha and Russill that Griffiths "likened it to the Trinity" and it certainly entailed for him an investment of profound and passionate emotion.²⁶ The friendship had undergone a searing trial when, completely without foundation, innuendo and accusations were levelled at Bede and Russill.²⁷ In point of fact, Bede's statement in defence attests to the depth of his growing awareness of the kind of integrative power available in the life of the Spirit in Christian community where *komunio* is enacted:

In regard to this I can only say that in all our relationship I cannot remember a single word or look or gesture which indicated any such feeling . . . For me this has been the realisation that it is possible to experience love in the most intimate sense in the depths of one's being, where we are totally open to God and to God's love in our hearts. There is no doubt that it is

female archetype." *Bede Griffiths, Essential Writings, Selected with an Introduction by Thomas Matus* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 74.

²⁴ Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 219-261. Russill had arrived in Shantivanam in 1984 as a nineteen year old postulant and his and Griffith's friendship was in Bede's words as "loving father and brother and friend in Christ." Utterly without basis, accusations of an inappropriate relationship injured Bede and to his great distress, drove Russill and Asha away from the ashram. *Beyond the Darkness*, 222, 223.

²⁵ Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 236. Bede Griffiths in a letter to Russill Paul, 14 February, 1990.

²⁶ Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 226. BG in a letter to RP, Asha and Wayne Teasdale, 3 June 1990.

²⁷ Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 222.

a human love involving one's whole being – body, soul and spirit – and I have no doubt that there is a sexual element in it, as there is certainly a deep human affection. But the source of this love is in the “spirit,” the point at which we are both open to the love of God and this is the controlling force in our relationship.²⁸

Nevertheless, in the midst of Griffiths' hurt and distress, Asha and Russill departed Shantivanam. However, with their marriage and in further meetings in community both in India and California, the friendship continued to flourish. With this privileged relationship Griffiths' attitude towards sex and marriage had changed. He no longer saw marriage as secondary or inferior to the celibate state and it is round this time that he begins to focus intensely on the idea of a contemplative community for both lay and religious. He says to Asha and Russill, “I feel today that many if not more people find God in marriage than in celibacy. Your own example has had a great influence on me.”²⁹

However, it is Sister Pascaline Coff, a member of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration who is credited with taking Griffiths' dream of the lay contemplative community to fruition. Pascaline spent the year of 1976 at Shantivanam ashram where she conceived the idea of founding a monastic ashram along the same lines as that in Tamil Nadu. Later on, providentially, Griffiths was in Sand Springs, Oklahoma in 1978 to bless the forty acres of land that had recently been purchased and significantly to present to the newly emerging community a gift of a bronze *Nataraja*, the Hindu “dancing Shiva” that is in Bede's eyes, symbolic of the resurrection. Bede Griffiths and Pascaline Coff nurtured a friendship centred in their shared vision for lay contemplative communities and contemplative life generally with the gift it promised for full depth of human integration. Their friendship was reflected in an extraordinary correspondence over seventeen years. Significantly, with Pascaline, Griffiths shared deep theological concerns especially in regard to Church structure³⁰ which he believed to be entirely patriarchal and opposed to the movement into the next level of

²⁸ Bede Griffiths' “Statement,” in Shirley du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 223.

²⁹ Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 224. BG, letter to RP and Asha, 15 February 1991.

³⁰ Griffiths was very uncomfortable with controversy – “I am not at all keen on controversy, and would rather not indulge in it in the future . . .” he wrote to Peter Anson from Kerala in Autumn 1957, in response to a difference over an article Griffiths had published in Pax. Much later, in 1990, he found the changes being wrought in his attitudes to Church dogma and doctrine “disturbing . . . I never know what is going to collapse next.” In regard to new convictions, he says, “I have decided not to publish in my life-time. I don't want to be involved in controversy. I will say all I want to you and Wayne and others and leave it all to be published, if necessary, after my death.” Letter to Sisters Pascaline and Eleanor, from Shantivanam, 8 June 1990.

consciousness. The problems for women in the Church he saw as being profoundly related to a neglect of the feminine in God.³¹

In August of 1991, during a stay with Russill, Asha and Wayne Teasdale in California, Bede, Russill and Asha visited Osage Monastery. By this time, principally through the assiduous planning of Pascaline and under the spiritual guidance of Griffiths via their regular correspondence, the monastic ashram had been established. Reflecting on their stay, Griffiths remarked on its being the most peaceful and restful place which afforded him complete solitude.³² That the monastery is operating today³³ and known as “the Shantivanam of the West” true to its first inspiration and has been carefully passed into lay ownership attests to the spiritual depth of Sr Pascaline’s and Bede’s friendship.

Although we agree with Shirley du Boulay’s surmise that there is a “connection between Bede’s dramatic discovery of the feminine and his loving relationship with Russill and Asha”³⁴ I believe his experience of being “overwhelmed” by “the feminine,” an experience of personal integration leading most profoundly to that of *advaita*, is also connected to the other relationships Bede shared with special women on his life’s journey as described above. I suggest that on account of his trust in the movement of the Holy Spirit, Bede’s theological openness to exploration and encounter with the possibility/risk of change, in the journey towards that which is always “beyond” ensured his own personal integration. This also has bearing on his and Wilber’s belief that self-transcendence, growth towards God, necessitates a turning away from the control of the ego and opening to the intuitive power of the higher intellect, Loyola’s “fine point of the soul.”

While I would avoid an arbitrary interpretation, I suggest there are real stages of holistic development through these special relationships. As already noted, with his mother and Barbara Millard, Bede experiences the spiritual depth of human love and companionship; Judy Walter inspires confidence, intimacy and nurture, a further insight into the divine feminine; Asha and Russill represent a robust archetypal harmony and balance which allows for full human extension; Pascaline represents the male/female participation

³¹ Bede Griffiths’ Letter to Pascaline Coff, 15 April 1990. Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 233.

³² Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 250.

³³ At this point, Osage Monastery is in a transition period. Ownership has passed to the Benedictine Oblates of the Deanery of Osage that belongs to the Mother House of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration of Clyde. It comes under neither Diocesan nor Camaldolese jurisdiction. Sr Pascaline Coff remains in residence to guide the monastic ashram through the period of transition ensuring that it remains true to Dom Bede’s spirit.

³⁴ Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 236.

in co-creation within the universal. The whole of this unified and yet sexually differentiated life-experience is held within *kommunio*, the self-giving human community of the Holy Spirit with the promise of personal fulfillment through integration of different levels of consciousness. The final culmination of the vision for the whole of humanity and the cosmos is revealed in Christ. Here, trust is essential.

Bede believed that the Christian way of “ecstasy of love leads to the supreme wisdom, to the discovery of the depth of the self, no longer in isolation, but in communion of love, for which it was created.”³⁵ One may conclude that the relationships described contributed in no small way to such a realization which occurred towards the end of his own life.

3. Context: The Divine Feminine East and West

Griffiths’ *advaitic* experience two years before his death, he understands as a goal for humankind as a whole. He had explored this idea in the *The Marriage of East and West, The Sequel to the Golden String*. Written in 1982, nearly 20 years after his arrival in India, it is a synthesis of his thought to this point. It continues the journey he began drawn by Christ to India. For him this was “a new era . . . opening up a new horizon.”³⁶ I have emphasized Griffiths’ identification of “the masculine” as characteristic of Western ways. He regards this as a centering in the rational mind, the active, aggressive power of the mind. In contrast, “the feminine” he sees as characteristic of “Eastern” ways - a centering in the intuitive mind, the passive, sympathetic power of the mind; the future of humankind and the whole world depending on a “marriage” of these principles or powers. To him, this is the challenge, the opportunity and the duty of our present age.³⁷ Bede says:

³⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 161,162.

³⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 7.

³⁷ In *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue*, Judson Trapnell steers clear of Griffiths’ designations of masculine and feminine principles. He mentions Griffiths’ cry of being “overwhelmed by love” after “surrendering to the Mother,” which is impossible to avoid. However, he cautions that Griffiths categories of “East” and “West” being associated with “the correlates of feminine and masculine, intuitive and rational . . . no doubt strike many as radically simplistic.” He adds that Bede’s was a “risk-laden strategy, provoking legitimate concerns.” Trapnell concludes that this in no way detracts from what he considers is Griffiths’ greatest accomplishment – that of “culture bearer” in a new movement into global dialogue. Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths*, 8,199.

We've reached the limit of the *yang* and the *yin*, the feminine principle is beginning to take over. We need to form smaller communities, where we bring the scientific mind . . . a holistic science relates to the cosmos, nature and fellow human beings.³⁸

Because he is first and foremost a Benedictine monk and furthermore a *sannyasi*, the longing for personal integration was attached to this vision, the path of love leading to union with the Divine just as for all humanity there will be unity with all creation and ultimate fullness in the One who is Love in relationship. Nevertheless, although he lives in India, as a *sannyasi*, in a Christian ashram and is involved in the dialogue of life, cultural exchange and interreligious theological exchange, his books are written mainly for a Western audience.³⁹ This is not to deny an equal intent to contribute something of value to India.⁴⁰ To advance the goal of humankind's journey he shares his exploration and experience of Indian religious tradition and spirituality in order to recommend to his listeners and readers through comparison of Western and Eastern symbols a God who is One yet all, who is not masculine or feminine yet both, not in an androgynous way but in the wholly transcendent infinite sense of One yet many. This last point will be further developed.

Griffiths understands "intuition," "the feminine power of the mind" as distinct from "reason."⁴¹ He associates reason with the rational system of St Thomas Aquinas and with Western science still firmly based in Greek and scholastic philosophy. On the other hand intuition and the power of self-reflection are a source of knowledge not accessible by empirical method. This particular self-awareness is a special kind of consciousness which Griffiths finds best described in Jacques Maritain's *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* as being "beneath the sunlit surface of the mind,"⁴² that degree or state of consciousness where dreams and images take shape. To plumb the depths of this subliminal consciousness, which is a peculiarly age-old Eastern tradition, is the way to Self-realisation:

³⁸ Bede Griffiths in an interview with Michael Toms, 1994. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust, Osage Monastery.

³⁹ Trapnell affirms this. *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue*, 126.

⁴⁰ For example he and Francis Mahieu endeavoured to adapt the Liturgy of the Indian Church to the needs of the Indian people.

⁴¹ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 152.

⁴² Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 154. This image is quoted by Bede from Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, 94.

If we can get into the unconscious, we can unfold it. . . . The whole of the universe is in each one of us. The whole of humanity is in each one of us.⁴³

It can also be described as the “passive intellect,” compared with the rational “active intellect.” The self-awareness of the subliminal consciousness affects the whole of one’s being. Bede says “the experience of the mystic” happens in “the culminating point of body and of soul” according to “the way of intuitive wisdom” which attends to the whole experience, in Trapnell’s words, “the physical, emotional, imaginative, rational, fiducial, and contemplative” levels.⁴⁴ For Griffiths, “Intuition, then, is the knowledge of the passive intellect” which is the “active passivity” described as traditional Chinese *wu wei*, or action in inaction and it is characterised by receptivity and attentiveness. Griffiths points to this intuitive wisdom as described in the *Tao Te Ching* as, “the Spirit of the Valley” and “the Mystic Female,” and he recognises it in Wordsworth’s “feeling intellect” that leads to his description of poetry as “emotions recollected in tranquility.” Here, it “arises in the emotions and ascends to the level of the intellect, where it is . . . gathered into unity and given meaning.” With this “intuition” therefore, or the self-reflection of the passive intellect, there is bodily, psychological and mental awareness that is integrative and which finds expression “in images and symbols, in dance and song, and beyond this in ritual sacrifice, in prayer and ecstasy.”⁴⁵

Although the intuitive intellect that is associated with “the feminine” is beyond the rational mind that is associated with “the masculine,” Griffiths says, “the values of the scientific mind must not be lost, but they need to be integrated in the wider vision of the intuitive mind.”⁴⁶ Ultimately, “reason itself is taken up into the intuitive mind . . . and reason itself becomes intuitive.”⁴⁷ In this state of complete integration and awareness “the soul knows itself, not merely in its living relation with the world around or with other human beings, but in its eternal ground, the source of its being.”⁴⁸

A certain weakness in Griffiths’ correlation of the categories of “Eastern” and “Western” with feminine and masculine, intuitive and rational have been identified by

⁴³ Bede Griffiths, “Christianity and the New Science.” Available from the Bede Griffiths’ Trust.

⁴⁴ Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life*, 138.

⁴⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 150 – 171.

⁴⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 165

⁴⁷ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 154 – 166.

⁴⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 199. Intuition also includes “the hidden germ” as described below.

Christians, Hindus, and scholars of religion.⁴⁹ Apart from the fact that communication of the profundity of Griffiths' vision of synthesis is hampered at times by his method there is, however, the particular contribution that Trapnell details. Respecting Griffiths' accomplishment in the brevity of one life-span and his unique contribution as "culture bearer" we hope to extend his own insight with further clarification.⁵⁰

Firstly, a "marriage" is in his terms crucial. "In every person the marriage of the male and female has to take place."⁵¹ Griffiths concludes with what amounts to an indictment of Western patriarchy:

When humankind refuses to recognize the feminine aspect in itself, it despises or exploits woman and exalts reason over intuition, science over art, man over nature, the white races with their dominant reason over the coloured peoples with their intuitive feeling and imagination. This has been the course of Western civilization over the past centuries . . . the values of the scientific mind must not be lost, but they need to be integrated in the wider vision of the intuitive mind.⁵²

For Griffiths, properly speaking the whole process is evolutionary. For Reality expressed as multiplicity, he assumes the Hindu feminine symbol, *sakti* which ultimately must go through a process of transformation in a marriage with *Siva*, "the ultimate reality beyond name and form, who is one with the Brahman, the absolute truth and the final good."⁵³ Matter, the evolving world of multiplicity,

has to go through various stages of evolution before it can be capable of life; and again life has to go through many phases of development before it can become conscious; so finally consciousness has to develop through sense, through feeling, through the imagination, through reason before it can become fully conscious of that being which is the source of matter, of life and of consciousness. But the hidden germ of intuition, of receptivity was present from the beginning, and the ultimate mystical experience is only the flower of that intuition which was hidden in the root of matter.⁵⁴

Human mystical experience, rather than being exceptional, is a precocious flowering of that which is inherently human.

⁴⁹ Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life*, 199, 120.

⁵⁰ Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths*, 199, 120.

⁵¹ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 165.

⁵² Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 165. (Recognisable here is the kind of arbitrary categorization for which Griffiths has been censured.)

⁵³ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 82. Here, Griffiths quotes from the Tamil Poem, *Tirumandiram*, "the ignorant think that Siva and Love (*anbu*) are two; they do not know that Siva is love." Griffiths cites *The Love of God in Saiva Siddhanta* by M. Dhavamony (OUP, 1971), Part 3.1b.

⁵⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 170.

Griffiths' experience and reflection led him to depend on the work of the transpersonal psychologist, Ken Wilber. It provided a basis for working at a synthesis of Christian myth and evolutionary theory. I include an extensive section on Wilber here because it is the background to a groundswell of change in Griffiths' own thought. The astonishing thing is that at the ripe age of eighty or so, Bede Griffiths was open to the possibilities of change and made good his advantage.

The Question of the Fall

Wilber's research of symbols (including masculine and feminine) in various religious traditions and especially in dialogue with Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity contributes towards his thesis that an evolutionary process which involves the recapitulation of stages of human development and consciousness is the means for humanity to achieve the ultimate transcendent goal. In this, Griffiths agrees and as we have shown, finds support in Teilhard de Chardin. Of Father Teilhard, Wilber asserts that he is "a brilliant paleontologist and biologist (and theologian), [*sic*] who . . . saw evolution as a progression of life forms leading from the lowest to the highest, and *therefore* necessarily culminating in what he called the Omega Point, wherein all souls reawaken to God consciousness."⁵⁵ In particular, Wilber finds support in Hegel's idea of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis and favourably compares this with the Russian Christian mystic, Nicolas Berdyaev. Of Eden, Berdyaev says:

The myth of the Fall does not humiliate man, but extols him to wonderful heights . . . The myth of the Fall is the myth of man's greatness. . . . The world proceeds from an original absence of discrimination between good and evil (subconscious ignorance) to sharp distinction between them (self-conscious apprehension) and then, enriched by that experience, ends up by not distinguishing them any more (superconscious transcendence) [*sic*].⁵⁶

This is the position Griffiths comes to appreciate with the assistance of Wilber.

While Bede has recourse to Ken Wilber's work, he does so with a global approach to Wilber's thesis of evolution and recapitulation which both supports and refines his own argument. He does the same with Nassr. However, (along with a complete rejection of Hegelian philosophy) Nassr strongly denounces Teilhard de Chardin's evolutionary scheme and all modern approaches to evolution as neglecting and even negating the ontological. Nassr writes:

⁵⁵ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 331.

⁵⁶ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 335.

Tradition . . . is the sense of a truth which is both of divine origin and perpetuated through a major cycle of human history through both transmission and renewal of the message by means of revelation . . . closely related to the Sophia which has always been and will always be and which is perpetuated by means of both transmission horizontally and renewal vertically through contact with that reality that was “at the beginning” and is here and now.

Only to an extent would Griffiths accept this because with the Incarnation, as a Christian thinker, he would also include renewal “horizontally.”

In Griffiths’ view, the “rhythm of the universe” is centered on the Incarnation and the Resurrection. Our life comes from the Father/Mother and is manifest through the Word “into time and space.” The Spirit is the “love energy” of the universe developing and drawing everything back transformed through consciousness to their divine source. This is made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus through which event “the matter of this life was transformed.” Griffiths gathers strength for his argument from Père Teilhard’s emphasis that “union differentiates” and Beatrice Bruteau’s emphasis that we further identify ourselves in our participation in another. Both are based on the Christian understanding of “profound differentiation” that is the unity of the Trinity. A person, a “dynamism of love,”⁵⁷ becomes more his or herself (that is more and more conform to their eternal archetype) to the degree of their involvement in the universal “web of relationships.” The very process of the temporal is, therefore, the field of operation of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸ It is because of this that Griffiths believes in the depth of dialogue between faith and science into which De Chardin entered. Nassr, on the other hand, says of Teilhard:

From the traditional point of view, Teilhard represents an idolatry which marks the final phase of the desacralization of knowledge and being, the devouring of the Eternal by the temporal process, if such were to be possible.⁵⁹

⁵⁷Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 173. Even though Griffiths believes Lonergan’s treatment of symbols is “very inadequate,” he nevertheless notes with satisfaction and deep interest Lonergan’s “idea of the fourth stage . . . surrender of love.” See “Conversation with Bede Griffiths” 9 November 1990, New Boston.

⁵⁸ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 170, 171, 173, 174.

⁵⁹ Seyyed Hossein Nassr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, “Chapter Seven: Eternity and the Temporal Order”. *Knowledge and the Sacred*, from the Gifford 1981 lectures, Online book (Albany: New York Press, 1989, accessed 6 May 2009); available from <http://www.giffordlectures.org/Browse.asp?PubID=TPKATS&Cover=TRUE> ; Internet. Professor Seyyed Hossein Nassr is an Islamic Philosopher at George Washington University. His comment is by no means obtuse. While his focus is a *sappiential theosis*, he recognizes Christian mystics such as Gregory of Nyssa, the desert fathers, Clement of Alexandria and Origen and Dionysius as *sappiential* thinkers, and he promotes Erigena in recommending the world and its beauty as sacramental. He

While Griffiths would reject such a judgment, he clearly admires Nassr's scholarship and relates to his central argument that the Cartesian philosophical influence of the West, with a corresponding fading of the perennial philosophy, has dominated the world to a degree that is destructive of the ecological, psychological and social fabric of life generally.

Wilber too would find support in Nassr's critique of a loss of the sense of the transcendent. Differently from Bede, Wilber adds that the male/female differentiation is helpful at only the "provincial, stage-specific" level. Masculine and feminine categories he says can better be associated with ascending, descending directionality available in both Plato and Plotinus, and Sri Aurobindo. Here, Ascent is the transcendent movement which he calls "left hand." It is the "masculine" movement of the Spirit, the movement of Eros, wisdom, otherworldly, or (Plotinus' "Reflux") focused on the Transcendent, finding in the many the "emptiness" that veils the "One." In the East, this "wisdom" is *Prajna* that "sees that Form is emptiness." Wilber criticises the "ecophilosophers" who trace an otherworldly ethos to Plato,⁶⁰ whereas Plato actually describes the two movements of "Ascent" and "Descent". Nassr's words, "Plato as well as figures such as Pythagoras and Plotinus, must be considered as metaphysicians and seers like the *rishi* of India rather than as profane

takes exception in particular to Père Teilhard's words, "If, as the result of some interior revolution, I were to lose in succession my faith in Christ, my faith in a personal God, and my faith in spirit, I feel that I should continue to *believe* invincibly *in the world*. The world (its value, its infallibility and its goodness) - that, when all is said and done, is the first, the last, and the only thing in which I believe." This is Henderson's translation. (We describe Henderson below). Nassr's is a little different. His translation reads: "If, in consequence of some inner subversion, I should lose successively my faith in Christ, my faith in a personal God, my faith in the Spirit, it seems to me that I would continue to believe in the world. The *world*—the value, the infallibility and the goodness of the world—this *is*, in the last analysis, *the first and the only thing in which I believe*."

Griffiths' different perspective could be represented by the article, "PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN: Toward a Science charged with Faith," in Charles P. Henderson, *God and Science* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986), Chapter 5; available from <http://www.godweb.org/chardin.htm>; Internet (accessed 19 July 2010). The Presbyterian Minister, Charles P. Henderson of Princeton University, is the author of many articles and books and a founding member of CIE/the Consultation on Interfaith education.

The Catholic Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn describes how as paleontologist/theologian Teilhard has raised many people's hopes because of his view of the entire universe stamped with the character of Christ in such a way that Christ becomes the energy of the cosmos itself. "His love for Christ made him into a kind of 'mystic of evolution.'" Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, *Chance or Purpose*, Trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 141-142.

⁶⁰ Because the manifestation of this world is "Spirit's children," Plotinus accuses the Gnostics of "spiritual child-abuse." See Ken Wilber, *A Brief History of Everything* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2007), 378. For Plotinus, "All things live by the Soul *in its entirety* . . . it is all present everywhere." *A Brief History*, 381. We believe that Griffiths would not be happy with Nassr's concept of *Gnosis* as the wisdom of the *philosophia perennis* to be recovered. Nassr finds support in Guenon and Schuon both of whom Griffiths judges as having a negative philosophy towards created life.

philosophers,” further demonstrate approximation in his and Griffiths’ thought.⁶¹ Griffiths would have been very enthusiastic with the recent work of Paul Tyson who argues that “Plato was not a Platonist.”⁶² Tyson’s thesis argues that Plato represents a balance of “Ascent” and “Descent.”

The descending movement is the feminine Spirit of Agape, compassion, kindness and mercy, immanent, this-worldly, (Plotinus’ “efflux”). It is “the embrace of the many with compassion and care.” In the East, it is “Karuna” “that sees that Emptiness is Form.” The unity of Spirit is the “seamless integration and union of Ascent and Descent, Reflux and Efflux, transcendence and immanence.”⁶³ To a large extent, this agrees with Griffiths’ understanding of “integral knowledge,” the marriage of *sakti* and *Siva*, attainable through the “intuitive intellect.”⁶⁴

Wilber’s harnessing of “evolution” together with “holoarchy,”⁶⁵ and his argument for the different evolutionary perceptive stages of Kosmos,⁶⁶ provide the motive to develop

⁶¹ Ken Wilber, *A Brief History*, 376. Here again we can positively compare Nassr:

Certain Muslims have called Plato a prophet and he, as well as figures such as Pythagoras and Plotinus, must be considered as metaphysicians and seers like the *rsis* of India rather than as profane philosophers. Their doctrines are based on the Intellect which illuminates rather than on simple ratiocination. With them knowledge is still impregnated with its sacred quality and is the means of attainment of *theosis*. These sages are gnostics whose teachings were to provide providentially the doctrinal language for many of the sapiential schools of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. The rediscovery of the sacred character of knowledge today would lead, almost before anything else, to a rediscovery of Greek wisdom, of Plato, Plotinus, and other Graeco-Alexandrian sages and writings such as Hermeticism, not as simply human philosophy but as sacred doctrines of divine inspiration to be compared much more with the Hindu *darśanas* than with philosophical schools as they are currently understood.

Nassr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (accessed 6 May 2009). For positive comparison with Griffiths, see *A New Vision*, 170, 179, 230, 231.

⁶² Tyson retrieves Plato as exponent of “doxo-ontological” belief (rather than onto-theological) like the continuing tradition from Justin, Origen,⁶² Bonaventure, Augustine and Aquinas. It is “contemplation as *worship*” which “does ‘dance and sing.’” Tyson argues that, “Plato’s onto-epistemological belief framework, as a blend of mystical insight, rigorous dialect, human warmth, literary art and broad learning, is subtle and profound. And it is essentially religious.” See Paul Tyson, “Plato Against Ontotheology”, in Conor Cunningham & Peter M. Chandler, Jr (eds.) *Belief and Metaphysics* (SCM Press, London: SCM Press, 2007), Ch 17, 393–412.

⁶³ Ken Wilber, *A Brief History*, 379.

⁶⁴ Because the manifestation of this world is “Spirit’s children,” Plotinus accuses the Gnostics of “spiritual child-abuse,” In Ken Wilber, *A Brief History*, 378. For Plotinus, “All things live by the Soul *in its entirety* . . . it is all present everywhere.” *A Brief History*, 381. Griffiths would not be happy with Nassr’s concept of *Gnosis* as the wisdom of the *philosophia perrenis* to be recovered. Nassr finds support in Guenon and Schuon both of whom Griffiths judges as having a negative philosophy towards created life.

⁶⁵ Wilber’s term for a hierarchy based on the concept of “holon” - of “whole” as gestalt and “part” as possessing the whole. “Holoarchy” therefore insists on the ultimate value of prior stages that are replicated in the whole and of the later stages being in service to the prior. If later stages are

an attitude of humble service and also openness to dialogue with experts and exponents of diverse disciplines. This is because from the perspective of integral awareness, thought itself is “a product and performance of the very currents . . . of the Kosmos.”⁶⁷

The obvious lack of correlation at a surface level highlights a point made by Griffiths, Wilber, and de Chardin that is represented by the ancient maxim, “The Tao that can be named is not the true Tao” and the later Zen formula, “That which one can deviate from is not the true Tao.”⁶⁸ This presents the paradox that on the one hand there is the need to clarify “maps” and correct them, on the other the realisation that at the deepest level there is a movement of truth and towards truth in which all participate and by which all are being moved. Because of this, Wilber concludes, “both correct and incorrect maps are equally expressions of Spirit.”⁶⁹

However, as each new transformation reveals its own limitations and its own problems, there will be repressions and alienations of the former to recognise and readjust⁷⁰ as well as solutions to be found to new challenges for finite being as it journeys back to the One, by a new way of being in the Spirit.⁷¹

It can be argued that Seyyed Hossein Nassr who has traced the disintegrative forces in the West to the loss of what Griffiths understands as the “perennial philosophy” is theologically “Ascent” focused. He cannot accept in Teilhard de Chardin an apposite “Descent” focus (which in Teilhard’s case is still open in an integrative way to the contrasting movement). Griffiths is able to use both approaches and we believe his reading of Wilber is supportive. For Wilber, history shows that the proper union of Ascent and

obliterated, earlier stages remain. If earlier stages are obliterated, later stages disappear. This rejects an evolutionary approach which describes higher, lower or superior, inferior stages. *A Brief History*, 25, 365.

⁶⁶ This is a Pythagorean term for the domains of “matter or cosmos, life or the biosphere, and mind or noosphere.” See Ken Wilber, *A Brief History*, 25.

⁶⁷ Ken Wilber, *A Brief History*, 96. Frank Visser, in his online article, “Integral Design - Ken Wilber's Views on Evolution” holds the view that there is a weakness in Wilber’s argument of “quantum leaps” in the mutation of species which would seem to reflect the work of God, or the active creative, or the “Spirit in action” that is “Eros”-at-work. This is not the place to evaluate such critique which does not negate the value of Wilber’s overall thrust that is his argument for an integrative wisdom. Available from <http://www.integralworld.net/suny-foreword.html> (accessed 31 May 2009).

⁶⁸ Ken Wilber, *A Brief History*, 97.

⁶⁹ Ken Wilber, *A Brief History*, 97.

⁷⁰ “The higher might not just transcend and include, it might transcend and repress, exclude, alienate and dissociate.” Ken Wilber, *A Brief History*, 99.

⁷¹ “Every state transcends and includes, and thus inescapably, unavoidably it seems, the sun will rise on a world tomorrow that in many ways transcends reason” *A Brief History*, 98.

Descent is “often broken,” and the “subsequent war has been one of the central and defining conflicts in the Western mind.”⁷² Teilhard and Bede recognise a synthesis of both “types” in Jesus who says: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18: 36); “even the hairs of your head are counted” (Luke 12:7); and “The kingdom of God has come near.” (Luke 10: 9)

Wilber’s schema demonstrates that between Augustine and Copernicus, there is a centering on Ascent which, through what he calls the “flatland Descended grid” that developed from the Renaissance, there finally comes the eclipse of any sort of Ascent, and a loss, or neglect, of the perennial philosophy.⁷³ Thus the problems associated with the use of empiricism and other methods to the exclusion of the intuition reflect an imbalance geared towards the Descending movement of the Spirit, here designated “feminine.” This employs the evidence of the senses in contradistinction to the “masculine” Ascending movement of the Spirit and the drive for transcendence *as well as* an imbalance at the “stage-specific” level.

We need to clarify this point of convergence in Griffiths’ and Wilbers’ understanding of the evolutionary process of human consciousness. It is helpful to see Griffiths’ many and varied references to *purusha* and *prakriti* throughout the corpus of his writing and public talks within the wider framework of Wilber’s Ascent and Descent. This is because Bede’s understanding of these images is consistently in dialogue with Christian tradition at its most universal expression.

Indeed his exploration of the evolution of Hindu insight into the different levels of transcendent reality that occurred before the Christian epoch, reveals an extraordinary mapping of this profound insight, a mapping which is for him and Wilber necessary now for the West. This is not to overlook the mystical tradition of the West but to emphasise its

⁷² Ken Wilber, *A Brief History*, 385.

⁷³ Wilber’s use of Ascent and Descent demonstrates the connection with his, Nassr’s, Teilhard’s and Griffiths’ thought:

The Descending path . . . reminds us that Spirit can be joyously found in body, sex, Earth, life, vitality, and diversity. But . . . in and by itself, has its own limitations. If there is no transcendence at all, then there is no way to rise above the merely sensory . . . With the fundamental Enlightenment paradigm, all of reality – including the Great Hierarchy – was mapped in empirical and monological terms. . . . Salvation in the modern world – whether offered by politics, or science, or revivals of earth religion, or Marxism (etc) . . . can be found only on this earth . . . only in pure *immanence*, in the Descended grid . . . of flatland . . . so entrenched . . . that even the ‘new paradigm’ rebels often move completely within its clutches . . .

See Ken Wilber, *A Brief History*, 17, 373, 389, 390.

primacy, especially in view of the tragic results in this day and age of the rejection or denial of the perennial philosophy.⁷⁴

Bede insists that the Church must be seen within the cosmic perspective, as is the case in *The Shepherd of Hermas*. Here the Church is the “eternal Mother . . . the created aspect of the uncreated Spirit”⁷⁵ and “for her sake the world was made.”⁷⁶ This is the universal *ekklesia*. It can be compared with Wilber’s feminine “Descent” of the power of Spirit that is *karuna* or compassion, Agape, the movement of Spirit coming to consciousness as immanence embracing all, *and* the masculine “Ascent” the power of Spirit that is *prajna*, Eros – the energy for life, wisdom, the movement of Spirit emerging in consciousness of the Good, the One, towards Transcendence. These should unite as “Integral knowledge” or “Integral Intellect.”

From Griffiths’ perspective, it is in and through the Spirit that “Nature” (the feminine *Prakriti*, the energy of matter) or the “Mother” emerges into consciousness so that the “marriage” (which has been taking place over millions of years in a perceptible evolutionary process) of the *Purusha*⁷⁷ with *Sakti* is revealed as bringing forth the world. “As consciousness grows in humankind, Nature becomes conscious of the immanent power within her and the Church is born.”⁷⁸ To put it another way, “The Church is humankind

⁷⁴ Prominent in the thought of Benedict XVI and other theologians such as Matthew Tan, is the pervasive secularity of Western society which is understood as expressive and pursuant of this destructive loss. Tan’s argument is that in the particular historical events surrounding the origination of nation states and movement towards modern global power structures, that a “body centre” can, rather than growing, suffer diminishment due to a kind of imprudent over-investment in the particular “energy” of the other “body system.” The exercise of prudence and discernment of the ecclesial body centred in an overt “key” marker is necessary. Griffiths would understand this “key” marker in terms of *komunio* and personal freedom, centred in both Trinity and Resurrection – “The Resurrection is key to everything . . .,” “the Trinity is *the* test”, See Bede Griffiths, “Conversation with Bede Griffiths,” New Boston, 1990. The Hindu “mapping” of the spiritual levels of consciousness can be seen in ancient religious art. On his visit in 1955 to the Cave Temple on Elephanta Island off Bombay/Mumbai, Griffiths noted the rock carving of the androgynous Shiva Ardhanarshvara, the figure with one side masculine and the other feminine as on the one hand the integration we must achieve and on the other that beyond which we must go. In Felicity Edwards, “God as Feminine: Experiencing Wholeness,” *The Other Half of My Soul*, 245, 246.

⁷⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 192.

⁷⁶ “The Shepherd of Hermas,” *Apostolic Fathers*, trans. and ed., J. B. Lightfoot, The Wesley Centre Online, Wesley Centre for Applied Theology. Vision 2,8:7 – 8-10 http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/noncanon/fathers/ante-nic/hermas1.htm (accessed 3 June 2009)

⁷⁷ This is the Word, the Cosmic Person. See Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 193.

⁷⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 193. Here, the church can be understood as humanity in its most profound sense. Denis Edwards, drawing on Rahner’s theology of the cosmos states, “The human person can be understood to be the cosmos itself come to self-consciousness.” And furthermore,

become conscious of his/her destiny as sons and daughters of God.”⁷⁹ “Integral Knowledge” which is a particular contemplative way of being, abides deep within the Church. Church in this sense is not situated in a geographical space and time, but coming to be, globally and universally, within the hearts and minds of humankind. It is the whole of redeemed humanity, the “bride of Christ” destined for eternal union with God. Griffiths further describes the “cosmic dimension” of the Church in evocative language. She is:

the Pleroma, the fullness, the consummation of all things . . . the “becoming” of God, the manifestation of the infinite, eternal Being in the course of time and change and history, not simply as a static presence, but as a dynamic power, changing the course of history and transforming the world.⁸⁰

In his dialogue with the Hindu myth, Griffiths uses a Trinitarian “screen.” Here the eternal Word (which can be compared with the Hindu *vac*) that is in union with and proceeding from “the Silence,” “Abba,” holds within it the “archetypes” of all that is created existence. These “seeds of the word” are planted within the receptive “womb of the Spirit” who “brings them forth in creation.”⁸¹

For his part, Wilber describes two movements of “Spirit” which is the “One”⁸² from whom and towards whom all creation comes and returns in a movement of transformation and transcendence. The first “seed forms” are “real archetypes” (as opposed to the Jungian archetypes of the “collective consciousness”)⁸³ that “emerge straight out of emptiness . . . the primordial Purity” and are the “original pattern’ . . . upon which all lesser forms depend for their being.” Wilber expands this in mystical language:

There is a Light of which all lesser lights are pale shadows, there is a Bliss of which all lesser joys are anaemic copies, there is a Consciousness of which all lesser cognitions are mere reflections, there is a primordial Sound of which all lesser sounds are thin echoes. Those are the real archetypes.⁸⁴

“This evolutionary history of the cosmos reaches its goal in God’s self-communication by grace to conscious beings, and through them to the whole cosmos.” See Denis Edwards, *Jesus and the Cosmos* (Mahwah, New Jersey: St Paul’s Publications, 1991), 134.

⁷⁹ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 193. In *The New Creation in Christ*, 52, Griffiths’ remembers that “the great Dominican theologian Father Garrigou-Lagrange showed us years ago, contemplation is a fulfillment of baptism.”

⁸⁰ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 195.

⁸¹ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 192.

⁸² Wilber agrees that this is not a vacuous emptiness but the “void” which is also the “fullness” of all.

⁸³ Bede Griffiths, *A Brief History*, 320,325.

⁸⁴ Bede Griffiths, *A Brief History*, 326.

This line of thought accords with Gregory of Nyssa who, as Griffiths describes, interpreted the seven days of creation as stages in evolution of primordial powers or energies in accordance with a “necessary order” to become the forms of nature. Similarly, says Griffiths, Augustine describes the “seeding” of “nature” via the *rationes seminales*.⁸⁵ The movement of evolution emerging from the One is described in terms of paradox by Wilber and derives from the ultimate transcendent non-dual experience of union and identification with the One.⁸⁶ Looking to “Schelling, Hegel, Aurobindo, and other evolutionary theorists East and West,” Wilber describes evolution as “*Spirit-in-action*, God-in-the-making, where Spirit unfolds itself at every stage of development, thus manifesting more of itself . . . Spirit is the entire process of unfolding itself, an infinite process that is completely present at every finite stage, but becomes more available to itself with every evolutionary opening.”⁸⁷ Because the world of multiplicity is the manifestation of Spirit thus unfolding, Wilber can use a famous Zen *koan* for the origin of “creation”: “The sound of one hand clapping is the sound the Big Bang made.”⁸⁸

While Griffiths lays emphasis on the *complete* pre-existence of the One, the rendering he gives of *Purusha*, the supreme Person, from the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, of about 300 BC, can be compared with “Spirit” in Wilber’s thought. In and through *Purusha* all is emerging and coming to consciousness. Griffiths describes the *Purusha*, the “Great Lord” (translatable also as *Kurios*, and *Adonai*) as both transcendent and immanent ruler of the universe. The glorious and adorable *Purusha* both “dwells in the heart of all” and “transcends all understanding.”

Before this, in *Marriage*, he presents the earlier Vedic *Purusha* and *Prakriti* as two mythic principles, masculine and feminine. The former is symbolic of consciousness, reason, the Taoist *yang*, heaven, active and full light deriving from “the sun” and bringing order; the latter, chaotic matter, the *Yin*, its source – Earth, the darkness of the womb, source of “instability and change like the waxing and waning of the moon” – the multiple colours of the rainbow.

⁸⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 113.

⁸⁶ In Christian tradition, this is recognised in Jesus words, “The Father and I are One” John 10:30.

⁸⁷ Ken Wilber, *A Brief History*, 14, 15. There is a close correlation between Wilber’s presentation of “Spirit” here and Griffiths’ of Church, above.

⁸⁸ Ken Wilber, *A Brief History*, 346.

Tracing the various feminine designations of Spirit in the Old Testament, Griffiths at this time sees a possibility of the first Person of the Trinity as both masculine and feminine principles, “Father and Mother,” the Son or Word as the “active principle of intelligibility” and the Holy Spirit as “the feminine principle of receptivity . . . infinite capacity for love, which receives perpetually the outflowing of Love through the Son and returns it to its source in the Father.”⁸⁹

So far this section has explored the background to a growing emphasis in Griffiths’ theology on the dire necessity of a marriage of East and West, an integration of masculine and feminine principles. We have to ask at this stage whether the gender polarity so far defined is helpful. Does it support his argument that the future of the Church depends on equality for men and women in decision-making to the highest levels of leadership? Is the feminine image of God he presents sustainable? I question his designation of Spirit as “feminine.” In certain respects, Wilber is supportive. There are some points, however, of difference. Firstly though, we must seek to better understand how Griffiths interprets the male and female images as they evolve within the Hindu symbol system.

4. The Divine Feminine in Griffiths’ Hindu/Christian Dialogue

There is a certain problematic in Griffiths’ profound involvement in and exploration of the Vedic journey which is demonstrably his own journey. His awareness and ideas change or evolve – even as he speaks and writes. He refers to the symbols *purusha*, *prakriti*, *shiva*, *sakti* without necessarily establishing their position in the system of different levels of consciousness.

Furthermore, the “two-sides-of-the-coin” quality of these symbols represent the paradoxical nature of the whole of the *Vedic* and *Upanisadic* symbol system dealing ever more qualitatively with continuing insights into transcendent Unity. Throughout the corpus of his works Griffiths emphatically directs attention to the value of this system in which a whole multitude of images, from *Vedic* times to the *Bhagavad Gita* converge on express, interact with and integrate different levels of being.⁹⁰ Griffiths’ insistence that this

⁸⁹ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 55.

⁹⁰ In *Marriage*, Griffiths provides the examples from the Vedic myth of the “constant conflict between light and darkness” where cows, the “Cows of Dawn” are symbols of light which represent the rays of the sun. The monster Vritra, representing the “primeval darkness of the unconscious” here imaged as a rocky cavern imprisoning the sun cows, holds back the waters of life and the light

“threefold nature of the world underlies not only the *Vedas* but all ancient thought”⁹¹ is linked with and supported by Raimon Panikkar’s Trinitarian cosmotheandric reading of reality.⁹² Bede points to “the native Americans, the Australian Aborigines, African tribal people . . . [who have] this sense of divine power and presence in the whole creation – in all matter, in all life, in all human beings . . . And that’s the source of all religion . . . the cosmic revelation.”⁹³

The Hindu masculine/feminine symbols are very fluid, and representing as they do a larger pattern of complementarity permeating all levels of reality, physical, psychic and spiritual are not intended to specify gender types. Some of Griffiths’ earlier work neglects this subtlety. Ideas are later clarified.

Similarly, Griffiths revises his earlier understanding of the disintegration represented in the myth of Eden. At the earlier stage he writes:

the fall of humankind was a fall from . . . spiritual consciousness with its centre on God to the plane of psychic consciousness with its centre on the ego, the separated human soul bound by the laws of the physical organism . . . the state . . . we find ourselves in today (that of) the psychic consciousness dominated by the rational mind . . . and, as a consequence . . . by the powers of the physical world, the “elemental spirits” of St Paul . . . the darkness of ignorance *avidya* and the illusion of *maya*.⁹⁴

Using Wilber’s work, he later adjusts the designation of Eden as a “fall.” He writes:

The original state was not, as St Thomas Aquinas [said], . . . original man, perfect wisdom and knowledge . . . It was on the contrary this global consciousness; nothing had emerged into rational consciousness at all. It was just above the animal where you’re one with nature,

of the sun. The releasing of the cows from their prison are the rays of the dawn sun that is the light of the mind and also further illumination for which one searches. Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 56.

⁹¹ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 51.

⁹² Raimon Panikkar, *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom* Trans. Annemarie S. Kidder (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) 94 – 98. See also, Raimon Panikkar, *The Experience of God* Trans. Joseph Cunneen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 91. See also, “A Meditation on the Mystery of the Trinity,” from the Bede Griffiths Trust. Griffiths looks to Panikkar for support of his insight into the Trinity which “only unfolded in the Indian context.” He quotes Panikkar:

In the Trinity a true encounter of religion takes place which results, not in a vague fusion or mutual dilution, but in an authentic enhancement of all the religious and even cultural elements that are contained in each.

See Raimon Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (New York: Orbis Books, 1973), 42.

⁹³ Bede Griffiths, “Cosmic Person; Cosmic Lord,” from a talk given for the Monday night Alternatives Programme at St James’s, Piccadilly, London. In *Human Potential*, Summer 1992. Available in the Bede Griffiths Collection, Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, CA.

⁹⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 58.

one with everybody else, and you don't become individual . . . And then the eating of the tree of knowledge was this awakening to individual, rational consciousness. And in one way, it upsets things and is the cause of conflict. And in another way, it's the path to transcendence and discovery . . . So it's ambivalent in that way. On the one hand, it breaks up the unity which you experience. But it's also the pathway to a new unity beyond. And therefore it is a growth process. So Wilber is right; it's "up from Eden."⁹⁵

Griffiths' humility in the face of such steps and stages of understanding highlights his sense of a general evolutionary process which he finds particularly well defined in Hindu religious tradition. The following section continues to trace Griffiths' understanding of this evolving process in respect of the image of the divine feminine beginning with the Indian tradition.

The Divine Feminine in the Indian Tradition

"The truth of the imagination," the emergence of "the concept in place of the image" comes about in the period of the *Upanishads*. At this stage, in India, the movement of Spirit manifesting in all of life as *sakti* emerges into "full consciousness."⁹⁶ Bede suggests that we could see the Spirit as the feminine principle in the Godhead, the Mother of all creation, the third person of the Trinity. This is, "the power of the Godhead . . . the breath by which the Word is uttered . . . the womb in which the seeds of the word are planted . . . the energy of Love . . . the Atman . . . the Self . . . the Source of all . . . manifesting in each and everyone according to its capacity to receive it."⁹⁷ It is this Spirit, Bede says, the *risis*, the authors of the *Upanisads* discover.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Trapnell writes, "Indicative of the continual development in his thinking, Griffiths in 1991 stated that his interpretation of the biblical Fall had recently changed. While at first disagreeing with Wilber's positive assessment of that symbolic event as a valuable step in the upward movement of human evolution, Griffiths affirmed that Eden does represent a stage out of which humanity needed to mature. In the Tape-recorded Interview by Judson Trapnell, Trappist, KY, August 1991.

⁹⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 62.

⁹⁷ Bede Griffiths, *Return*, 129, 130. The third Person of the Trinity as Griffiths describes is here comparable with Wilber's "Spirit," the absolute Transcendent Reality. Griffiths describes the union in and through the Spirit as being the "final release" known in Hindu terms as *moksha*. In this union: body and soul . . . realize all their potentialities . . . It is Spirit which gives being and actuality to matter, building up the stellar universe and the innumerable forms of life, drawing out the infinite potentiality of matter into ever new forms of being. In the human being matter transcends itself, it emerges into consciousness. The Spirit working within matter draws this new mode of being from the potentiality of matter. But our present state of bodily existence is only a transitional phase in the evolution of matter . . . all (stages of evolution including those not yet attained) is only a foretaste of that radical transformation of the matter of the body which will take place in the resurrection.

Bede Griffiths, *Return*, 134-135.

⁹⁸ Again, we note that in the fluid symbolisation in India, such gender polarities are not marked.

The remedy for the Western “disease,” therefore, Griffiths finds in the practice that is “the heart of the teaching of the *Upanishads*,” meditation,⁹⁹ which is a form of death “beyond the rational understanding, the imagination, the senses”; entry “into the dark . . . the cave . . . the abyss . . . the primeval darkness” which is a “return to the womb.” Bede equates this with the Chinese “uncarved block,” the darkness of origins.¹⁰⁰ Here where darkness is “revealed as light” the soul “discovers itself in the radiance of pure intuition . . . attains to self knowledge.”¹⁰¹

From the *Vedic* to *Upanishadic* times we see this transition from mythical to philosophical thought and the realisation that *Brahman* the transcendent is *atman* the inner Self. The earliest seventh century BC *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, conceives of *atman* and *brahman* in the form of a Person, *Purusha* who is *neti, neti*, not this, not this – beyond thought. The *Chandogya* and moreso the later developed philosophy of the *Katha Upanishad*, 500 BC, present a hierarchy of being: “. . . As large as the space which contains the universe, so large is that space within the heart. Both heaven and earth are contained within it . . .” The whole universe is contained within the consciousness from - the senses, to mind, to intellect, to cosmic mind, to cosmic order, to the Unmanifest.¹⁰²

In the *Katha Upanishad*, *prakriti* is this *anyakta*, “the unmanifest” (beyond the *mahat* or psychic realm) and known as “*Mula-Prakriti*” or Nature as “womb,” “the Mother . . . ground of all creative powers of the world.” Griffiths calls this the “principle of potentiality” and likens it to Aristotle’s *dynamis*. It is the, “womb of nature (in which) the seeds of all future forms of matter and mind lie hid.” Griffiths further equates this with the Buddhist “Void, the Emptiness which, in Buddhist terms, contains all fullness . . . the ground of human consciousness, the cave, the abyss . . . the unplumbed depths of consciousness . . . the deep sleep from which consciousness arises and the world comes into being. . . . But beyond this *anyakta*, this *prakriti*, is *Purusha*, the Person, the Supreme, beyond which it is impossible to go.” Focusing still on the *Katha Upanishadic* wisdom, Griffiths delineates *Brahman* as “the eternal Spirit . . . pervading the whole creation, one and yet manifold, the ground of all

⁹⁹ Griffiths tends to use “meditation” and “contemplation” a little indiscriminately due to his life-style in India. He does point out that what he speaks of in India as “meditation” is strictly speaking “contemplation” in our Western tradition.

¹⁰⁰ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 69.

¹⁰¹ We can recognize in this ancient Indian wisdom, the rhetorical category, “irony” as it is sketched in regard to the universal/Christian mystical journey in Chapter 3.

¹⁰² Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 70.

creation” and “Atman . . . the same Spirit . . . the self of each human being, the ground of consciousness” through whom we can transcend “the limits of the rational mind . . . to approach the Supreme, the ‘one without a second.’”¹⁰³

Here Griffiths addresses the difference between the human spirit and the “supreme spirit.” The *jivatman* – or “the human spirit” is the human soul with its potential to turn either to God or to the world of the senses. In the *jivatman* potential is operative, a potential which is St Francis de Sales’ “fine point of the soul” that is in its potentiality, “a reflection of the divine light in us,” a “dynamic point.”¹⁰⁴ The *Katha Upanishad* gives an explanatory story for this “light and shade” in “the secret high place of the heart”: “Two birds, inseparable friends, cling to the same tree. One of them eats the sweet fruit, the other looks on without eating . . . On the same tree a man sits grieving, immersed, bewildered by his own impotence (*anisa*), but when he sees the other, the worshipful Lord (*isa*) in his glory, his grief passes away.” This explains the disposition of the soul that is ignorant of, distracted away from the *atman*, compared with the soul that meditates on or contemplates the Lord, the *atman*, the Self of selves who is also Brahman.¹⁰⁵

Whereas the idea of relationship in unity is intuited in the earliest *Brihadanyaka Upanishad*,¹⁰⁶ Griffiths describes the evolution of the idea of “relationship” in the Transcendent Reality to the further profound intuition in the late *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, 300 BC. The relationship is a triad, the *pradhana*, the perishable, the material world, then the souls that is, the *jivatma*, and then Hara who is “the Lord, the Imperishable.” All three are discovered to be *Brahman*.¹⁰⁷

In exploring the images of *purusha* and *prakriti*, Griffiths turns to the recognition in modern physics of the world as a “field of energies” which includes the whole of human experience, that is both physical and psychological and which form together “an

¹⁰³ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 74, 75.

¹⁰⁴ “As soul (*psyche*), humanity is the head of the universe. It is, in a sense, matter coming into consciousness and forming an individual soul but then, like matter itself, that soul is open to the *pneuma*, the Spirit, which is the point where the spirit of man opens on the Spirit of God. So the human being is, from the beginning, body and soul, while beyond body and soul it is open to, and receives its life from, the divine Spirit.” See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 97.

¹⁰⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 76.

¹⁰⁶ “If a man clearly beholds the Self as God and as the Lord of what is and what will be, then he is more afraid.” *Brihadanyaka Upanishad*, 4:4:15. *Marriage*, 78, 79.

¹⁰⁷ *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, 1:7-9. This is not intended though, in a pantheistic sense but with the insight that Brahman is the ground of all and permeates all because all that exists manifest the divine Ground.

interdependent whole.” This would “in Hindu terms” partially describe *prakriti*. Then there is *Purusha*. This *Purusha* is “beyond *prakriti*” and is the “sphere of consciousness . . . beyond senses and imagination . . . experienced in meditation (as) the source of all consciousness, the principle of all real knowledge, the ground of personal being . . . in which all souls find their centre of unity.” Here *Purusha* is “all pervading Spirit, which penetrates and embraces the whole field of physical and psychic energies and unites them in one.” It can be experienced as “the ‘ground’ of all being, pervading the whole creation (and then) it is known as Brahman. Or . . . as the ground of human consciousness . . . when it is known as Atman . . . the immanent principle of both being and knowing . . . also as transcendent being – ‘God’ the ‘Lord’ . . . known as *Purusha*.” Because the Spirit, the Supreme *Purusha*, is seen to transcend the three worlds of body, mind and spirit, *Purusha*, Atman, and Brahman can be used interchangeably of all three realities.

Here we find a close correlation with the Ascent and Descent of Spirit in Wilber’s terms. Furthermore, Griffiths is here tracing the emergence of “the concept of the personal God.”¹⁰⁸ In traversing such an intricate development of mystical insight, *Purusha* is found to be the full integration of both masculine and feminine principles. Griffiths compares the *Purusha* “the cosmic Person in whom the whole universe comes together” with Christ, in whom “the whole of humanity is growing to full stature.”¹⁰⁹ Bede quotes Monchanin, “The aim of *Shantivanam* is the Trinity and *advaita*,” and Bede adds that this is because “this

¹⁰⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 80.

¹⁰⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 112. Griffiths defines the human “person” as “essentially a being capable of knowledge and love, which means being capable of receiving the universe into oneself by knowledge, that is, by symbol and language, and capable of acting on the universe by art and science. “Person” is really the supreme reality in the universe, the point at which the universe enters into consciousness.” See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 111. Clearly relationship is fundamental in this. LaCugna describes the Trinity as the source of personhood. “The person of Jesus Christ is the criterion of what we are to become.” She quotes Cyril of Alexandria, “We become by grace what God is by nature.” This is citing *De Trin. Dial.* PG 4, 520c. “Our ‘personhood’ is to become what God’s personal reality already is: boundless self-giving, love poured out for the sake of life, and that which creates inclusive communion among persons. The ‘deified’ human being is the totally free human being, one who can embrace the enemy and help bring about the kingdom of God.” See Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: Harper Collins), the chapter, “The Trinitarian Mystery of God,” 189. Teilhard de Chardin’s idea compares with Griffiths “person” as evoking, extending to and subsuming the whole of creation. Père Teilhard speaks of “infinite degrees in the loving initiation of one person into another unfathomable Person . . . (a person) will recognise the role of the created thing in the sharpening of sensibility, which gives the warmth that charity calls for, and the vast cosmic realities that give God’s tangible and palpable being here below. Clothed (in the world) as in a garment . . . Jesus must be loved as a world.” Teilhard de Chardin, *Prayer of the Universe*, 139.

Trinitarian theology to me is *the* test of Christian orthodoxy.”¹¹⁰ In the following section we see the basis of Bede’s presentation of a “Christian Vedanta” which is a Trinitarian form discovered in the Hindu transcendent reality disclosed in its symbol structure. It is also the basis of Sri Aurobindo’s use of “*Satcitananda*,” as the *advaitic*¹¹¹ state of “being, consciousness, bliss.” However, Griffiths emphasizes the centrality of love in this state. Furthermore, the feminine is intrinsic.

In *Vedic* times, whereas the gods were personal, they were simply aspects or expressions of *ekam sat* the ultimate Reality itself which was not understood as personal. However, with the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, 300 BC,¹¹² the Supreme Brahman is to be found hidden within all and “enveloping everything as the Lord.” This *purusha*, now known as the Supreme Lord, is further named as *Siva*, the Blessed, the Kindly One, who fills the whole universe, the *pradhana*,¹¹³ embracing all things and transcending all things as the divine personification of love.¹¹⁴ Like *Kali*, *Siva* represents the integration and transcendence of prior levels of the evolution of consciousness. He is also known as the personal Lord, *Isha/Ishvara* or *Hara*, the manifestation of *brahman*. Those who know him “become immortal.”¹¹⁵

In the contemporaneous *Bhagavad Gita*, instead of *Siva*, there is *Vishnu*. *Bhagavan* is the name for the personal God, the Lord, hence the *Bhagavad Gita*, or *Song of the Lord*. The *Bhagavad Gita* celebrates *Krishna* as the *avatara* of *Vishnu*,¹¹⁶ one with Brahman and Atman,¹¹⁷ “revealed as both totally transcendent and totally immanent.”¹¹⁸ Griffiths sees

¹¹⁰ “Conversations with Fr Bede”, Waitsfield, Vermont, 11 August 1992, Tape 1, side A. See also, Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life*, Notes, Conclusion, 257: 4.

¹¹¹ Bede presents not a complete identification with God, but a “*qualified advaita*,” unity in relationship.

¹¹² *Upanisadic* times as such end about 500 BC.

¹¹³ The *lingam* associated with *Siva*, represents the utterly Transcendent God “beyond name and form.” Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 81. The original Dravidian god, *Siva* which Griffiths describes (from an ancient figure found at Mahanjadaro) as being decorated with snakes and the *lingam* can be recognised in Wilber’s *Up From Eden*, as a “Mythic Magic” androgynous Great Mother image.

¹¹⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 82. Griffiths cites the Tamil poem, *Tirumandiram*, in *The Love of God in Saiva Siddhanta* by M. Dhavamony. (OUP, 1971), Part 3.1b.

¹¹⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 81. Here he cites the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, 3:7.

¹¹⁶ *Vishnu* from the Aryan/Vedic pantheon is a sky god and coupled with this the parallel with the dark god, *Siva*, explains the “blue” colour of *Krishna*.

¹¹⁷ Griffiths believes that *Krishna* and the *Mahabarata*, the story of the great war which is basic to the expository dialogue between *Krishna* and *Ramanuja* . . . , probably have a “historical origin” and which have nonetheless been embellished by legend. Out of this embellishment has emerged “the figure of the Supreme God . . . the God of love . . . the one Supreme Lord, the creator of all.” Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 86.

the *Bhagavad Gita*, with Vishnu incarnated as Krishna as “an advance even on the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*.”¹¹⁹ Tantrism enters the Hindu belief system much earlier than its extant texts of 300 AD and for Bede demonstrates the integration of “the Great Mother,” the values of the body, energy, senses and all that Bede includes in “the feminine” or *sakti*, the power that is “the source of the universe.”¹²⁰

This last section is illustrative of Griffiths’ focus on the kind of evolutionary development common to all peoples and religions that is a necessary part of the human journey.

The Myth of Adam and Eve

In this context, Griffiths further explores the significance of the masculine and feminine symbols in his interpretation of the myth of Eden. Adam and Eve are symbolic of humankind and represent together “the rational mind (and) the intuitive power of nature.” The sin of Adam and Eve represents a break in the natural order such that reason becomes “sterile” and intuition “blind.” Griffiths sees this as the normal course of sin, the turning away from the movement of the Spirit and centering on the ego.¹²¹

At this point Wilber’s work is helpful as like Nicolas Berdyaev, above, he does not equate the “disobedience” of Adam and Eve with sin in a moral sense. The exploration here follows logically from that of the *Imago*. We are looking for a perspective to view gender differences that is reflected in contemporary disciplines such as anthropology and psychology so that we can best assess the connection Griffiths makes between male and female in service of insight into the one non-dual Reality; in Christian terms, a God who can be named as Mother and Father. Wilber’s work is highly relevant as Griffiths is strongly influenced by it and as will be seen – increasingly so.

Wilber’s anthropological/psychological approach raises an important point in respect of intellectual development. The emergence of verbal communication¹²² he describes as “a

¹¹⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 87.

¹¹⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 73. Developed further from the *Svetasvatara Upanisad*, the *Gita* reveals the deepest wisdom, the “*Aham asi*,” “That am I,” which is, that the heart or transcendent centre of all, is both profoundly personalistic and unitive.

¹²⁰ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 75. What Griffiths is labeling here as the Great Mother, however, we would understand as integrated into further levels of transcendence to be realized as the Goddess. This is explicated further in the chapter.

¹²¹ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 120.

¹²² Wilber states that language did not arise with the beginning of “Homo” about two million years ago but can with archaeological evidence be shown developing from the late Pleistocene age, that is

higher leap in transcendent evolution.” That is, it is “transorganic, transbiological, transbody.” Wilber quotes A.L. Kroeber, “The dawn of the social (cultural membership) . . . is not a link in any [biological] chain, not a step in path, but a leap to another plane.” This stage of mature language is the “*predominant vehicle of the separate self.*”¹²³ Wilber’s differentiation is important in terms of Griffiths’ description of gender characteristics because it does not see mental difference principally as continuation from the biological but rather with the transcendence of mind, as environmental/cultural.

In Wilber’s perspective, the Atman Project¹²⁴ saw the development of The Great Mother figure that is dominant in typhonic and early membership stages. The Great Mother therefore represents both Great Protector and Great Destroyer. This is an intense relationship, “basic, awe-inspiring, fundamental and consequence-laden.”¹²⁵ It is the same kind of “separation drama” for the baby and the mother, and humankind and “mother nature.” The figure of the Great Mother therefore represents the body, matter and all that pertains to this realm of nature. Rites and rituals to appease the Great Mother and win her protection which were bloody and cruel belong to these second and third stages of evolution of the consciousness.¹²⁶ Wilber concludes, “The sacrificial ritual was carried out to appease and expiate death guilt in the form of the Devouring Mother” on the one hand and on the other “to promote a more abundant yield of crops.”¹²⁷

over the period, 70,000 to 8,000 B.C. “The essential point is that a rather full-fledged language emerged fairly recently – probably not much before 50,000 BC (and) . . . as late as 10,000 B.C. peaked . . . at the beginning of the mythic-membership . . . around the . . . start of farming cultures.” Ken Wilber, *Up From Eden*, 98, 99.

¹²³ Ken Wilber, *Up From Eden*, 100.

¹²⁴ The “Atman Project” is Wilber’s term for the steps of an evolutionary process of recapitulation, whereby every stage is both a movement towards God who is “intuited” as the ultimate transcendent end and goal and a perversion of the movement into “compromises, compensations, substitutes, and defences.” See Ken Wilber, *Up From Eden*, 104. “Eros” represents the life drive/confidence/security or “the desire to recapture that prior Wholeness which was “lost” when the boundary between self and other was constructed – the undying power of seeking, grasping, wishing, desiring, perpetuating, loving, living, willing.” At a certain point it is unbalanced by the action of “Thanatos” or “the force of reality . . . (that) acts moment to moment to tear down that boundary between subject and object – whose real meaning is transcendence,” otherwise ever-present as “death-denial”; the death experience provides the threshold of transcendence to the next stage which must not repress the last stage but integrate it into the wholeness of the next level of transcendence. *Up from Eden*, 157, 158.

¹²⁵ Ken Wilber, *Up From Eden*, 127.

¹²⁶ Archaeological evidence for this can be found as far back as Paleolithic times. Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 128.

¹²⁷ Symbols associated with the Great Mother are the womb, and lunar and menstrual cycles, ocean tides; and her consorts such as the lunar serpent, pig and bull. Tied to the moon cycle is the consort

Nonetheless, this is a part of the Atman Project and represents the primary intuition of Spirit at the heart of existence and the associated immortality wish and its correlative death-fear.¹²⁸ In respect of this, the Great Mother is sign of the drive for self-transcendence. The widespread appearance and persistence of myths dealing with this:

is an entire commentary on this whole period that the vast, vast majority of souls were under the sway of the Chthonic and Devouring Great Mother, still not strong enough to awaken as self-conscious beings, still struggling to crystallize finally out of subconsciousness, and still succumbing in the attempt.¹²⁹

In demonstrating the extraordinary difference between the Great Mother and the Goddess, Wilber points out how a given rite can function as a symbol effecting *transformation* (esoteric) or merely as a sign of *translation* (exoteric). The first, “works . . . to dissolve the self in God consciousness . . . the second function is merely substitutive, and serves to perpetuate and strengthen the self-sense by securing magical substitutes for God.”¹³⁰ Whether the first or second is operative depends on the attitude of the individual (Wilber specifies, “psychological state” and “understanding”). For comparison, Wilber points out Joseph Campbell’s explanation of the transcendence of the esoteric experience in ritual or Sacrament; it means “the will of the individual to his/her own mortality is extinguished – through an effective realization of the immortality of being itself and of its play through all things and he/she is united with that being, in experience, in stunning crisis of release from the psychology of guilt and mortality.” This is an experience of “the Atman Project” and of the Atman/Brahman.¹³¹ While Bede demonstrates the connection with the devouring “Mother” and the hero myths,¹³² he does not always clearly present the difference between the early level of consciousness associated with the Great Mother and the much more

of the Great Mother who lies dead for three days before rising as god. The Great Mother is hermaphroditic and identified as both mother and lover, her consort being both husband and son. She is the bride and virgin mother of god. Because new life was connected with the menstrual flow of the woman rather than with the male semen, blood sacrifices were needed in order for the Great Mother to be productive of new life. Recorded myths and legends and researched documentation of ritual blood sacrifice are provided as evidence for this. See Ken Wilber, *Up From Eden*, 136, 137.

¹²⁸ We see this expressed in myths which reflect “the vengeance of the Great Mother (which is) the overpowering of the ego by the subterranean.” Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 139.

¹²⁹ “The self system, at this stage in history, was itself nothing but the sacrificed lunar consort of the devouring Great Mother.” Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 140.

¹³⁰ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 142.

¹³¹ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 143, 144. Wilber cites Joseph Campbell, Vol. *Primitive Mythology*, 1959.

¹³² Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 42.

advanced level of consciousness identified with the Goddess and while he personally experiences resolution of the conflict in later life, his explanations can be confusing.¹³³ We note his conflation of Great Mother and Goddess as “Mother Goddess” in *A Human Search*.¹³⁴ This confusion probably contributes to a certain inconsistency of expression in respect to the feminine which we can recognize in his words from the conversations with John Swindells for *A Human Search in 1992*:

We have to transcend nature and life, transcend the feminine, just as the child has to leave the mother and go out and become a man. But we have gone out beyond the feminine, rejected the feminine, sex, earth, matter, and life, to build up this wonderful religion of grace and truth and so on. . . . Now we have to recover the balance.¹³⁵

This could be interpreted (while not Griffiths’ intention) as gender polarity - something critics reject.

Wilber shows how although the outward forms of the ritual of sacrifice to the Great Goddess were similar to that of The Great Mother, the difference was enormous as the former was an offering of the self made in the heart and “never involved literal body murder.”¹³⁶ The insight into the One, that all is One,¹³⁷ which begins with the Great Goddess happens at the early membership stage but begins as an esoteric experience of a few and an entry into a higher level of reality. However, as Wilber puts it, “where the leaf grows the trunk must follow.”¹³⁸ The experience of a few sets the stage for the rest of humankind. The elevation of the Goddess within a society as a whole begins in Egypt about 3,500 B.C.

For our purposes the distinction we have followed here care of Wilber between the Great Mother and the Great Goddess is that between “the average mode of consciousness and the most advanced mode.”¹³⁹ The metaphors used depend on culture and so “Goddess”

¹³³ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 86, 87.

¹³⁴ John Swindells, *A Human Search*, “Appendix: History and Interpretation of the Bible,” 158.

¹³⁵ Bede Griffiths, *A Human Search* ed. John Swindells (Blackburn, Vic.: HarperCollins, 2006) 124.

¹³⁶ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 144.

¹³⁷ Here all manifestation is seen as, “*mother, maya, measure, menses, menstrual, metered*” which come from the same Sanskrit root *ma* and Wilber states “means essentially, ‘production’”. Ultimately the whole “production” of this manifest world is One. See Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 153. Griffiths translates *ma* as “to measure” to explain how *maya* or “illusion” suggests a “separation from matter, from the mother, from the feminine in the attempt to go beyond . . . But with Tantra the balance is restored as matter, mother and the feminine are restored to their proper place.” *A New Vision*, 193.

¹³⁸ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 150.

¹³⁹ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 154.

at a matriarchal stage changes to “Father” of a later patriarchal stage. “The metaphors are by and large anchored in the average-mode level of consciousness.”¹⁴⁰

At around 2,000 B.C, in the movement into the mental-egoic stage of consciousness, the mythologies of the Mother are transformed to the patriarchal mythologies of the hero. The conquest of the hero over the Great Mother consort is reflected in the *Vedic* story of Indra defeating the serpent-monster Vritra.¹⁴¹ This is the victory of the freely willing ego – and it represents a certain independence and the ability to detach from the dominative powers of nature. However, in the West, the ego according to Wilber displays a “blind arrogance,” as rather than transcending the “Great Mother,” it represses it.¹⁴² We are speaking here of a time in the West round 2,000 BC. Griffiths identifies the violence in Israel’s religious history with such repression of the Great Mother, rather than integration and transcendence.¹⁴³ In the East/Orient, however, it is a different situation – demonstrable from the *Vedic* and *Upanishadic* insights. Bede points out that, in the West, rather than into a mythic *differentiation* from the Great Mother, the ego went to a mythic *dissociation*.

Here Wilber makes a point I find central to Griffiths’ argument and which runs through all his works. According to Wilber, “When the Great Mother (representative of the earlier levels of consciousness – two and three) is repressed, the Great Goddess (representative of the much higher level six) is concealed.” This means “that when the Feminine Imago is rejected *in toto*, the higher wisdom, or Sophia, which often finds its natural expression in the Great Goddess, is likewise denied expression . . . and *that* would become a perfect and terrifying comment on an entire civilisation.”¹⁴⁴ When the typhonic and Great Mother realms are buried together, the ego rises up in the West “viciously assertive” through a dissociation which is one of mind and body and which is further expressed in a “disjunction between organization of thought and the organization of nature.”¹⁴⁵ For his part, Griffiths describes the resulting “terrible wars”¹⁴⁶ which he says amount to a conflict between reason and intuition, the European “dis-ease.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁰ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 155.

¹⁴¹ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 193.

¹⁴² Transcendence involves recapitulation. The prior level is held in awareness but is mastered by, integrated into and serves the next level through organic unity.

¹⁴³ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 87.

¹⁴⁴ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 197,198.

¹⁴⁵ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 201, Wilber is here quoting L.L. Whyte, in *The Next Development in Man*. Wilber explains how in the early membership stage, language allowed for temporal extension but there was as yet no “ego.” There is unbroken interaction with nature. With the real

Wilber concludes that “having used thought to transcend the body, we have not yet learned to use awareness to transcend thought. That, I believe, will be the next development in men and women.”¹⁴⁸ Griffiths is in agreement and expresses this in his concern for the practice of contemplation as vital for humanity at this stage. In agreement with Wilber, he demonstrates how the “Western materialist philosophy” is largely the cause of an “arrested development” at the mental egoic stage while the East has gone beyond to experience transpersonal consciousness.¹⁴⁹

The mentally constructed linear historical movement best serves the mental ego. However, the particular repression that has been discussed above manifests in history as self-indulgent perversions, described as exploitative and as puritanist oppression, designated - fearful. Bodily and abstract, mental compulsions are both representative of the European dissociation. We have already noted Griffiths’ observation of the greater energy and grace of the poor in India where there is not the same repression of “organic energy” *prana* (Griffiths’ observation is in terms of both men and women – but especially women).¹⁵⁰

Griffiths also follows Wilber’s treatment of the rejection of the feminine in the development of the Western patriarchy which is a further complexification of repression of the feminine principle. It comes under the evocative heading of “solarization.”

Wilber describes the “extremely complicated” shift from “the typhonic Great Mother to the ego-mother-father.” The early wakening consciousness is absorbed in a hermaphroditic/bisexual myth. The crisis of awakening to sexual differentiation propels to a higher unity. In the case of individual development, for example, a further crisis propels the

achievement of rational-egoic-self-consciousness, there begins “the fall of man” round, 1,600 – 400 B.C. The ego’s own thought processes have become its “substitute self,” a problem compounded because the ego compared with prior levels of consciousness is very stable and very difficult to transcend. A greater self-awareness heightens fear of change, of death - this is a fear of the higher level “unity consciousness” and instead a grasping for “eternal everlasting life . . . thought promises eternity (through memory) by delivering its substitute: permanence . . . The self-sense, in flight from death, abandoned the body, the all too mortal body, and took substitute refuge in the world of thought.” See, Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 208, 209.

¹⁴⁶ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 44, 45.

¹⁴⁷ Even before he had encountered Wilber’s work, Griffiths was reflecting on his early experience in India where he felt people moved with a grace and ease that was different from the comparatively awkward movements of people in Europe to which he had been accustomed.

¹⁴⁸ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 208, 209.

¹⁴⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 48.

¹⁵⁰ See “Bede Griffiths and the Indian Foundation,” Third Installment, 10 July 1955, and also from the First Installment, Bangalore 17 April 1955.

child to identify mentally, no longer bodily, with the opposite parent and this is a real “*mental accomplishment*” and the source of a strong ego and superego.¹⁵¹ Through transcendence of the chthonic Great Mother, both sexes come to possess a mental-feminine and mental-masculine consciousness. Ideally, therefore, proper integration and transcendence means both male and female minds are structured by “solar femininity” as well as “solar masculinity.”

In a general sense then, as regards the human psyche, the Great Mother “is initially representative of global, *bodily*, separate, and vulnerable existence in space and time.”¹⁵² The “universal mythological equation: the body is Earth, the mind is Heaven,” refers to the ascendance of mental-feminine and mental-masculine (solar-feminine and solar-masculine) over the body level. How did this “new mental-egoic Heaven” from about 3,000 – 2,000 BC come to be male/masculine/father dominated?¹⁵³ Wilber recounts that in the West, “the ego rose up arrogant and aggressive, and . . . began to sever its own roots in a fantasy attempt to prove its absolute independence . . . It attempted – and succeeded – in repressing access to both realms, and imagining success, began to remake the cosmos in its own image.”¹⁵⁴ Similarly, Griffiths describes the human *hubris*, “the vision of a human-being as master of the universe.”¹⁵⁵

Wilber determines that this comes about as a “mixture of natural tendencies and unnatural inclinations.” He contends that both male and female transcend their gender differences and come to a higher “mental androgyny.” Indeed, “recent research shows clearly that the most developed personalities display a balance and integration of both masculine and feminine principles, and are thus ‘mentally androgynous.’”¹⁵⁶ He gives St Paul’s criterion, “‘in Christ neither male nor female.’”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵¹ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 233.

¹⁵² Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 126.

¹⁵³ Wilber detects in some Hero myths the early intuition of the solar feminine, where despite the myth’s “patriarchal trappings, the ‘treasure hard to attain’ – the freed ego structure – is usually represented by a *feminine figure*.” See Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 237. The solar-feminine, solar-masculine myths of hero and princess represent the freeing of both anima and animus from the “dragon” and the rescue of the “feminine counterpart – *the most valuable part*” of the hero’s personality. The Oedipus complex is therefore significant principally as representing “a shift of the Atman project *from the body to the mind*.” See Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 251.

¹⁵⁴ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 190.

¹⁵⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 119.

¹⁵⁶ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 239. In comparison there is a certain ambiguity in Griffiths’ presentation of gender differences:

Griffiths develops Wilbers' insights to explain significant details such as Jewish and Christian patriarchy, Western linear history compared with the Indian cyclic view, repression within the psyche and the symbolization of devils and demons, psychic abilities and ego-centric perversions. In his wide purview, he gives a more general explanation of the hero myths and while, he considers the instigation of patriarchy (and a necessary reversal) very important, does not properly clarify the important point Wilber makes regarding it.¹⁵⁸

Wilber explains that despite the possibilities suggested by the hero myths, the male "had an edge" in the mental development towards logic, reason and conceptual understanding. It was easy to consistently and continuously identify women with childbirth and everything to do with Earth and men into the social group characterised by "mental culture." (I presume that women naturally maintained a certain solidarity, that is, they were complicit in this identification.) As a result, the super-ego becomes largely patriarchal. However, what amounts to here as a "difference of function" quite soon changes to a "difference of status" so that finally we can hear this reflected in the Jewish daily prayer, "*taceat mulier in ecclesia*" – the thanks for not having been born a woman.¹⁵⁹

Wilber concludes:

Because historically the body was equated with femininity and the mind with masculinity . . . the inward and psychological dissociation of the body from the mind meant an outward and

Woman represents the intuitive power in human being while man represents the rational mind . . . Man and woman are equal and opposite . . . A woman does not become more equal to man by seeking to become like a man, but by revealing his opposite character . . . in the man reason is dominant and intuition is subordinate . . . in woman intuition is dominant and reason is subordinate. In a perfect man and woman the "marriage" of opposites takes place and in fact the very purpose of an exterior marriage is to enable the man and woman to complete one another by an interior marriage . . . Reason without intuition is intelligent but sterile, intuition without reason is fertile but blind.

Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 120, 121. There is a "profound psychological difference between man and woman." 164. We note that Felicity Edwards in making the point that "exterior marriage is for the sake of interior marriage" acknowledges Griffiths' own depth of understanding, yet has a more subtle and clear understanding and articulation. In Felicity Edwards, "God as Feminine, Experiencing Wholeness," *The Other Half of my Soul*, 249 – 252, 258. It is significant that Wilber differentiates "women's intuition" or "emotional hunches" - the early awakening intuition tinged with the biologically wired body-emotion, from "transcendent insight."

¹⁵⁷ There is a subtle difference between this interpretation of Paul's words and that of Gregory of Nyssa's. Wilber's allows for an androgynous mental integration while maintaining the basic human gender difference. See, his explanation of the different masculine and feminine "voice" below, this chapter. It reflects on the ultimate, "unity in differentiation."

¹⁵⁸ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 28 – 48.

¹⁵⁹ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 242.

sociological oppression of the feminine by the masculine . . . when Adam fell, he fell in two . . . male and female, heaven and earth, psyche and soma. And Adam Jr., was a sexist.¹⁶⁰

Wilber here equates the first Adam with the great Chthonic Earth Mother, that is, hermaphroditic. On the other hand, “free Adam and free Eve” would represent “the emergence of the true mental ego.” However in the *Genesis* account, “free Adam emerged; Eve did not.”¹⁶¹

This represents the repression of the feminine principle as a whole, the dissociation from the body, from nature as well as the complete denial of a Solar femininity, the exclusion of the feminine “from the newly emergent world of rational mind, of culture, of free communicative exchange, of Appollonian heaven.” The feminine/woman has become, “a threat to reason and a threat to heaven.”¹⁶² For Wilber, *Genesis* is a “half twisted patriarchal tale.” Because Adam has “harkened unto the voice” of his wife – because he has “allowed femininity to enter the mental-communicative field,” he is punished.¹⁶³ Griffiths however, is at pains to emphasise the creative love-impulse of the Spirit in the peace and harmony of the original Eden, through the call of the prophets, the recognition of Sophia/Wisdom in Israel’s history and the expectation of a “return to Paradise” as we find in Isaiah 11: 6 - 9.¹⁶⁴ We can see that this accords both with Wilber’s Ascending and Descending movement of Spirit as potentially an integrated whole and also his assessment that all of the evolutionary process ultimately is held in God. Griffiths’ own reflection on the Christian mystical tradition, and the role of “the Virgin Mary,”¹⁶⁵ somewhat takes the sting out of his words: “But we have gone out beyond the feminine, rejected the feminine, sex, earth, matter, and life, to build up this wonderful religion of grace and truth and so on. . . .”¹⁶⁶ in respect of Christian tradition.

¹⁶⁰ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 243.

¹⁶¹ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 243.

¹⁶² Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 244.

¹⁶³ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 245.

¹⁶⁴ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 42, 85.

¹⁶⁵ Griffiths sees Mary as restorative of imbalance in the Christian tradition. For Bede she represents the Great Mother as well as the Holy Spirit or as he understand it, “the feminine aspect of the Godhead.” See Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 192. I agree with this with qualifications in respect of what I regard as as mistakenly identifying the Holy Spirit with the feminine principle.

¹⁶⁶ Bede Griffiths, *A Human Search*, 124.

The “higher order” of the mental-ego as already shown came as a “truly evolutionary mutation in consciousness”¹⁶⁷ and therefore it is the ensuing imbalance that Griffiths and Wilber wish to right.¹⁶⁸ In the Hero myths, the sun does not represent the ultimate light of the Void as it does in Vedic myths, but the light of reason in the same sense as the European “Enlightenment.”¹⁶⁹ While the Great Mother myth dominates the early membership stage, when social groups develop and grow into early civilisations underpinned to some extent by the earliest sacrificial kings the transference of sacrificial victim soon assures a new means of power and control.¹⁷⁰ Griffiths’ insistence that, “the religion of the Great Mother is the basis of all the great city civilizations,”¹⁷¹ refers to this; with his vision for decentralized societies, he intends it perjoratively.

“God the Father” can be “a simple *projection of the paternal superego*,” the one who promises eternal immortality. However, like Wilber, Griffiths sees Christ’s crucifixion as profoundly symbolic of the death of the separate self. The risen Christ has entered into the realm of *Dharmakaya/Svabhavikakaya* – the ultimate Reality, or Unity/nonduality. Jesus promises his followers that they may be One, just as he and the Father are One. Jesus’ use of “Father” (or Abba) is not seen in terms of “mythical membership” fourth level consciousness; rather it is beyond the furthest mental level and beyond the psychic fifth level. In the mystical intuition of this “6th 7th or even 8th level consciousness,” “Father” is Ground and Source of being, the Ultimate Reality who is “Person.”¹⁷² This “Person” thus is both “Mother” and “Father.”

¹⁶⁷ “The new and higher (mental-egoic) came ‘first and foremost as a protest (in the case of both male and female) against the worship of the Earth and the daimones of the fertility of the Earth.’” Here Wilber, in *Up from Eden*, 237, cites Vol 3. *Occidental Mythology*, 1964.

¹⁶⁸ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 195, “Sometime in the second and third millennia B.C., what we know as the egoic structure of consciousness emerged out of the mythic-membership level of consciousness. The heroic emergence of the ego level: something . . . quite unheard of . . .”

¹⁶⁹ This is represented as the victorious sun, the *sol invictus*. This then is the “predominantly masculine world of [heaven], sun, consciousness, and ego” in conflict with the “earth, body-bound world of the unconscious” that is identified with the femininity. Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 249.

¹⁷⁰ Wilber cites E. Becker in *Escape From Evil* (New York: Free Press, 1975): humankind turns to the figure of the king because “man wanted a visible god always present to receive his offerings, and for this he was willing to pay the price of his own subjection . . . Once men consented to live by the redistribution of life’s goods through a god figure who represented life . . . there was no stopping the process of monopolization of life in the king’s hands.”

¹⁷¹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 41. Wilber quotes Kenneth Clarke in pointing out the kingly court as a bearer of culture while the earliest king was, “the original bearer of *individualised* or egoic consciousness.” Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 182.

¹⁷² Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 167, 168, 170, 202. Person is here understood not in the Enlightenment psychological sense but in the classical sense of being in relationship. Catherine La

Griffiths' correspondence with Wilber's thought gives substance to his earlier concern in regard to the ravages of industrialization which, as already noted, he regards as the poisoned fruit of the domination of the masculine principle:

(After) Mother Earth . . . giving (of) her gifts . . . the father came to the fore, developing this great ego and becoming associated with authority and power . . . the stage of the human person's separation from nature . . . (From) about 2000 BC . . . we have been living in a patriarchal culture . . . Why in Christianity do we have only a male deity? It is because we belong to a patriarchal culture. . . . Only now are we beginning to see that there are feminine aspects in God which are just as important as masculine. God is neither male nor female and can just as easily be called mother as father.¹⁷³

His vision of a right balance of masculine and feminine principles is lent support by Wilber's "comprehensive map" for integral vision.

This is made up of five elements, that is, *quadrant, levels, lines, states, and types*. He describes the "masculine and feminine types" with the assistance of Carol Gilligan's book, *In a Different Voice*. She explains that male and female persons (boys and girls) negotiate the various stages of moral development not according to opposite archetypal tendencies but rather "in a different voice":

Male logic, or man's voice, tends to be based on terms of autonomy, justice, and rights; whereas women's logic or voice tends to be based on terms of relationship, care, and responsibility. Men tend towards agency; women tend towards communion. Men look; women touch. Men tend towards individualism, women toward relationship.

As men and women develop through the hierarchical stages, they tend towards personal integration, that is, they "start to befriend both the masculine and feminine modes in themselves, even if they characteristically act predominantly from one or the other." Bede Griffiths' approach, while it differs in gender signification in that he does use archetypal opposites, is basically consistent with this. He says:

Every man and woman is both male and female; reason and intuition exist alike in every human being In a perfect man or woman the "marriage" of opposites takes place.¹⁷⁴

Cugna refers to Gregory of Nazianzus to clarify this: "Gregory of Nazianzus says 'Father' is not the name of the divine essence but the name of a relation." (citing Gregory of Nazianzus Orat. 29:16) "Thus the personal property of the Father, that which makes the Father unique, is unbegottenness (coming from no one); the personal property of the Son is begottenness (coming from the Father); the personal property of the Spirit is procession (coming from the Father)." See Catherine La Cugna, *The Trinitarian Mystery*, 168.

¹⁷³ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 46.

¹⁷⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 121.

A fully integrated person represents a “union of autonomy and relationship, rights and responsibilities, agency and communion, wisdom and compassion, justice and mercy, masculine and feminine.”¹⁷⁵

Significantly, language plays a vital role in Bede’s insistence that the challenge is for men and women to find the balance through such integration in a period of transition to new levels of consciousness, for the sake of the planet, for the sake of humankind, for the sake of God’s kingly reign.

5. The Divine Feminine and Symbolic Language

God-speak is symbolic, and effective. Bede insists God is always beyond and only to call God, “Father,” does not carry the right negation. For Elizabeth Johnson, naming God as Father or naming God as Mother should be a “naming towards” Absolute Mystery.¹⁷⁶

The point made by Catherine Mowry LaCugna concerning *theologia* and *oikonomia* has a bearing ultimately on names and terminology for God. It reflects Schillebeeckx’ presentation of Christ as “the Sacrament of our encounter with God.” For LaCugna, the utter holiness of God is the source of absolute mystery. Although God is completely revealed in Christ, yet God remains veiled. “The economy of salvation is as ineffable, therefore, as is the eternal mystery of God.”¹⁷⁷ She points to economy in the sense Irenaeus uses it “as a synonym for the incarnation of Christ and the deification of the human person.”¹⁷⁸ It follows that “Father” used for the first person of the Trinity is profoundly symbolic. Moreover, together with Christ and the Spirit this is apparent in the liturgical practice of early church tradition. It is most obvious in the baptismal formula, the basis for Gregory Nazianzus’ assertion of the identity of “Father” in relation alone. “Thus the personal property of the Father, that which makes the Father unique, is unbegottenness (coming from no one); the

¹⁷⁵ Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*, (Boston, Massachusetts: Integral Books, 2006) 8 – 14. We are here also reminded of Erikson’s mature personality as described in the Chapter, Divine Host. It is well to remember here, Griffiths’ emphasis throughout this thesis, that within ultimate unity, distinction remains.

¹⁷⁶ Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is*, 178.

¹⁷⁷ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *The Trinitarian Mystery*, 157. In order to avoid dissolving the immanent in the economic Trinity, LaCugna refines Rahner’s “rule” with the assistance of Kasper, “In the economic self-communication, *the intra-trinitarian self-communication is present in the world in a new way*, namely, under the veil of historical words, signs, actions, and ultimately in the figure of the man Jesus of Nazareth.” La Cugna cites Walter Kasper in, *God of Jesus Christ*, 276.

¹⁷⁸ Catherine La Cugna, “The Trinitarian Mystery,” 159.

personal property of the Son is begottenness (coming from the Father); the personal property of the Spirit is procession (coming from the Father). We have seen that Griffiths agrees with this Eastern theology.¹⁷⁹ In accordance with the need to distinguish “person” in the Trinity from the Enlightenment meaning as “individual conscious subject,” LaCugna refers to John Zizioulas¹⁸⁰ and concludes, “God’s being is therefore inherently ecstatic and exists or is structured as a communion of persons.”¹⁸¹

Understanding God as “person” in such a way means that God as Trinity may just as well be designated as Mother-Daughter, Father-Daughter, Mother-Son. Considering the feminist resistance to literalizing analogical names for God, we can then see an alternative form such as Mother God as profoundly apophatic. It is in line with Julian of Norwich’s expression, “Our mother Christ.” LaCugna rejects, however, “functional” alternatives such as, “Creator-Redeemer-Sustainer” which, by “appropriating” activities to the persons of the Trinity, detract from or hide the *economia* proper to God.

We remember that Griffiths’ *advaitic* experience was of being overwhelmed by the Mother, by Love, the feminine. The experience was of the totality of the Feminine at all levels such that he experienced the force of integration at the very roots of his being, and so this included the feminine both as Great Mother and Goddess. As noted above, he argues for identifying the Holy Spirit as feminine and is assisted by his exploration of Hindu motifs. However, as previously explained, these are not intended as gender specific.

Both LaCugna and Elizabeth Johnson wish to avoid such categorisation. Rather than stereotypically labelling the Spirit “feminine,” Johnson suggests speaking “in terms of Spirit using metaphors coined from women as *imago Dei*.”¹⁸² Or as LaCugna says, “A sufficiently apophatic use of feminine as well as masculine imagery (for all three Persons of the Trinity) can free the imagination of the Christian community,” and she gives the example from the

¹⁷⁹ Bede Griffiths’ trinitarian theology of birth and return: “We come forth from the Father in the Son and we return to the Father in the Spirit” can be seen also in Hans Urs Von Balthasar, “The Father is the ‘Origin’ of the Son,” and it is “because he bears fruit out of himself and requires no fructifying that he is called Father.” Hans urs von Balthasar, *Credo* (Ignatius, 2000), p 30 in “Trinity-Ekstasis: A Theology of God the Father and Response to Kevin Giles,” Phantaz Sunlyk; available from <http://www.tektonics.org/guest/psekstasis.html> (accessed 18 June 2009).

¹⁸⁰ Based on Heideggerian anthropology, Zizioulas understands person as the “there” of being (*Dasein*). This is akin to the Hindu “Tat tvam asi.” “Because the ontological principle of God is Father, “God ‘exists’ on account of a person . . . and not on account of a substance.” Catherine LaCugna, *The Trinitarian Mystery*, 179. LaCugna is here quoting John Zizioulas in *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 42.

¹⁸¹ Catherine LaCugna, *The Trinitarian Mystery*, 179.

¹⁸² Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is*, 133.

Eleventh Council of Toledo in 675, “which stated that the Son was begotten ‘de utero Patris.’”¹⁸³ I am in agreement with this theological perspective which is different from the idea proposed by Griffiths, presented early in this chapter.

To my mind, Griffiths’ suggestion to designate the third Person of the Trinity as feminine detracts in fact from his *advaitic* goal, the whole thrust of the journey to the “beyond.” The sheer paradox of the transcendent reality, the object of Christian faith, is held as plural yet one, unity yet difference. In Griffiths’ own words the attempt to use language and the rational mind “to express that which is beyond language and the rational mind” takes us into paradox such as is described by the Hindu *bheda-abheda*.¹⁸⁴ Whether one uses, Father, Mother, Son, Daughter, masculine or feminine to refer to this Mystery, an apophatic usage is best maintained. Like Trapnell, I nevertheless recognize and respect Griffiths’ great accomplishment in the brevity of one life-span. His central concern is that humanity, “serve the growing Christ.”¹⁸⁵ For Griffiths, this Christ is not limited to being either male or female.

6. The Divine Feminine and the Movement into Integral Wisdom

In taking such an imaginative course we may recognise the “integral wisdom” which Griffiths describes in the Upanishadic intellectual synthesis:

This is the time when reason and imagination meet in a marvellous marriage, and the masculine and feminine unite to form the complete human being. It is no accident that at the end of this period we meet the figure of the perfect human being, in the form of Rama and Krishna in India, the Bodhisattva in Buddhism, and Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, who brings to fulfillment the promises made to Israel and the prophecies concerning the Messianic Priest and King.¹⁸⁶

Griffiths believes that in our time in the West in particular there is unique transformation taking place which is a further expression of the Christ phenomenon. It has global consequences in the order of a profound integration.

In our exploration of this image we note that Bede’s own experience would recommend the divine feminine is available for those in need and who are open to her

¹⁸³ Catherine LaCugna, *The Trinitarian Mystery*, 183.

¹⁸⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 159.

¹⁸⁵ Andrew Harvey recounts how in his last days in the midst of great suffering, Bede would struggle to voice the words, “Serve the growing Christ. Serve the growing Christ. Serve the growing Christ . . .” See Andrew Harvey, “An Interview with Michael Toms.”

¹⁸⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 61.

movement in their lives. She emerges or comes at the time most auspicious for their welfare. Griffiths believes that our era is uniquely prepared for, awaiting and in need of the divine Feminine.

The Hindu expression *Beda Abeda*¹⁸⁷ refers to a symbol of paradox which both veils and reveals. It respects that which is *acintya*, inexplicable. Such symbols can direct to infinite mystery *and* be the means of experience of God. As argued, the image of the divine Feminine is one such symbol. It belongs in the rhetorical category of irony in respect of the journey image and therefore grounds Christian community. Griffiths and LaCugna speak of Christian community as the ultimate symbol, which LaCugna says “is the image or icon of the triune God when the pattern of its relationships imitates what God is.” This has implications for justice and equality, in respect of gender difference. Griffiths says, “It’s really *koinonia*, the community that is fundamental, Jesus creates community . . . in which ‘there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female.’” (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11)¹⁸⁸ At the same time, once again, we follow Griffiths’ anticipation of a realisation of the divine Feminine in Christian community inspiring them, as a whole and interpersonally, to contemplative listening and creativity.

Griffiths suggests that present structures in the Church which is the “eternal Mother . . . the created aspect of the uncreated Spirit”¹⁸⁹ for whose “sake the world was made”¹⁹⁰ must change for the sake of integration vital for our era. He wants new structures which enable equal male/female partnership at all levels, in the awareness of humankind’s participative dignity as co-creators of the reign of God.

The question of women priests is a continuing issue in the Church. In Bede Griffiths’ *Essential Writings*, editor Thomas Matus OSB Cam, in 2004, interpreted Bede’s response to a question in regard to women priests in the Roman Catholic Church as being “surprisingly in line with the traditional and current magisterium of the Roman Church.” I reject this interpretation. Bede’s response was:

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

¹⁸⁷ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 154.

¹⁸⁸ Bede Griffiths, “Conversations with Fr Bede,” Vermont, 1992.

¹⁸⁹ *Marriage*, 192.

¹⁹⁰ *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Apostolic Fathers, trans. and ed., J. B. Lightfoot, Vision 2, 8:7 – 8-10 http://nazirene.org/shepherd_of_hermas.htm (accessed June 3rd 2009)

together in the service of the kingdom of God . . . the model for the church . . . I don't think women have a vocation to the priesthood at all¹⁹¹

I interpret this much more radically in line with his vision for a non-clerical Church, the privileged position of women and the priority of the prophet in the new age which is emerging. Griffiths is quite open in respect to a married priesthood:

In the early church . . . the priests were normally married, just like the apostles . . . The monk was to be celibate . . . Monastic life was perfectly distinct from the priesthood. The monks were not priests. . . The tendency grew for (priests) to become celibate and monks to become priests. . . I think we should go back to a married priesthood and recognize celibacy is a particular gift given to some people. . . . We should keep the two vocations distinct.¹⁹²

It is in this context that his response should be interpreted. On another occasion, Bede says:

Jesus committed the Holy Spirit to his disciples and without fail it has continued in the church and we can always find it there. But it is found under the load of historical circumstances . . . and can always change . . . it is always changing, developing, adjusting as Newman saw it, to human situations but still preserving the essential truth of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹³

He adds that in respect to the new age which is emerging:

We should be aware that in the New Testament women played a very considerable part in the ministry of the church, and any attempt at renewing the structures of ministry of the church would involve women having ministries in equality with men. . . . We may expect . . . a development in Christian theology recognizing the feminine aspect in God and the place of women in the ministry of the church. There is of course no question of a return to a matriarchal society. It is a matter of the recovery of feminine values and the reconciliation of the masculine and the feminine.¹⁹⁴

Bede Griffiths clearly resists any idea of women in some way contributing to "putting the priesthood back" in any way whatsoever according to its present form which he entirely rejects. He says, "There were no bishops or priests in the early church. We are moving now into something like the early church."¹⁹⁵ It is only through retrieval of "the feminine" and the recognition of male/female equality that the West will succeed in achieving entry to the

¹⁹¹ Bede Griffiths, *Essential Writings*, 75.

¹⁹² Bede Griffiths, *A Human Search*, 123.

¹⁹³ Bede Griffiths, "The Church," Tape Transcription of a talk given at Osage Monastery, Sand Springs, OK, July 1992. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

¹⁹⁴ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 291, 295.

¹⁹⁵ Bede Griffiths, "Lay Contemplative Communities," 11 August 1991, Osage Monastery. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust. See also Kathryn Spink, *A Sense*, 189. See also, Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 254.

next level of consciousness. The Church centred in Rome should really lead the way, in accordance with her divine mandate. Certainly, without thus recognizing and retrieving the feminine, there is no possibility of gaining integral wisdom.

Conclusion

Bede Griffiths struggled against what he perceived as an imbalance in himself as a Western man; in the Western world; and in the church centred in Rome. It illuminated the significance and value of the “feminine.” This chapter shows how, in his search for insight into a serious problem and means to rectify it, he listened keenly to voices coming from different angles. His theological stance allowed him to be particularly open to new ideas and to change. I have noted the effect on his life of significant women. While like-ideas from some authoritative voices such as Nassr and De Chardin confirmed some of his ideas, the influence of Ken Wilber occasioned a change of mind in at least one important area. His great tolerance that is centred in his image of the journey of humanity back to its source in God enables him to reconcile differences and even ignore seeming incompatibilities. He is less successful with the Western church. While it identifies itself as the body of Christ and hence presents itself as the apogee of humanity, it maintains its male, patriarchal bias. As already shown, Griffiths’ critique in this regard was a deeply painful one, evidenced by his identification with Jesus grieving over a Jerusalem obdurately refusing to change.

This predicament highlights how Griffiths understands that to take up the challenge of the divine Feminine signals the journey of paradox in and towards the One who is always beyond. For Bede, God is our divine Mother who emptied her womb in Christ revealed to him as the Golden String. For him, it meant a journey of growth in life in the Spirit of light and love back to the One awaiting the return of the whole of transformed creation.

Griffiths hopes that, eventually, the details of human life will reflect the kind of integration to which humankind is being called. The exploration of the divine Feminine in this chapter has demonstrated his conviction that this is only possible through a turning towards and integration with the feminine principle which is integral to the whole of reality. Osage Monastery in Sand Springs Oklahoma can be seen to represent a budding forth of this promise. Here the architecture both in the worship space and the grounds shows the movement of the Spirit in Ascent and Descent, in the spire of glass and the Osage Sundance Circle, and the integrative intimacy with creation as God’s handiwork.

Griffiths' image of the divine feminine looks back for grounding to the *imago*. This chapter has made explicit the need for a retrieval of the perennial philosophy reinterpreted for our times with the particular emphasis on the feminine principle. In Wilber's terms, a renewal of the Ascent focus of Spirit in no way suggests a disavowal or neglect of the Descent focus of Spirit. Importantly, it points rather to a new synthesis whereby, as Griffiths demonstrates, the deep wisdom of the Christian tradition in dialogue with the wisdom of other religious traditions is reappraised allowing for a celebration of the movement of the Holy Spirit throughout all of history in light of a universal call to a new level of consciousness. This nevertheless calls for careful discernment, prophetic courage and openness to change.

The chapter, "the Divine Feminine" has proven to be central in significance for my thesis. Contrary to Griffiths' suggestion, I have argued against an explicit identification of the feminine with the Holy Spirit. Rather, I support an apophatic denotation of any such analogical language. Pursuing this, the discussion looks forward to support the image of the divine Lord that is the subject of our next chapter, and the peace and justice which are implicit in God's reign.

Chapter 8

Divine Lord

“Christ is the Lord who assumes human nature and reunites human nature in himself and in reuniting human nature, he reunites the whole cosmic order in himself. He becomes the Lord the centre of the whole. This corresponds very closely with the idea in the Gita. All is one in the Lord.”¹

Introduction

The last chapter recognised in Bede Griffiths’ use of the image, the divine Feminine, his call for and anticipation of an openness to a renewed contemplative listening and creativity. In this chapter on the “divine Lord,” we explore a particular motive for this openness and the channel he believes it must take.

This image is probably the most paradoxical. On the one hand it exemplifies any image of transcendent Reality as analogical and also the kind of radical apophatism we articulated in the previous chapter. On the other hand, however, it represents God’s presence manifest in all of creation.

As will become clear, there is no doubt whatsoever that Griffiths’ dialogue with the Hindu tradition helped him to clarify his thoughts on this image in respect of his own Christian tradition and, at the same time, forced him to delve more deeply into the relevant Indian beliefs.

While Bede shows how “divine Lord” in both traditions links up with concern for and solutions to present crises in global society and effective relief for other ongoing social problems, he understands this aspect as more central in the Christian tradition. Although he believes that Western influence in India has in many ways been detrimental to her society, here at least he finds a positive flow-on.²

¹ Bede Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, 203.

² We can recognise the tension in the differences in values which Griffiths observed in all societies and which are variously expressed. See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 179 and *River*, 283. The Hindu tradition has three rhyming related words. *Yoga* or “uniting” shares the same root as the English “yoking” and signifies personal integration within the universe. Conversely *Bhoga* which is centring on material goods does not contribute to spiritual transformation and can lead to *Roga*, physical and mental illness that comes from material over-indulgence. See Jesu Rajan, *Bede Griffiths and*

Moreover Bede further discerns how “divine Lord” in the Hindu and Christian traditions relates to contemplation in action. In what amounts to a reflection of “the true *sannyasi*,”³ people’s everyday lives can be transparent witness to the Holy Spirit. We have found that Griffiths’ theology is best supported with what we have named as a “hermeneutic of encounter.” This is most profoundly for him as a Christian centered in the image of the divine Lord.

Accordingly, the chapter is set out under the following headings:

1. Griffiths Hermeneutic of Encounter
2. The Christian Context: Griffiths’ Experience
3. Comparison with the Hindu Tradition
4. Signs of the Kingdom Heralding the New Age
5. Divine Lord and the Call to Contemplation in Action

1. Griffiths’ Hermeneutic of Encounter

I have already described Griffiths’ images of God couched in the overall image of journey. As well, the late Judson Trapnell has articulated Griffiths’ developing theology of complementarity.⁴ This whole movement grounded in a hermeneutic of encounter which is discernible in potential in Griffiths’ particular intellectual mien even as a youth when his exploration of life is strongly dictated by his literary interests. It receives motive and direction when he discovers Christ, the Golden String.

As a young student, he is devoted to the novels of Thomas Hardy who finds depth of humanity in exploring people’s suffering through poverty and deprivation. Later the Romantics provide the setting for the pure idea which comes through contemplation of beauty and its working on the imagination.

The “graced moment” of his numinous experience in his final year of high school provides the key to the further step of understanding the sacramental, how the mysterious depths of reality are veiled by everyday life. Through an initial “nature mysticism” and later

Sannyasa, 1989. See also, “Trilogy of Bhoga, Roga and Yoga,” *Hindustan Times*; available from http://www.adishakti.org/_/trilogy_of_bhoga_roga_and_yoga.htm (accessed 10 November 2009).

³ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 272.

⁴ Judson Trapnell, “Bede Griffiths’ Theory.”

an intense crisis of conversion, he comes to discern the Word manifest in a variety of different ways, who is Christ, the “Golden String”⁵ and the way to the Eternal City. This is the basis of humility and his sense of self-transformation (and the transformation of all of creation) as a process in life’s journey. Concomitant with this is a particular sensitivity and openness to Christ which, while it finds a home in an institutional Benedictine expression of humility and welcome, also points beyond to further forms of expression.

It grasps Rahner’s insistence on the openness towards and of an absolute future as that which is quintessentially Christian.⁶ We also note the resonance with Panikkar’s theology where a Trinitarian faith can be expressed in “the pure algebraic formula,” of “openness in both directions.”⁷

In what we have elsewhere named as Griffiths’ ‘hermeneutic of encounter’ meaning is found in – being found, in the primordial personal encounter instigated by God; the One who is yet discovered to be profoundly present within and without, such that pursuit of greater openness to life in all its forms is a sacred discipline and continuing exercise in humility.

Griffiths admits that although in the beginning of his journey he was rightly oriented, nonetheless he was selective, screening out what did not appeal to him. This changed in India. Here, in his search for personal integration and the experience of *advaita*, (non-dualism) he encountered dark symbols, such as *kali*, and sexual images which did not, however, disgust him. Rather, they pointed to the heart of Mystery. He was even more convinced of the need to accept the full panoply of stages in human development and personal integration such as he found best explicated in the work of Ken Wilber.

On the other hand, a hermeneutic of encounter does not dispense with spiritual discernment. It owns a radical acknowledgement of God’s outpouring love in and for all of God’s creation. Necessarily, however, the divine freedom which is imaged also in creation recognises the possibility of the demonic. Griffiths does not condone sin. In the case of interreligious dialogue which he insists is a vital duty, he advises patience and perseverance;

⁵ This is Griffiths’ own emblematic symbol, taken from William Blake’s poem, *Jerusalem*.

⁶ Karl Rahner, *Investigations*, 190.

⁷ Raymond Panikkar, *The Trinity and World Religions*, 42. This concept is compared with Griffiths’ ideas and elaborated in the Chapter, “Divine Host,” in the section “In Dialogue with his Journey Partners.”

we note in particular difficult situations from which he withdraws when it becomes apparent to him that the motives of the other parties do not serve the search for truth.

Apart from the “hostile forces” due to repression in the subconscious mind Griffiths recognizes further powers for good or evil in the psychic or subtle realm between consciousness and the “supramental”⁸ that can influence human judgment and decision. Bede describes these elemental powers, named by St Paul, *stoicheia*⁹, as being of the world of psychic experience, the world of gods and angels. There are the three levels of reality common to all religious traditions which have given rise to enormous variety of image and symbol, the whole being subject to the originating “freedom to be.” Within these interacting realms, or “worlds of experience” of physical, psychic and spiritual life, in both Christian and Eastern traditions there exists a hierarchy, or degrees of reality. Right order encompasses service. Dionysius speaks of nine “orders (functions or roles) of angels” and sees the mystical reality of the Church, the *ecclesia* reflecting this. Griffiths finds that both Origen and Sri Aurobindo understand that this subtle realm adheres to its own laws which are “as coherent as those operating in the physical world.” A manifest illustration in our times for Griffiths is the phenomenon of Findhorn.¹⁰

Evil, for both Griffiths and Wilber, results from freedom which is commensurate with divine creative love. While Griffiths quibbles with Wilber’s terms – that Wilber calls simply “shorthand” – that is, a first “theological Fall” and a second “scientific Fall,” he seems nevertheless to agree on principle: the refusal to recognize the relationship with the transcendent, the interdependency of all things and the dependency on the Spirit, on God, but rather to focus on, or put faith in separateness, on the individual, the separate self, is the origin and cause of sin.¹¹ It involves a “clinging,” *trishna*, and refusal to change, to

⁸ This term is elaborated in the chapter, “Companions for the Journey,” specifically in respect of Sri Aurobindo.

⁹ For Griffiths’ specific reference to Paul’s use of this term, see *A New Vision*, 51. For support of Griffiths’ usage, see the scholarly article *Paul’s Rhetorical Use of “stoicheia” in Galatians 4:3,9*, available from <http://kvond.wordpress.com/2008/05/28/the-condensation-of-specificity-pauls-rhetorical-use/> (accessed 17 February 2011).

¹⁰ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 47 – 56, 199 – 200, 236 – 239, 244 – 245, 236. Findhorn, in Scotland for Griffiths, “seems to substantiate” Origen’s insight in respect of angelic influences in nature. Griffiths describes what has been reported as extraordinary phenomena around which an eco-village has built up. Available from <http://www.findhorn.org/whatwedo/vision/history.php> ; (accessed 17 February 2011).

¹¹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 252. Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 328, 329.

transcend present stages and move on to greater levels of being.¹² It involves also involvement in “illusion,” in the purely material existence, such as, already shown, is illustrated by the Hindu story, in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, of the two birds and the unhappy man sitting in the one tree.

For Griffiths, at the heart of divine Mystery we encounter Love, the source of true happiness, for which Christ is the supreme symbol, the divine Lord whom he encountered in his own life as the “Golden String.”

Weighing up this image, we have included in our exploration Bede’s understanding of the evolution of the idea in the Hindu and Christian traditions with his critical comparison, as well as the relevant associated issues of human concern for global and societal problems and outcomes. For this we have recourse in particular to his engagement with the thought of Erick Schumacher and David Bohm, while not forgetting Rupert Sheldrake and Fritjof Capra, and also Ken Wilber some of whose work we examined in detail in the prior chapter. In India, his model is Mahatma Gandhi, while all of his works and many of his letters engage this image in some way or other.

We note that in *The Marriage of East and West* and *A New Vision of Reality*, Bede treats of the Hindu development first. Differently, for this chapter it is necessary to begin with the Christian process. In respect of this image, it is the particular lens through which he, even though a *sannyasi*, must see and understand as a committed Christian. On the other hand, Griffiths himself acknowledges his indebtedness to his Hindu search for a clearer view of the stages of the Christian process itself.

2. The Christian Context: Griffiths’ Experience

“Lord” connotes “person” and the wealth of all else inferred by it. Bede is able to positively compare the Hindu and Christian traditions where, through a process of evolutionary stages a personal God is gradually revealed.

For Christians the Hebrew Testament is the source of the process because its “final and definitive meaning” is found in Jesus of Nazareth.¹³ Griffiths traces the development of the plural Elohim “when Israel recognised many ‘gods,’ in a form of ‘henotheism,’” where El,

¹² Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 172, 185.

¹³ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 105.

or one God manifested in different forms such as, El Roi, El Olam and El Elyon.¹⁴ He compares this with the Hindu Brahman manifesting as the *devas*. With Moses, Elohim receives the singular designation for the One God who is nevertheless at this stage still bearing a tribal resonance as a thunder god, witnessed in Moses' vision with the thunder and lightning on the mountain.¹⁵ The un-namable One¹⁶ of the *tetragramaton*, is "Lord of hosts," the Lord of Israel's armies, "driving out their enemies before them."¹⁷ As we are dealing with the immersion of the consciousness in myth, it is only gradually that change comes about. Even though Griffiths recognises that "the God of Israel . . . is essentially a 'holy' God, whose characteristics are righteousness (*sadiq*) and loving-kindness (*hesed*)," nevertheless a certain violent and demonic aspect carries over which he compares with the Hindu *kali* and which he sees as being inherited by Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Besides the Old Testament God-wrought violence, Griffiths cites the Inquisition, the crusades, the desecration of the earth, the threat of nuclear war and the Christian doctrine of hell and eternal punishment as implicated in, and even in some instances directly stemming from, this continuing aspect of the myth.¹⁸ Moreover he recognises the origins as being very dualistic; the word "holy" itself can signify separateness.¹⁹

In the early stage of his life, Griffiths' describes his own concept in dualistic terms. Despite the numinous experience he had had in his last year of high school, from which time he felt in tune with a certain "presence" when alone with nature, until his exit from university, God "was a grim, impersonal power" and "inscrutable mystery"; certainly not a reality that could be designated as "Lord." Nonetheless, he "revered" Christ but only as "a perfect human being like Socrates."²⁰

¹⁴ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 79.

¹⁵ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 80.

¹⁶ The Tetragrammaton, *YHWH* is the capital letters in Hebrew for "Lord" and connected with the verb, *hayah* "to be." See *NRSV*, Exodus 3: 14.e. Somewhat inappropriately, Griffiths notes "the name *Yahweh* as revealed as the proper name of the God of Israel." See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 80. An exegesis of this text shows that the Exodus insight communicates the sense of God's utter transcendence, indeed a deep apophatism. However, in the later *The New Creation in Christ*, p34, Griffiths rectifies this.

¹⁷ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 80.

¹⁸ We would refer here to the previous chapter in the explication of "dissociation" due to suppression of the "Goddess."

¹⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 81, 87. *Marriage*, 108. In *The New Creation*, Griffiths translates "holy" as "separate," 64. God's holiness represents a distinct transcendence.

²⁰ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 24, 25.

In *The Golden String* we can trace the development in Griffiths' understanding of "Lord" in terms of divine authority, divine immanence, divine providence and divine love. He had always described himself as very "left-brain" oriented. We believe it took the kind of contemplative experience which he found in India to evoke in him a deeply personal experiential knowledge of Jesus as Lord.

In his 1980 Forward to the second edition of *The Golden String*, which was originally published in 1954, Bede uses "Lord" four times in the space of two consecutive sentences. In the whole of the rest of this, his earliest book and first section of his autobiography (the sequel being *The Marriage of East and West*), there is barely any use of the word.

Only in his recollection of Psalm 119 do we find it. At the time of his repentance for his rejection of the Church and placing sole confidence in his own independent thought, he hears the words, "Blessed are those that are undefiled in any way: and walk in the way of the Lord . . ." ²¹ being chanted. They are "engraved on (his) mind" heralding his transition from "darkness into a world of light" when he discovers a profound sense of belonging. He experiences a transformation of life such that everything glows with inner effulgence; he has a sense of floating buoyancy and inside the church he feels he is "in the house of God."²² But here his journey towards appropriation of faith in the Lordship of Christ has barely begun. He continues to puzzle as to whether God is an abstract reality more in keeping with the Hindu and Buddhist texts he is reading or indeed a "Person."²³ His reading of Newman's *Development of Christian Doctrine* integrates convincingly for him Church as the mystical body of Christ and Church as institution.²⁴ At two crucial times of decision,

²¹ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 106.

²² Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 106, 107.

²³ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 111.

²⁴ Newman represented for Griffiths "the historical approach" which was central. "The Church which Christ had founded was a historical reality." Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 120. Newman's presentation of the Church as a "living organism, beginning like a seed in the New Testament and gradually developing according to specific laws until it reached its full stature" fitted St Paul's image of the Church as "a human body composed of many organs, but subject to the one head and animated by one Spirit." The "inner principle of growth" he was also able to compare with Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, and the evidence in such organic growth of "false developments, failures in adaptation, which resulted in the corruption of a species and its gradual extinction." Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 121. It was also convincing evidence for him of the validity in theological development so that his concern for what seemed to be philosophical accretions on the "richly symbolic terms of poetry and imagination," were in accord with "the development of any other science." Again he turned to Newman for the key for discerning true or false developments. He fully identified with Newman's demonstration of the Church as "the Body with Christ as the Head" as a Church of the Spirit. As well, he accepted Newman's presentation of Apostolic succession while he found

Bede resorts to prayer in solitude when, in the abandonment to God of first his reason and then his will the “alien . . . terrifying . . . power . . . took over (his) life . . . revealed itself . . . as love.”²⁵ Added to this he finds in monastic life a “Christianity . . . not just a doctrine to be preached but a life to be lived . . . the heart of that life . . . to be found in sacrifice . . . day by day in . . . work and in . . . prayer in union with Christ on the Cross,” but as members of community who were together, “putting on Christ.”²⁶ Nowhere yet, however, does he invoke the title, “Lord.”

Yet the word is used definitively in his Forward to *The Golden String*, around 1979 as he says, “twenty-five years (after) *The Golden String* was written and nearly fifty years since the experiences which I have recorded took place.” In this much later addition, in two sentences he describes the “simple formula of the early Church – ‘Jesus is Lord,’ as the essence of Christian faith.” He quotes St Paul, “No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit,” and describes the Trinitarian formula within this simple formula as “faith in God as Father, in Jesus as the Lord, in the Holy Spirit as the witness to the Lordship of Christ” being the “common faith of all Christians.” We take this as an indication of the kind of clarification and sure simplicity of theological articulation granted to him through his monastic habit in England but especially by his years of dialogue with the Hindu tradition.

In the Indian context therefore, Griffiths’ later works deal in an exploratory way with this theology. In *Marriage*, he describes the Christian “historical myth” in the context of the promise made to David that is “rooted in historical time” in contradistinction to the semi-historical myth of Rama and Krishna based in cyclic time. He insists on the utter necessity of a reconciliation that demands the integration of East and West. This has to take into consideration the seeming incompatibility of linear and cyclic patterns of time. We have explored this nexus in the chapter, the *Imago Dei*, where we suggested Griffiths’ reconciliation of the Perennial Philosophy and an evolutionary process amounted to his vision for a new level of consciousness. It demands a new openness to the utter mystery of God, to the Church of the Spirit. And this means universal religious renewal through a

particularly helpful, his “seven principles by which genuineness of the development could be tested and distinguished from a corruption.” He listed these as, “preservation of its type, the continuity of its principles, its power of assimilation, its logical sequence, its power to anticipate the future and conserve the past, and finally its chronic vigour.” Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 125. These no doubt assisted him in the painful time he describes as a “great turmoil” a “state of demolition” he was going through only three years before his death.

²⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 96-120.

²⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 132 – 142.

return of each religion to its originating source and a consummate reintegration within contemporary knowledge systems.²⁷ It is conscious of the need for a balance between Lonergan's transcendental precepts and the creative use of religious symbol.

Based on the New Testament, Griffiths provides a brief exegesis of "Lord": It was after the post-Resurrection event of Pentecost that Jesus of Nazareth, man of history was recognised by his followers as "Christ" or "Messiah." Later he was further identified absolutely as "Lord" equal with God, the very Word of God incarnate. In and through Jesus Christ, the awaited Kingdom or reign of God is inaugurated. Jesus' transformation represents a foretaste of that ultimate transformation for all of humanity and all creation. Moreover, Jesus' mother, Mary, is the symbol of the transformation of sexuality, taking the "energy of love" into the realm of the Spirit.²⁸

Central to Griffiths' understanding of the image of "divine Lord" is the insight into God as person which is evident from the beginning of *Genesis* (about 1,000 BC). God's spoken word, "Let there be . . ." up to the Gospel of John and further to the dispensation of the Holy Spirit finds in Jesus Christ its complete fulfillment as *Logos* through historical incarnation. *Ho Logos* consummately is also Spirit, that same Spirit which, as *ruah*, broods over the primal waters of creation, and which, as Sophia, is "immanent presence" which "has filled the whole creation" and "pervades and penetrates all things."²⁹ Griffiths also understands the story of Eden as describing the same Spirit as "indwelling" in the hearts of earliest humankind, such that there is harmony with the rest of creation (a harmony he finds also in the prophets of Israel). In the previous chapter, I described Griffiths' view of sin in the world, an exclusive centering on the ego and rejection of the Spirit, which disrupts the relationships between God and humanity, human beings with one another and with the rest of creation. The "essential mystery of the Gospel" is that Jesus "opened the way to a new movement of the Spirit" in the life of Israel, by making way for "the gift of his Spirit." This new "life of the Spirit" made available through Jesus Christ is the means of "communion with God . . . the meaning and purpose of human existence."³⁰ As we have seen in previous chapters, because of mystical insight into a reality that is beyond time and place, beyond

²⁷ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 200 – 204. See also, Bede Griffiths, *Return*, 117, 118.

²⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 172-192.

²⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 81.

³⁰ Bede Griffiths, *A New vision*, 82 – 105.

history and culture, for Griffiths, this last point is strongly nuanced. Jesus particularly identifies with the Son of Man figure, a figure which we find in other religious traditions.

As Son of Man, Jesus' total surrender to the abiding Spirit and to "the Father" not only "reunites humanity as one body in himself" but also the whole of creation as "a new creation."³¹ I have pointed out in a previous chapter that Griffiths understands this as a new stage in evolution. It is a concept he shares with others, such as Teilhard de Chardin, David Bohm and Sri Aurobindo. The whole process is one of "personalization." He believes that, in accordance with the inner essence of God as Trinity, humanity as a whole, the *imago dei*, is to become a "communion of persons in love."³² In the chapter, *Imago Dei*, we have indicated the promise of the "bonded community" of humanity based on a mystical tradition within each religion which indicates a "dynamic relatedness" as integral.

Divine Lord and personal integration; the place of women

Here we note the particularly poignant paradoxical element of the divine Lord image. At this epoch-marking stage of humanity's career, the progression towards this communion means "the reconciliation of the masculine and feminine." For Bede, this means a recognition in practical day-to-day terms that the Christian devotion to Mary as Mother, has its origin in God. There is no question for him of a return to a matriarchal society; however, there are serious implications for how women should contribute in church ministries and in society as a whole. While we "have now reached the limit of the *yang*," the movement of the swing towards the *yin* where "the feminine will sooner or later begin to take its proper place with its characteristics of intuition, empathy and co-operation, and with its holistic approach" means an integrated "person" whether of male or female gender. This integration is symbolised by Divine Lord. For emphasis, Griffiths presents Julian of Norwich "who speaks of Jesus as our Mother."³³

So we have the appreciation of the Trinitarian God as divine Lord where Lord, in Panikkar's terms, can just as well be applied to God who is three divine *persona* in relationship. That is, God who, though One, in Paul's "trinitarian formulation of God" from Ephesians 4:6 is "above all, through all, in all" or *super omnes*: that is Source of Being and

³¹ "The whole of humanity is growing to the full stature of the man, Jesus Christ, who is none other than the primordial Man who was there in the beginning and who has now been revealed as the Lord, uniting all humanity with God." Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 112.

³² Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 94.

³³ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 294, 295.

the Father; *per omnia*: the Son, Being and the Christ; *in omnibus*: divine Immanence, return of Being and the Spirit.³⁴ For Griffiths, “Trinity is the essence, the very ground of all Christian existence. It is not one person. It is the communion of love.”³⁵ I have shown that Griffiths argues this can be expressed in feminine terms just as well as masculine, that is, Source of Being and the Mother; the Daughter, Being and the Christ; return of Being and the Spirit/Sophia.³⁶ For Christians, then, on the one hand, “divine Lord” can be seen to have a peculiarly apophatic thrust; on the other, there is a correspondingly firm directive for integration within a holistic cosmic order. This latter can be seen in Griffiths’ 1991 articulation of the theology of “the cosmic Christ.” “The cosmic Christ, then, is our belief that Christ himself goes beyond space and time, is totally one with the Father, the creator-God,³⁷ and so is also present in all creation.”³⁸ And as noted, this one God is Mother and Father. Griffiths credits John Paul 1’s tragically brief pontificate with one supreme contribution: “The one thing Pope John Paul 1 left to the Church was saying, ‘God is mother.’”³⁹

How does this compare with the Indian model? It is necessary to introduce this area in order to better understand Griffiths’ approach to service in the world which is co-extensive with the image of divine Lord.

³⁴ Raymond Panikkar, *The Trinity and World Religions*, 67.

³⁵ Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation in Christ* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1992), 96.

³⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 191.

³⁷ We would have to understand “creator-God” here in terms of “source of being” or “the void” which empties into the act of creating being itself.

³⁸ Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation in Christ*, 97.

³⁹ Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation in Christ*, 95. Bede also mentions this point in a talk at Osage Monastery, 11 August 1991, “Lay Contemplative Communities,” where he adds, “Too holy a man, too gifted to stay long on the earth . . .” At the *Angelus* talk, on the 10th Sep, 1978, John Paul 1 speaking of the peace process referred to Prime Minister Bergin:

Premier Begin *sic* recalls that the Jewish people once passed difficult moments and addressed the Lord complaining and saying: “You have forsaken us, you have forgotten us!” “No!”—He replied through Isaiah the Prophet—“can a mother forget her own child? But even if it should happen, God will never forget his people.”

The Pope continued:

Also we who are here have the same sentiments; we are the objects of undying love on the part of God. We know: he has always his eyes open on us, even when it seems to be dark. He is our father; even more he is our mother.

See *John Paul 1, ANGELUS, Sunday, 10 September 1978*; available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_i/angelus/documents/hf_jp-i_ang_10091978_en.html (accessed 30 September 2009). See also, “Lay Contemplative Communities,” a Talk at Osage Monastery, Sand Springs, OK. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

3. Comparison with the Hindu Tradition

After living sixteen years as a monk in India, fourteen of these as *sannyasi*, Griffiths can proclaim with confidence that “behind the vast forest of images in a Hindu temple, there is the presence of the One ‘without a second,’ the unutterable mystery of Brahman” and that this inexpressible mystery is comparable in all religions whether Christian or American Indian Tlingit and Dakota.⁴⁰

We emphasise again that it is only in this radically apophatic sense that the divine “Father/Mother” is “Lord.” It accords with Panikkar’s theology,

The Father is the Absolute, the only God, *o theos*. The Trinity is not a tri-theism . . . the Father . . . has no *ek-sistence*, not even Being. In the generation of the Son he has . . . given everything. In the Father the apophatism . . . of Being is real and actual . . . Is it not here, truly speaking, in this essential apophatism of the ‘person’ of the Father, in this kenosis of Being at its very source, that the Buddhist experience of *nirvana* and of *sunyata* (emptiness) should be situated?⁴¹

It is in the light of Panikkar’s theology that Griffiths’ explication must be read. In *Return to the Centre*, distinguishing *nirguna* Brahman, Brahman “without attributes,” from *saguna* Brahman, Brahman “with attributes” or the Creator, the Lord (Isvara), Bede writes somewhat ambiguously of the former:

In Christian terms it is the abyss of the Godhead, the “divine darkness” of Dionysius, which “exceeds all existence” and cannot be named, of which the Persons of the Godhead are the manifestations.⁴²

Griffiths has distanced himself from Augustine’s psychological trios such as memory, understanding and will for imaging the Trinity, preferring the holistic relational and apophatic models of the Cappadocians, most especially Gregory of Nyssa, and the later mystics Julian of Norwich and Jon Ruysbroeck. This provides him the place for dialogical meeting with the mystery of the Trinity in terms of other religions. It encompasses the synthesis of classical ideas and builds a basis for a fresh understanding of the perennial philosophy to which he insists the West must return.

In India, Griffiths had studied Sanskrit and, just as long before he had read Greek and Christian philosophy in their original languages, now he discovered a parallel grand and

⁴⁰ Bede Griffiths, *Return*, 20, 21.

⁴¹ Raimon Panikkar, *The Trinity*, 45, 46.

⁴² Bede Griffiths, *Return to the Centre*, 25.

ancient religious tradition, “yet completely different in its orientation.” Here, instead of considering everything from the human centre, “the supreme reality was Brahma, the absolute Being” with all else seen in relationship to this Reality.⁴³ Griffiths found the mystical tradition in Christianity the way of meeting with the East. He points to the transcendent orientation of Plato’s thought and he sets the great philosopher’s “ideas” in the level of reality that India had mapped as the *mahat*, or the level of consciousness that is *sambhogakaya*.⁴⁴ It is not, however, the unitive experience and it is expressed in dualistic terms. To Griffiths’ mind, Plato had not achieved an insight “comparable to that of Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim understandings,” such as was achieved in the mystical theology of Dionysius and which he expressed symbolically. While Plato was “profoundly influenced by Pythagoras and inherited his mystical understandings . . . he always used the language of rational analytical thought.”⁴⁵

It is therefore the Greek Patristic and more dynamic Medieval theology of the Trinity to which Griffiths suggests we must return for meeting the world’s religions and in particular, for this focus, in respect of the idea of universal Lordship.

Thirteen years after *Return to the Centre*, supported by his knowledge of Ruysbroeck set within an experiential theology, Griffiths writes of the Trinity with clarity and without ambiguity. “The Father . . . the source, the one, the origin . . . is pouring itself out eternally in the Son, knowing itself and expressing itself in the Son.” He continues by quoting Ruysbroeck:

This communion of love in the Spirit swallows up every divine way and activity and all attributes of the persons within the rich compass of the essential unity. To this the persons of the Trinity and all that lives in God must give place . . . the abyss itself may not be comprehended unless by the essential unity . . . for here there is naught else but an eternal rest in the fruitive embrace of an outpouring love.

To this Griffiths adds, “beyond all distinctions and yet embracing all distinctions.”⁴⁶

In *The Cosmic Revelation* of 1983, Bede describes the Hindu religion as “cosmic” in line with what is revealed in God’s covenant with *Adam* and recognizable in that of

⁴³ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 171.

⁴⁴ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, 53 – 55.

⁴⁵ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, 231. Griffiths is not alone in his belief that Pythagoras was familiar with Indian mysticism – possibly even through travel. See Peter Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (Inverness, CA.: The Golden Sufi Centre, 1999).

⁴⁶ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 251.

Melchizedek, the “pagan priest,” with Abraham. Furthermore, “Hinduism . . . is the supreme example of a cosmic religion” and Brahman, “the One Supreme Being . . . the Cosmic Lord.”⁴⁷

In the chapter, “Divine Host”, we have shown in detail this infinite Lordship which underlies the whole of the *Vedic* revelation. From the earliest *Rg Veda*, we noted the *purusha*, the universal man, “three fourths of whom are in heaven, one fourth on earth.” We continued to the *Upanisadic* wisdom that saw the *purusha*, manifesting from the primordial silence of the word, *vac*,⁴⁸ as one with the *atman* and *Brahman*. We quoted Griffiths’ articulation of this *Vedic/Upanisadic* insight into this cosmic Lordship:

There is here the concept of a unified creation which has the character of a person who embraces the whole universe and at the same time transcends it.⁴⁹

In the later *Bhagavad Gita*, this Lord, or *Bhagavan* (who is one with Brahman and Atman)⁵⁰ takes the form of the *avatara*, Krishna. In addition, the wisdom of the *Gita* has the one Spirit present in all life throughout the cosmos as the union of male and female principles, *purusa*, and *prakriti*. The devotee is not led inwards to love in isolation. At the point of the *buddhi*, the human meets the divine and realises *Brahma-vidhya*, or awareness of the indwelling, all-encompassing divine presence and in a deeper realisation, union, *Brahma-bhuta*, where the person’s love “is for all creation and he has supreme love for me, (the Lord)”⁵¹:

By love he knows me in truth, who I am and what I am and when he knows me in truth he enters into my Being.⁵²

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, therefore we find, *Brahman*, as one with the *atman*, dwelling as divine Lord in the human heart. We can understand Griffiths’ enthusiasm towards the

⁴⁷ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 28-35.

⁴⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation* 77-78. *Vac* is feminine, and comes forth from the Absolute to which it is wholly surrendered and manifests through the divine ardor (*tamas*) to create an other. *Vac* in Panikkar’s words is, “the total living word,” “the primordial mystery,” “the cosmotheandric reality par excellence.” It reveals that “God man and the universe . . . are constitutively connected . . . (in a) cosmotheandric communion.” Raymond Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 89-92.

⁴⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 66.

⁵⁰ Griffiths believes that Krishna and the *Mahabharata*, the story of the great war which is basic to the expository dialogue between Krishna and Rama, probably have a “historical origin” and which have nonetheless been embellished by legend. Out of this embellishment has emerged “the figure of the Supreme God . . . the God of love . . . the one Supreme Lord, the creator of all.” *Marriage*, 86.

⁵¹ Bede Griffiths, *River, Bhagavad Gita*, “The Yoga of Liberation by Renunciation,” V 54. 318.

⁵² *Bhagavad Gita*, “The Yoga of Liberation by Renunciation,” V55. See Bede Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, 318.

Gita as “a wonderful confirmation of the revelation of God’s love contained in the Gospel.”⁵³

Bede speaks and writes ecstatically of one Hindu image in particular. The ancient symbol, the *Nataraja*, commonly known as “the Dancing Siva”⁵⁴ more than any other, for him bridges the East/West, Hindu/Christian divide. It is, he says, “the Resurrection” and can be identified with the cosmic Christ “dancing at the heart of creation.” Within the circle of flames representing the eternal sacrifice of love, a royal figure (*Nataraja* is literally, “Lord of the Dance”) with four arms, representing the four points of the universe, dances in an ecstasy of joy with one foot delicately raised and the other poised on a small human form representing victory over ignorance and illusion. (Because the foot is source of blessing, this can be interpreted as raising humanity to transcend ignorance and illusion.) The dancing figure holds in one hand an hour-glass drum, redolent of the primordial word, “OM,” bringing forth all of being and also the integration of masculine and feminine; another hand points to the raised foot, the symbol of blessing and freedom; a third hand is held in the *Abhaya* pose of fearlessness with the palm foremost on which is engraved the icon for tender care; a fourth hand holds a flame declaring sovereignty over life and death, creation and destruction, further illustrated by the mastery of the recoiling serpent draped over an arm. Contemplation of this image reveals the goal of the human journey:

We must find who is dancing in our hearts; then we will see the Lord dancing in all of creation . . . He says, “Come to me for your salvation” . . . He sustains the whole universe. This holding of the universe is a kind of dance, the dance of the universe, and He is dancing in every human heart. You have to recognize the Lord dancing in your heart and then you dance with him.⁵⁵

This recognition of the Lord and the “dance” images the Trinitarian theology of *perichōresis*. The mutuality of the Trinity in John 17:21, that Griffiths constantly refers to is evoked by this term used by the Greek Fathers which implies, “movement around and into . . . utter abiding within . . . an indescribable ecstasy and intimacy.”⁵⁶ This “communion of love,”⁵⁷ this “total unity where we experience the whole creation and the whole of humanity

⁵³ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 325. In particular, Bede refers to the Gospel of John, Ch 17:21.

⁵⁴ Bede had brought a bronze image wrapped in brown paper and presented it to the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration when Osage Monastery was opened.

⁵⁵ Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*, 42,43

⁵⁶ Edith M. Humphrey, *Ecstasy and Intimacy: When the Holy Spirit Meets the Human Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006), 92, 93.

⁵⁷ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 162.

reintegrated in the supreme consciousness, in the One,” is the one Griffiths knows and images as divine Lord.⁵⁸ And as noted, it is his dialogue with other religions, in particular the Indian tradition, which has assisted him.

Differences yet remain between the Christian and Hindu insights in respect to divine Lordship which have implications for the co-extensive reign of God on earth. From Griffiths’ Christian perspective right response to God’s reign as Lord must flow from the Paschal mystery:

The Word of God is the expression of the mind of God. It is the self-manifestation of the eternal Wisdom; and the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is the self-communication of the eternal Being, infinite love, which is manifested in the whole of creation and comes to a head in the person of Jesus Christ.⁵⁹

In other words, the right response to the love of the Lord is a turning outwards and an engagement with life.

In the chapter, *The Imago Dei*, we described the journey that all humanity with the whole of creation takes towards an eschatological fulfillment begun in Christ. Because through this all of life is of inestimable value, the right response of the Christian is compassionate engagement with life centered in the cross and resurrection, which for Bede is perfectly ritually enacted in the efficacious sacrament of the Eucharist. We have spoken of the wholly transcendent “Father/Mother” as source and ground of all that exists. Proceeding from this “void,” divine Self-expression is manifest in Being itself through the Word who holds the “seeds” of all creation as primordial potential. Life is communicated through the love dynamic of the Spirit which “pervades and penetrates all things.”⁶⁰

We noted also in the same chapter that in a return to a recognisably Cappadocian insight, especially Gregory of Nyssa, Griffiths’ dialogue partner, the mathematician Beatrice Bruteau bases her argument for an Incarnational theology and a “self-creating world” on the “enstatic” “ecstatic”⁶¹ reality of the life of the Trinity, characterised by “the tendency of

⁵⁸ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 56.

⁵⁹ Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation in Christ*, 57.

⁶⁰ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 81.

⁶¹ Beatrice Bruteau, *God’s Ecstasy*. Bruteau (reflecting the theology of Gregory of Nyssa) explains this as Being is “enstatic,” while “May-you-be” is ecstatic. “My enstatic reality is expressed in my ecstatic love for the other, which is a will to union with the other’s enstatic reality, which in turn is an ecstatic movement out to yet another,” 31. This “shared being, shared life” as “a paradigm for the cosmos . . . will be the pattern repeated on all the levels to various degrees.” More significantly for us, it defines community as “a network of interactions” which has to be seen in terms of the whole not as

Being, to be in every possible way . . . ⁶² Furthermore, God's ecstatic expression is manifest as finite existence which is a process. This opens up freedom to choose the way of transcendence, the way of conscious co-creators. As Griffiths points out, it also indicates the opportunity for "creativity, improvisation, novelty, adventure, life at the fullest."⁶³

Set within the compassion of Christ, however, the Spirit dwelling in the heart of each person, longs for this freedom for *all* of humanity, upon whom all creation depends for *its* fulfillment. This is the basis of "sacrifice," from *sacrum facere*, making sacred by making over to the Lord; that is, sacrifice in the spiritual sense of realisation of dependence on the Lord God and centred in the virtue of *hesed* "loving kindness." Bede describes the depth of this sacrificial love:

Love is terrible in the way it makes us face our own wounds and the sufferings of others. But it breeds compassion . . . Love brings us into the presence of Christ who bears in himself humanity's wounds. . . Our compassion extends to the whole of suffering humanity, which is both revealed and healed by the suffering of Christ on the cross. . . The cross is healing. . . The suffering Christ, the glorified Christ and the cosmic Christ are all aspects of the same reality which we have to keep in mind.⁶⁴

This provokes a certain tension and unresolved anomaly. It means the Spirit is present to life and to all peoples so that in the depths of their consciences all are called to such a response. It reflects the universal urge to self-transcendence which is (here Bede defers to Rahner) constitutive of humankind. In each religion the means of self-transcendence is the experiential encounter with their particular "absolute symbol." Bede recognises in John Main's⁶⁵ rediscovery from "the Benedictine tradition stemming from the Fathers in the desert" the use of a simple "mantra" as the means of realising Jesus as Lord is especially "suited to the needs of lay people."⁶⁶

In the late summer of 1991, every day for a week, at *The John Main Seminar* in New Harmony, Indiana, Griffiths spoke on the theme of "Christian Meditation: the Evolving

a collection of parts. While it has "internal differentiation" it is one. Pp 32, 35. For Griffiths' own short description of Gregory's theology in this respect, see *A New Vision*, 242, 243.

⁶² Beatrice Bruteau, *God's Ecstasy*, 37.

⁶³ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 40.

⁶⁴ Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation in Christ*, 53.

⁶⁵ Born in 1926, Dom John Main, OSB, from 1975, led meditation groups at Ealing Abbey. Laurence OSB, writes that Bede in the East and John Main in the West, "attempted to live a monastic life restored to its primitive essentials of contemplation and community." See Laurence Freeman OSB, Introduction, in Bede Griffiths, *New Creation*, 7.

⁶⁶ Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation*, 14, 32.

Tradition.”⁶⁷ Laurence Freeman points out that although Griffiths met Main in 1979, it was only after Main’s death in 1982, “that Father Bede first read him deeply.”⁶⁸ Bede later wrote to Freeman that, “in my experience John Main is the most important spiritual guide in the Church today.” As Freeman explained, this was due to “the way John Main met certain critical needs of modern people in their search for a deeper experience of God.”⁶⁹ It is the *experience* of Christ that Main emphasised in meditation which “excited” Bede. It supports and develops Griffiths’ own insight which is, as Freeman explains, that “as we pass beyond our own ego-bound consciousness of thought and imagination we move into freedom of the mind of Christ and so find the human consciousness of Jesus is our way to the One he called ‘Father.’”⁷⁰ In this, Griffiths recognises John Main’s “special awareness of the connection between contemplation and community.”⁷¹

Passing beyond the ego, is for a Christian to both acknowledge Jesus “as Lord” oriented to community and to recognise the significance for all religions of the “cosmic Christ.” It demands that we enter into dialogue with other religions. Especially, it means recognising the “truth and holiness in all genuine religion.” Griffiths is quoting *Nostra Aetate*, when in the same paragraph he says, “The Second Vatican Council said that the ‘Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in other religions.’” He adds:

The Christian mission is to help other people to grow but also to learn from them so that our Christian faith grows too. It has been our experience in the ashram that the more we open ourselves to the other religions, to Hinduism in particular, the deeper our Christian faith grows. Our aim is the deepening of our own faith which then becomes more open to others.⁷²

Indeed, Griffiths sees, as the universal sin, humankind’s refusal to live in relationship. To choose instead to separate out and centre on the individual ego, however this manifests in people’s lives, rather than on the Spirit, is the cause of all destruction in the world.

⁶⁷ This is the substance of *The New Creation in Christ*.

⁶⁸ Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation*, 6.

⁶⁹ Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation*, 7.

⁷⁰ Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation*, 9. To some extent this indicates Griffiths’ theological method. We believe Robert Kiely in his introduction to *The New Creation in Christ*, erroneously states, “. . . he (Bede) is no theologian.” We understand that Bede’s is clearly at basis a mystical theology. Kiely goes on to state, “His (Bede’s) criterion is experience . . . not system.” As we have demonstrated this is only partially true. Bede is very concerned with systems as instruments of the Holy Spirit. He compares, contrasts and critiques them, seeking to discern in these human vehicles signs and means of transformation.

⁷¹ Laurence Freeman, in Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation*, 8.

⁷² Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation*, 97.

“Respect” says Bede, “for other people’s religion and culture is the crucial thing I think, (and) on the whole, this is the way the Church is moving today.”⁷³ He adds that it must be combined with interiority by which people can open to the Spirit within, and through whom they can proclaim, “Jesus is Lord.” (2 Cor. 5:6)⁷⁴

Practical works, like social action, should by rights flow out from this kind of contemplation, or else meditation “loses its depth.”⁷⁵ Moreover, both are vital for “the new age” that is dawning and which is another stage of the Kingdom of God which “is always ‘at hand.’”⁷⁶ This important point requires further explication.

4. Signs of the Kingdom Heralding the New Age

The previous reflection represents a late synthesis of Griffiths’ theology which we drew from his 1991 talks in the USA. In order to articulate the signs of the times relevant to this topic we have to delineate a little more carefully some strands of Griffiths’ earlier thought. Attention to his dialogue with David Bohm and Rupert Sheldrake and his interest in the work of Erick Schumacher and particular philosophers, scholars, and activists, Teilhard de Chardin, Sri Aurobindo and Mahatma Ghandi will nevertheless bring together as a unity, early and later theological movements.

It is of interest that in his twilight years, Griffiths had come to a profound acceptance of the possibility of a global catastrophe being the precursor of the new age dawning. There is an apocalyptic ring in his words: “The disaster is coming, but a new creation is coming out of the disaster, from death to resurrection.”⁷⁷ Faced with a calamity of such mammoth proportions, what contributes to his equanimity?

At basis it is his confidence in the cosmic process evident through history of the Spirit at work drawing humanity back to the likeness of Christ, the archetypal person.⁷⁸ Humanity’s role is participative, with the fulfillment and integrity of all creation involved. Judson Trapnell writes of Bede’s “optimistic attitude” towards the valuable contribution of the new science in the new age. Griffiths believed that “the progress of science will be

⁷³ Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation*, 106.

⁷⁴ Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation*, 85.

⁷⁵ Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation*, 94.

⁷⁶ Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation*, 81.

⁷⁷ Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation*, 82. Griffiths sees the monastic orders as basically prophetic. *The New Creation*, 84.

⁷⁸ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 272.

found in renewing a view of life antithetical to its modern model and harmonious with traditional wisdom.”⁷⁹

Griffiths’ dialogue partner, David Bohm, is an exponent of this “new science.” In *The Quantum Theory*, written in 1951, Bohm studies the inconsistency between “radically different concepts” of the continuous processes of classical physics and the discontinuity of quantum transfers.⁸⁰ This led him to conclude that in fact a very close relation existed between them.⁸¹ Bohm combines both concepts in a complementary way. The classical shows that there exist, “objects, phenomena, and events that are distinct and well-defined and that exhibit reliable and reproducible properties with the aid of which they can be identified and compared.”⁸² The quantum shows that, “properties of matter are to be associated with incompletely defined potentialities . . . (which) imply the indivisible unity of all interacting systems.”⁸³ Quantum properties of matter can be more definitely realized only in interaction with a classically describable system. Therefore quantum theory requires the classically describable system for interpretation in order to have meaning.

Bohm concludes that “quantum theory presupposes the classical level and the general correctness of classical concepts in describing this level; it does not deduce classical concepts as limiting cases of quantum concepts.”⁸⁴ The implication is that “the large scale behaviour of a system is not completely expressible in terms of concepts that are appropriate at the small scale level.”⁸⁵

Nevertheless, the material universe exerts a mutual influence from large scale to small scale. Indeed, “large-scale and small-scale properties . . . are in the closest inter-relationship” which is “reciprocal.”⁸⁶ The tendency of indeterminacy and the drive to exhibit or express all potentialities at the small-scale level is incontrovertibly linked with the large-scale continual tendency “for a specific tendency to be realised at the expense of all other potentialities.”⁸⁷ The process of reciprocation is continual because just when the quantum

⁷⁹ Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths*, 125.

⁸⁰ David Bohm, *The Quantum Theory*, 3rd edition (New York: Dover Publications, 1989), 27.

⁸¹ Here we are reminded of Panikkar’s assertion that for *Vedic* people to name God the wholly transcendent other was blasphemy as God is profoundly intimately present in all.

⁸² David Bohm, *Quantum Theory*, 624.

⁸³ David Bohm, *Quantum Theory*, 624.

⁸⁴ David Bohm, *Quantum Theory*, 625.

⁸⁵ David Bohm, *Quantum Theory*, 626.

⁸⁶ David Bohm, *Quantum Theory*, 626.

⁸⁷ David Bohm, *Quantum Theory*, 627.

system is influenced by the greater level towards a narrowing down and finer definition it exhibits a broader range of complementary variables and a compensating widening of “the range of new potentialities.”⁸⁸ Bohm therefore concludes that, “the nature of what can exist at the nuclear level depends to some extent on the macroscopic environment.”⁸⁹ Although Griffiths is clear on the point that science and theology are separate systems of thought, nonetheless on the basis of his understanding of all of reality as being a complicated web of dynamic interdependent relationships, he can hold in parallel tension comparable sets of information. To some extent the exploration of his images in this thesis has shown this. Bohm’s theory above can help direct light on the relationship between the Church as institution, the Church as Spirit, the local Church and the human person as a microcosm of Church. In this instance, it assists the awareness which Bede voiced, of the grounding importance for Church as institution, for assemblies, synods and councils operating interdependently, with a spirit of conciliation and generosity with regard to the entire system.⁹⁰

By 1980, in *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, which is a collection of his essays over a period of twenty years, Bohm has taken his theory a step further. He extends the relationship to thinking, to consciousness such that thought itself is seen to be part of reality as a whole.⁹¹ Bohm posits that at this stage of human development (and scientific discovery) physicists need not only formal, logical, mathematical terms of operation, but also other modes of thinking which involve the intuitive mind including sensory, imaginative, poetic patterns, that is, “harmony between the ‘left brain’ and the ‘right brain.’”⁹² It signifies a whole new development of humankind’s understanding of reality and is closely related to how Griffiths understands “new age,” a point we made earlier in the thesis.

Griffiths emphasises the example Bohm gives of the *hologram* instrument to describe how the whole is implicit in every part.⁹³ According to Bohm there should be a

⁸⁸ David Bohm, *Quantum Theory*, 627.

⁸⁹ David Bohm, *Quantum Theory*, 627.

⁹⁰ Bede Griffiths, “The Church,” 1992.

⁹¹ David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, 4th edition (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), Introduction, xi.

⁹² David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, Introduction xvi.

⁹³ The name is derived from the Greek words “holo,” meaning “whole,” and “gram,” meaning “to write.” Thus, the hologram is an instrument that, as it were, “writes the whole.” See David Bohm,

“new order” for physics that recognises the “undivided wholeness” of existence, the whole universe of past, present and future. “A *total order* is contained, in some *implicit* sense, in each region of space and time.”⁹⁴ From the word “implicit,” Bohm suggests that each region has folded up within it “a total structure.” He gives further examples, such as the radio-wave image of a television broadcast.

The agreement between relativity and quantum theory, of the need to look at the world as an “*undivided whole* in which all parts of the universe, including the observer and his instruments, merge and unite in one totality,” demands a new form of insight which he calls, “*Undivided Wholeness in Flowing Movement.*”⁹⁵ He believes it agrees with the relationship in Aristotle’s and Aquinas’ formative and final cause.⁹⁶ Griffiths correlates this also with Sheldrake’s concept of “formative causes” or “morphogenetic fields.” Like Aristotle’s explanation of matter as potential energy that is structured by *eidos*, or “form,” so Sheldrake, like Bohm, understands the matter of the universe as a dynamic process that is structured by form.⁹⁷ In Bohm’s view, acting in accordance with this new insight will afford solutions to problems such as “pollution, destruction of the balance of nature, overpopulation, world-wide economic and political disorder, and the creation of an overall environment that is neither physically nor mentally healthy . . .” thus working towards healing of the modern disease caused by the prior way of objectification and fragmentation.⁹⁸ How Bohm’s vision and Griffiths’ come together at this point is quite clear. In *A New Vision of Reality*, Griffiths supports Bohm’s dependence on Krishnamurti. The core of “the teachings” which this Indian mystic shared during his life, he expressed in 1929 as “*Truth is a pathless land,*” and he reaffirmed in 1980. It coheres with Griffiths’ synecdochic cue, the need to “always go beyond.” Similarly, there is a radical openness that is central to the dynamic which Bohm describes. In Griffiths’ presentation of Bohm’s theory of the implicated universe, he emphasizes such openness or freedom:

(that) the whole universe is already implicated or folded up together . . . from the beginning . . . does not mean that particular forms are predetermined. Rather there was infinite

Wholeness and the Implicate Order (New York: Routledge Classics, 2008, London: Routledge, 1980) 182,183.

⁹⁴ David Bohm, *Implicate Order*, 188.

⁹⁵ David Bohm, *Implicate Order*, 14.

⁹⁶ David Bohm, *Implicate Order*, 16.

⁹⁷ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 18 – 21.

⁹⁸ David Bohm, *Implicate Order*, 2.

potential present in the very origin of the universe and one aspect of that potential came to be actualized at each moment.⁹⁹

Bohm turns to Krishnamurti's emphasis on the "whole field of measure."¹⁰⁰ Here, "measure" for which the root meaning is also shared by "medicine," "moderation" and "meditation," has the sense of a deep inner order or wholeness, the very source of which is, in contradistinction to what has been the practice of modern society in science, industry and technology, itself immeasurable.¹⁰¹ Bohm can therefore speak of "the unbroken wholeness of the totality of existence as an undivided flowing movement without borders."¹⁰² Griffiths recognised the similarity with the Vedic idea of "the net of Indra" and "Indra's pearl necklace" in this modern physicist's concept of the totality of existence being enfolded within each region of space and time, the vision of reality he terms, "the implicate order."¹⁰³ Up until now, physics has only dealt, in a myopic way, with unfoldment, or the explicate regions of space and time.¹⁰⁴ The most significant point for Griffiths though, is how Bohm's idea, (which is still exploratory) joins consciousness and matter in profound relationship within a "primary implicate order" or "enfoldment."¹⁰⁵ Bohm further proposes a "common ground" which is a deeper enfoldment – in the sense of "the kosmos" (based on the idea of the totality and sub-totalities or ordered states) and even beyond this the possibility of more and more inward and deeper enfoldments wholly beyond human understanding.¹⁰⁶

I would like to note here Griffiths' various comments both on that point of mystery where the human spirit and the divine Spirit meet and also the "manifestation" of the transcendent reality in material time and place that are already articulated.

It is where Griffiths brings together the Vedic/Upanishadic sources with the holistic scientific vision that we situate his idea of the Lordship of the "cosmic Christ." As previously shown, the same perspective is found in Teilhard de Chardin, with his "prescient vision of a

⁹⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 18,19.

¹⁰⁰ David Bohm, *Implicate Order*, 33.

¹⁰¹ David Bohm, *Implicate Order*, 26, 27.

¹⁰² David Bohm, *Implicate Order*, 218.

¹⁰³ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 149, 150, 174, 175.

¹⁰⁴ David Bohm, *Implicate Order*, 219-225.

¹⁰⁵ In part, Bohm bases his argument on Pibram and his hologram-like function of the brain which involves the totality of mind-body consciousness at various levels. In David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, 251-252. In Bohm's thought this is not a mere mind-body interaction but rather that "the mind enfolds matter in general and the body in particular." *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, 265. See Also, Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 149, 150.

¹⁰⁶ David Bohm, *Implicate Order*, 264, 274.

spiritually oriented evolution, a cosmic synthesis of science and religion.”¹⁰⁷ De Chardin’s own holistic view of “one vast, organic, guided operation, in which each of us has a place”¹⁰⁸ is based on the centrality of Christ as Lord of a new humanity coming into being at one with the whole of creation: “The very being of the world is now *being personalized. Someone*, and now no longer something is in gestation in the universe.”¹⁰⁹

Fritjof Capra is inspired by the Taoist insight of reality as “a process of continual flow and change.” While he recognises a certain role of struggle and conflict within human progress, he emphasises rather “a wider context of cooperation.”¹¹⁰ Rupert Sheldrake’s exploration of morphogenetic fields, similarly anticipates generative responses to positive signals across wide underlying interdependent rhythmic form “fields.”¹¹¹ Such deep-set relationships within reality suggest again the paramount importance of the intuitive mind. Significantly, in such integral patterns we recognise the links that Griffiths makes with the mystical insight of Medieval Julian of Norwich and the present thought of Ken Wilber. “divine Lord” is also “Lady.”¹¹²

We note the comparable patterns of thought of others who influenced Griffiths. With Sri Aurobindo, God is manifested through the transformation of human consciousness in an evolutionary process. Ken Wilber finds that Sri Aurobindo’s idea of evolution and transformation from subconscious state, to the ego-sense of “imperfect individualized personality” to the “*superconsciousness*” is expressed with “precisely the same sentiments” as his explication of *The Atman Project*.¹¹³ Panikkar asserts that the realisation of the divine in a cosmotheandric transformation requires human co-operation. For Rahner the way forward that best represents the mystery of Christ will be the “collective discovery of truth”

¹⁰⁷ Arthur Fabel, “Teilhard 2000: The Vision of a Cosmic Genesis at the Millennium”, in Arthur Fabel and Donald St John eds, *Teilhard de Chardin in the Twentieth Century: The Emerging Spirit of the Earth* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 154.

¹⁰⁸ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Man’s Place in Nature* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1966), 15. In Arthur Fabel, “Teilhard 2000,” 154.

¹⁰⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace Javonovich, 1971), 184. In Arthur Fabel, “Teilhard 2000,” 155.

¹¹⁰ Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point*, 34, 35.

¹¹¹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 19 – 21. Rupert Sheldrake, “The Fields of Form,” Conference in Shantivanam, 1983, “Religion in the New Scientific View.” From the the Bede Griffiths Trust, Sand Springs. O.K.

¹¹² Julian of Norwich says, “Our Saviour is our true mother in whom we are eternally born and by whom we shall always be enclosed.” In *Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Elizabeth Spearing (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 136.

¹¹³ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden*, 336.

centred in human experience. Such a renewed focus on the full depth of the “human” centre of society has certain implications. For Griffiths, it means a turn to a practical theology.

The year Griffiths completed his degree, a young man from Germany, Ernst Schumacher, entered New College, Oxford, as a Rhodes Scholar. Later as a renowned economist his ideas lent further support to the full compass of Griffiths’ engagement with the “divine Lord.”

Schumacher, Gandhi and Small is Beautiful

Bohm’s vision, as we have noted is not abstract but concerned with harmony and right order in the present reality. We know that Griffiths entertained a similar concern very early on as part of his resistance to industrialisation. He later discovered in Ernst Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful* both careful articulation of the dangers inherent in the modern model and suggestions of solutions. In India, he was able to assess the value of Schumacher’s model. This is one of decentralisation and proper maintenance of rights and responsibilities in the service of justice for every person, in resistance to the greed and envy of society, and based on “the traditional wisdom of humankind.”¹¹⁴

For his model, Schumacher proposes “an entirely new system of thought . . . based on attention to people, and not primarily attention to goods” which he sums up in the phrase, “production for the masses, rather than mass production.”¹¹⁵

Griffiths terms it, “appropriate technology” which would “improve Indian agriculture . . . not destroy it.” It would bring to the Indian village, “the intelligence which science can give but sensitive to the local surroundings, to the human community, to the human being as part of the local environment.”¹¹⁶

Schumacher blames the “drop-outs” and the “footloose” on the structureless, frontierless larger patterns arising from centralisation within the expanded great nation and the modern “megapolis.” This has produced a great proliferation of de-humanised situations of grief and suffering in the lives of countless “non-viable” persons.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Ernst Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (London: Sphere Books, 1974), 250.

¹¹⁵ Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, 60, 61. Schumacher takes this from Ghandi’s expression which he later quotes as “not mass production but production by the masses.”

¹¹⁶ Bede Griffiths, *An Interview with Michael Toms*.

¹¹⁷ Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, 58.

Schumacher points to the Buddhist Ananda Coomaraswamy's¹¹⁸ distinction between the tool and the machine – the one which “enhances . . . skill and power” and the other that forces a person to serve a “mechanical slave.” “The carpet loom,” says Coomaraswamy, “is a tool, a contrivance for holding warp threads at a stretch for the pile to be woven round them by the craftsmen’s fingers; but the power loom is a machine, and its significance as a destroyer of culture lies in the fact that it does the essentially human part of the work.”¹¹⁹ Differently from materialism, Schumacher says, the Buddhist does not count “multiplication of wants” but “the purification of human character.”¹²⁰

It is significant that Griffiths, who noted Gandhi’s insistence on humanity first in the workplace that was reflected in his successful campaign for India’s independence, sought to live and teach this ideal in the Ashram and include the message in his talks overseas. They have shared sensitivities. The continual deepening of what it means to be human is directly related to the Lordship of Christ as described above and to every person’s innate drive for self-transcendence.

In *The Marriage of East and West*, Griffiths points to the ideals of science and democracy in the West as evidence of the movement towards a “greater realisation of what it means to be human.” Conversely, limitations in both these areas are due to “a fundamental defect in Western man/woman” which has had disastrous effects.¹²¹

Griffiths asserts the need for both East and West to learn from one another. Hinduism, says Griffiths, tends to see time and history only “as passing phenomenon,” while Christianity concentrating on temporal events can forget “the timeless reality.”¹²² So Griffiths does not demonise science and technology. Rather, their role is crucial:

It still remains possible to conceive of a development of science and technology which would seek not to dominate nature in the style of the West but to work with nature, building up from the basis of the village economy, as Mahatma Gandhi sought to do, and so create a

¹¹⁸ 1877-1947, Sri Lankan, educated in England and a scholar of religion, art, law, philosophy and science.

¹¹⁹ Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, 46.

¹²⁰ Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, 46.

¹²¹ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 150, 151.

¹²² Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 180.

new culture, in which people¹²³ and nature, reason and intuition, the Yang and the Yin in Chinese terms, would be brought into harmony.¹²⁴

Griffiths recognizes in Mahatma Gandhi the kind of spiritual integration to which all are called.¹²⁵ The Mahatma stands as a unique role model¹²⁶ both for Indians and the wider world because in religious terms he reflects the most profound characteristics of the divine Lord as “a unique mirror of the infinite” (as the Church Fathers would have it).¹²⁷

The authority and initiative demonstrated in Gandhi’s life and teaching is based on an acquired suspicion of powerful systems of control and his corresponding concern for the poor and powerless; the link with his lasting high regard for Jesus’ teaching, especially the *Sermon on the Mount* is clear. It is through *karuna* – God’s compassionate love, that Gandhi interprets both the Christian Gospel and the Hindu *Gita*. Rather than in domination, Gandhi found resistance through suffering in the “suffering servant” figure of Isaiah.¹²⁸ On the other hand, more than his “devotion to Jesus as an example of love and forgiveness,” he found in the *Bhagavadgita* the universal message and source of transcendence through its teaching of *karma yoga*; the way to God through serving one’s neighbour as a vehicle for transcendence of the ego.¹²⁹ As Gandhi understood from the teaching of the *Gita*, “total service of humanity is compatible . . . with *total* (my italics) surrender to God.”¹³⁰ Vivekananda, disciple of the nineteenth century Hindu reformer, Ramakrishna, expressed it as, “My God, the poor; my God, the suffering; my God, the oppressed.”¹³¹ This also relates to the *sannyasi* ideal of the drive always to “go beyond,” dedicating one’s whole life to the

¹²³ Griffiths has “man” here. We have changed it to “people” to avoid a gender polarisation which he did not really intend and also for the sake of inclusive language in accordance with his later request.

¹²⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 10.

¹²⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 139, 172. See also, *River*, 90, 93.

¹²⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 114.

¹²⁷ Bede Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, 98, *Cosmic Revelation*, 72, 114, *River of Compassion*, 71. *Marriage*, 84.

¹²⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 139.

¹²⁹ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 84, 85, 91. The way of transcendence of the ego, Griffiths points out is represented by the Hindu ritual in the temple courtyard where a coconut is cracked open before the image of Ganesha, the god who dispels obstacles, releasing the sweet, nutritious, milky fluid in the centre which represents the divine life. See *Cosmic Revelation*, 36. While Bede believed that “Jesus was a pure contemplative . . . always abiding with the Father . . . always in that state of contemplative awareness . . . (he was) at the same time perfectly natural and human.” See Bede Griffiths, *River*, 273. Just as Jesus who like “the true *sanyassi* “ had “availability for everyone and everything, so also the Christian goes “beyond the passive state of contemplation to the experience of the Trinity . . . which moves him or her to the service of love.” *River*, 272.

¹³⁰ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 105.

¹³¹ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 5.

search for God. Gandhi's life exemplifies a certain resolution of this tension between prayer and action. This has particular relevance with respect to Griffiths' interest in forming lay contemplative communities.

5. Divine Lord and the Call to Contemplation in Action

In the *Bhagavadgita*, the Hindu *karmani akarma* parallels the Chinese *wu wei*.¹³² This is "worklessness in work" whereby all action is understood to be offered by God, for God and in God:

Who in all his work sees, God, he in truth goes unto God: God is his worship, God is his offering, offered by God in the fire of God. (*BG: The Yoga of Partial Knowledge: V24*)

¹³³

Here, a person's life is understood to be sacrificial, a participation in the primordial sacrifice of the *Purusha* who, in Krishna, is the manifest presence of God. Such a person is also said to be *ekgraha*, or "one-pointed", that is, not divided. This "action in inaction" is taught to Arjuna by Krishna:

Kill therefore with the sword of wisdom the doubt born of ignorance that lies in thy heart. Be one in self-harmony, in Yoga, and arise, great warrior, arise. (*BG: The Yoga of Partial Knowledge: V42*)¹³⁴

Any person who, like Arjuna, can now "fight the battle of life" with detachment can truthfully say, "I am not the doer God is working in me." There is no desire for reward, "no binding force at all" and so there is no egoism involved. The action flows from the Self or from the Spirit within. The person can act creatively and free from fear.¹³⁵ For Griffiths, this teaching of the *Gita* resolves the age old problem in the monastic life of seeking a balance between the solitary life of prayer and activity or industry. The work becomes "contemplation in the true sense . . . an activity of God within." This, says Griffiths, is "the real goal"¹³⁶ Both Sankara's view of *maya*, illusion, and the *Gita*'s teaching of *lila* - that all

¹³² In the *Tao Te Ching*, the paradoxical saying describes all activity as proceeding from the concentration and stillness at the centre whereby the eternally inactive first principle of creation yet leaves nothing undone. In Bede Griffiths, *River*, 74.

¹³³ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 76.

¹³⁴ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 81.

¹³⁵ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 81.

¹³⁶ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 81-85.

the world's activity is the "play" of God,¹³⁷ have to be held within this deeper meaning. Behind and beyond all, as in the Christian theology of the Cross, there is a divine purpose and a final fulfillment. Not only does Griffiths compare this with Bonaventure's understanding of *bonum diffusivum sui* – "the overflow of goodness"¹³⁸ or in Griffiths' words "the energy of love"¹³⁹ but Wilber also links the "centrifugal" movement of creation with the Hindu concept of *nivritti*.¹⁴⁰ Griffiths supports this, commenting that together with *pravritti*, the corresponding return, this is paradoxically one single movement in God and he further compares this with Gregory of Nyssa's *enstasis, ekstasis and epekstasis*, the outward movement, inward movement and the "constant going beyond."¹⁴¹ At this stage we meet again, Griffiths' synechdotic principle of "going beyond" as a self-surrender. Here, says Griffiths, "we must learn from one another . . . the secret . . . the equilibrium." In a verse promising inner purity and freedom to the one who "ascribes his works to Brahman" the *Gita* echoes the *Chandogya Upanishad*, and also parallels the Buddhist scriptures, "No sin can stain thee, even as waters do not stain the leaf of the lotus."¹⁴²

Griffiths points out that just as Gandhi did, it is necessary for the Christian to go beyond doing one's *swadharma*, one's own duty, or *dharma*, for the sake of inner purity alone. "For Gandhi," says Bede, "it was of crucial importance to change the world." Centered in the Paschal mystery, Bede's concept has an Incarnational significance:

This world has a force in it now which is directing it towards a final fulfillment and in the world we are working for the Kingdom of God. That is a vision common to many modern Hindus and many modern Christians.¹⁴³

Griffiths points out how Mahatma Gandhi's reaction to neglect and indifference in India is seen reflected in the good works such as the Ramakrishna movement,¹⁴⁴ comparable with

¹³⁷ In this way, Griffiths interprets *lila* in a Christian sense, as the overflow of love, or goodness, "*bonum diffusivum sui*," the outflowing "energy of love." See Bede Griffiths, *River*, 54.

¹³⁸ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 87, 88.

¹³⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 270. He says further, "The love-energy of God is precisely what the Spirit is, and that love-energy flows out to express itself in the universe."

¹⁴⁰ Ken Wilber, *Up From Eden*, 326.

¹⁴¹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 243.

¹⁴² The Buddhist scriptures read, "Just as a lotus born of water, grown up in water, passing up above the water, is not stained by the water, so is the Buddha: though he as grown up in the world and conquered it, yet he is not stained by the world." The *Chandogya Upanishad* has it, "As water does not stick to a lotus leaf, so do not evil deeds cleave to the man who knows this." Bede Griffiths, *River*, 88,89.

¹⁴³ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 89, 90 - 93.

¹⁴⁴ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 93.

those of Christians. He was particularly impressed by the *Sarvodaya* movement which had been initiated by Gandhi and was continued by Vinoba Bhava.¹⁴⁵

Engagement with God's reign of justice and peace arouses in Griffiths a condemnation of Western educational systems. He recommends one along the lines suggested by Gandhi, "an integral education of body, soul and spirit, relating each person to the world in an organic way and developing their personal capacities." In this, Griffiths promoted Rudolf Steiner's system. The first seven years should be devoted to emotional growth, the next seven to the imagination and only from fourteen years should serious training be applied to the rational mind. Thus preparation for the kind of contemplative living as modelled in Jesus' life¹⁴⁶ is not hampered by a rigid educational system.¹⁴⁷

Ultimately, "God-realisation" through contemplation, for the Christian, means an awareness of incorporation into the Cosmic Christ¹⁴⁸ such that each will exercise their own gifts differently because, "we surrender ourselves to a love which then compels us and may drive us in any direction to whatever work we have to do."¹⁴⁹ Here "divine Lord" is synonymous with "divine Love" – Love with the character of a Person.

In comparison (after the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre), in a letter to Pascaline,¹⁵⁰ Griffiths unequivocally stated his opposition to "the utter brutality of Marxism" which, even though he deferred to its "idealism", he regarded as "one of the greatest scourges which has ever inflicted humankind." He expresses concern that "so many Catholic theologians have been deceived by it." Rather than being a means of liberation, it is "the most oppressive system in human history." Despite his high regard for Aloysius Pieris, "I don't know any Asian theologian to equal him," he criticises Pieris' qualified support of Marxism for the liberation of Asia because he seems not to have realised how "it has crushed the soul of Asia" and also because liberation of the poor can only really come after dialogue among religions, "a profound conversion in which Christianity encounters the depth of Hinduism and Buddhism." The "legacy" of Marxism is to place social and economic change first resulting in complete distortion.

¹⁴⁵ Kuruvilla Pandikattu, *Religious Dialogue as Hermeneutics*, 49.

¹⁴⁶ For Jesus as a contemplative (in action), see Bede Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, 273.

¹⁴⁷ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 285.

¹⁴⁸ Griffiths emphasises that the realisation of *sadhana*, or detachment, is a necessary ideal, but not the ultimate state because the journey takes the soul further into a God of love. See Bede Griffiths, *River*, 102.

¹⁴⁹ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 102.

¹⁵⁰ Bede Griffiths in a letter to Sr Pascaline Coff, 14 June 1989.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have followed Griffiths' hermeneutic of encounter in respect of this image. Here, Divine Lord exemplifies change through an evolutionary process based in dialogue (in contrast to one that is revolutionary and dialectical) and, most importantly, is overtly centered in surrender to a God of love in a movement with a goal both immanent and infinite.

For our times it means a courageous openness to change and growth through dialogue with other religions and other disciplines. We note how in Griffiths' case, conversion to the divine Lord is assisted by such dialogue. It informs a greater sensitivity to person as being in relationship, and to cosmic interdependency. Advocates of such holistic thought who are exponents of diverse disciplines are particular dialogue partners.

As a Christian, Griffiths recognizes the absolute unique symbol of Jesus Christ along with its gender-inclusive apophatic significance; he also relates to evocative symbols for Lord in the Indian tradition and finds complementary scriptural basis for sharing this image; and recognizes common modes of contemplative prayer which lead to union with the divine Lord. Such union is understood in a radically holistic sense.

Focus on the divine Lord in this chapter brings together concepts from the new science that emphasise life as interdependency at all levels, and provides examples of the ideas and work of others whom Griffiths admires from both East and West that reflect such insights. Griffiths' image of divine Lord is an efficacious symbol with cosmic significance through which self-surrender is expressed as contemplation in action.

Griffiths nevertheless insists on the need to go beyond even this symbol – to the apophatic reality which is paradoxically the fullness of the Godhead, the divine “fruitive embrace.” This takes us to the image “divine Light” which is especially evocative of unity, both in the Hindu and Christian traditions. For Bede, it is most pronouncedly his chosen image for a Christian *advaita*. It brings together the different strands of his focal image of “journey.”

Chapter 9

Divine Light

. . . the reflection of a light which shines forever beyond the darkness, a light which is ever the same, pure, transparent, penetrating the whole creation, enlightening every human being, yet remaining ever in itself, tranquil and unchanged, receiving everything into itself and converting all into the substance of its own infinite being.¹

*The Atman the Supreme Spirit is like the sun in which the light is fully present, fully realised. This Supreme Spirit manifests itself in the world, as light radiates out from the sun. Then, the light reflects itself in all different forms of Nature, in all different colours, so the one Spirit manifests itself, projecting itself in all the forms of Nature.*²

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we saw how Griffiths' image of "Divine Lord" represents the goal of humanity and also the way itself; it is fundamentally linked with the Christian Gospel of God's reign of justice and peace. Particularly, divine Lord is related in the Christian/Hindu dialogue with the primordial word, *Om*, with the "universal man," the *purusha*, and so with the second person of the Trinity, the Word, the Christ. Ineffably, divine Lord belongs to the union of the One. Like Griffiths for whom the *Bhagavad Gita* confirmed in a wonderful way the revelation of God's love in the Gospels,³ Raymond Panikkar extols the message of the *Gita* as one of "liberation" as it teaches that "human maturity consists in discovering the face of the Lord and in accepting this growing revelation, for which there are no fixed patterns."⁴ The one Lord is seen differently. Union, however, is especially evoked by the last of Griffiths' images of God that we present, "divine Light."

Significantly, then, this chapter brings together all Griffiths' images. Here the variously designated rhetorical elements are linked up as an interdependent whole. The metonymic element of light as the day-travel of self-surrender retrieves and integrates with the prior overarching metaphor of journey and with the synecdochic principle of the need to "go beyond" and its image of the horizon. Thus it expands to encompass irony, illuminating

¹ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 167.

² Bede Griffiths, *River*, 22.

³ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 325.

⁴ Raymond Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, 159.

the paradox that the final goal is the extinguishment of all ideas, all thought on the matter in the darkness of unknowing which mysteriously opens up into the ineffable divine light of unity of the wholly transcendent One. The partial vision of mystics is as St Paul says only ever seeing “in a glass darkly.” (1 Cor. 13:12)

For Griffiths light accompanies his conversion experiences. The “Golden String” is also the light which illumines his heart and soul. This chapter brings this more to the fore in respect of his dialogue with the Hindu tradition, contemporary philosophy and the new science. It is significant that transcendent truth, *gnosis* by truth, is central in Eastern religions.

The chapter is set out under these headings:

1. The Sun, Light and Hindu Tradition
2. Griffiths’ Experience
3. Divine Light as the Way of *Advaita*

1. The Sun, Light and the Hindu Tradition

Considering Griffiths’ dialogue with the Hindu tradition in particular, this final image is particularly resonant. To the human mind, light is uniquely linked with the sun. It heralds life and is eclipsed by death. In presence or absence it marks days, weeks and seasons, dictates human work and play, cuisine, culture and commerce, sickness and health. As such, it holds great significance in the human question of the meaning of life itself.

Unsurprisingly, the sun is central in native spiritualities and variously nuanced in the world religions. For Christians it has symbolic import in the human conversion experience and journey of the soul to God. The ancient Christian source, the *Didache* describes its use in the earliest Christian Baptismal ritual.

It is most significant that in the Hindu pantheon, the sun, the great *savitre* is the symbol of transcendence par excellence. We have shown how *Brahman*, *Purusha* and *atman*, and the host of representative gods relate to all levels of reality. *Savitre* can be invoked as source of human life, the energy of the universe, of the *mahat* or cosmic order, the light of the rational mind or *manas* and of the high intellect, the *buddhi*, and of consciousness itself; it is symbol of the inner Self, or *atman*, and the supreme transcendent

Spirit that penetrates the depths of the human spirit and illuminates the soul. *Savitre* is invoked as the source of *Samadhi*, the profound contemplative state linked with the privileged hours of sunrise and sunset.

Light and sight are incontrovertibly linked. The Indian genius which Griffiths extols is focused on inner vision. The *Vedic* overt image of the sun, *savitre*, Lord of light leads to the *Upanisadic* interior vision, an inner pilgrimage that discovers the Lord of light dwelling as *atman* in the human heart. In this section we see how this has most impacted on Griffiths' understanding of the God of light.

It is the song to the sun, *Savitre*, symbolising the one high God, that is the most exalted *Gayatri Mantra*,⁵ the chosen prayer for the holiest ritual of presentation of the sacred thread to the one consecrated as *sannyasi*. It is a profound meditation on "the glorious splendor" of the divine life-giver, that this one "may . . . illuminate our consciousness." This "*Savitri*" (as it is otherwise known) is itself "a complete symbol of light . . . more than the epiphany . . . it is light itself when the recitation is a real prayer."⁶

The basis of *Vedic* wisdom is expressed as the three *gunas*, *tapas*, the originating ardour from which the universe emerges and too, the principles of order and truth, *rita* and *satya*. This "ardor" combined with *rita* and *satya* (which is an "ontic truthfulness . . . or being"⁷) are evoked by the fire of *agni*, in sacrifice⁸ and symbolised by the all-embracing *savitre*.

In the *Upanisads*, the Spirit itself is named light and it gives a mystical insight that sees beyond the horizon, while as Mascaro points out, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Light of God, or *jnana*, is the most exalted theme.⁹ Finally, the vision of Arjuna reveals the divine

⁵ Raymond Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 38.

⁶ Raymond Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 43. Panikkar adds that the mantra has the power to liberate but that this is dependant on the exponent's authority and spiritual preparation. *The Vedic Experience*, 39. See also, Bede Griffiths, *River*, 198.

⁷ Raymond Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 59.

⁸ We remember that the *Vedas*, *Upanisads* and the *Gita*, together, proclaim the whole cosmic order as sacrifice and Krishna is finally revealed as that great "Person" whose sacrifice sustains the world and the whole cosmos. Griffiths compares this with Rev.13:8, where the sacrifice of "the Lamb . . . slain before the foundation of the world" is that of the cross of Jesus which redeems "the whole creation." See Bede Griffiths, *River*, 148.

⁹ Juan Mascaró, "Translator's Introduction to the 1962 Edition", lix. In, *The Bhagavad Gita*, translated from the Sanskrit by Juan Mascaró (London: Penguin Books, 1962).

“radiance,” wherein is seen “the whole universe in its variety, standing in a vast unity in the body of the God of gods.”¹⁰

Light and faith are intrinsically connected.¹¹ The *Gita* reaches back to the *Vedas* to proclaim faith as the gift of life. Anything done without faith is “not being.”¹² The *Upanisads* proclaim faith as being “of the heart alone,” the heart meaning the core of one’s being. (CU 1, 1, 10)¹³ Faith, however, comes through illumination that happens in the profound darkness of the cave of the heart.¹⁴

In the *Rig Veda* the primordial sacrifice is extended through faith which is the gift to humankind given with life which emerges from the One. This faith is “a quality of the full human being . . . something given to or rather grafted into (human) being . . . For this reason, there are ultimately as many types of faith as there are . . . human beings.” And *Vedic* faith is before thinking, willing and deciding and makes these possible.¹⁵ The initial grace, however, is the “germ of faith” and awakening to it requires “a second grace.” The “loving faith” of the *Bhagavad Gita* is *Bhakti yoga* which flows from the surrender consummate on this second grace.¹⁶ These first and second graces therefore are profoundly linked by the fire of sacrifice, *Agni*, of which the primordial symbol is *Savitre*. The *Gita* teaches, says Griffiths, that “faith is always the response to an inner light, a recognition of the presence of God, whatever form it may take.”¹⁷

Like Panikkar above, Griffiths can declare: “everybody lives by faith.”¹⁸ Griffiths’ understanding that all are held in God incorporates both the “first” and “second” graces referred to above. Firstly, faith is the reflection of the *atman*, in the rational mind or *manas*; however, wisdom, *jnana*, beyond all concepts and images, is the experience of truth itself. Griffiths recalls St Thomas’ *semen gloriae*. “Already the same light which will illumine us in heaven in fullness is present by faith.” Although it may only be “a tiny speck . . . it is a spark from the eternal.” Furthermore, Christian tradition also teaches that “if we are illumined from above and receive this true light into our hearts, then we are conformed to the truth.

¹⁰ *The Bhagavad Gita*, (11.12-13), in Juan Mascaro, trans. “Translator’s Introduction”, lx.

¹¹ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 290.

¹² *The Bhagavad Gita*, XVIII, 3;28. See Raymond Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, 183.

¹³ Raymond Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, 179.

¹⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 65.

¹⁵ Raymond Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, 178.

¹⁶ Raymond Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, 179, 180.

¹⁷ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 145.

¹⁸ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 291.

Faith is actual participation in the divine truth.”¹⁹ Trapnell emphasises Griffiths’ assertion in the superiority of light of knowledge by faith mediated by Christ and his Body, the Church, the origin of which is supernatural.²⁰

In the Christian vision, the material universe itself, through the transformation of consciousness will ultimately transcend natural corruption and be united with God. Griffiths accepts the Hindu premise of material existence as “manifesting” from the One.

Throughout the developing Hindu tradition the insight deepened. With the *Vedas*, the “magna” or “matrix,” symbolised as “*yoni*,” is the primordial undifferentiated chaotic matter which envelops all, including “day” and “night,” which come forth through *rita* and *satya*, order and truth. The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* tells of the depths of this original matter manifesting from the transcendent source, the void, of which it is said:

There the sun shines not, nor the moon, nor the stars; lightnings shine not there and much less earthly fire. From his light all these give light; and his radiance illumines all creation. (*Svetasvatara Upanishad* : 6)²¹

Griffiths describes how the architecture of the Hindu temple evokes this wisdom. It draws the movement in towards the *garbha griha*, the womb-house, or *mulasthanam* (source of life) which is always dark so that it evokes this “ultimate mystery” of God. It represents the unitive way, while the outer courts of the temple where the devotees pay homage to the cosmic powers, the *devas*, represent the illuminative way and before this at the entrance, the breaking of the hard coconut to release the white flesh and sweet milk, which evokes the breaking of the ego and opening to divine life within, represents the purgative way. It is also significant that this first ritual takes place before the shrine of

¹⁹ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 290, 291.

²⁰ This compares with Schuon’s emphasis on the more direct unmediated mode of “intellectual intuition.” Griffiths says, “Though its mode is inferior to that of intuition, its object is infinitely superior to any natural intuition since it gives us God in God’s absolute transcendence as this One can only be known by grace.” Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life*, 63.

²¹ Juan Mascaro, 96. Mascaro compares this with Isaiah’s vision for the soul in the enjoyment of God, “The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.” 25. Griffiths quotes a parallel verse in the *Gita*, “There the sun shines not, nor the moon gives light, nor fire burns, for the Light of my glory is there. Those who reach that abode return no more.” *Bhagavad Gita*, “The Yoga of the Highest Spirit”, 6. Griffiths compares it in the Christian tradition with Rev. 21:23, “I saw no sun there, nor moon; for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the lamb.” Significantly, he adds an explanatory comment, “When we reach the source of light, there all created lights are eclipsed.”

Ganesh,²² the god who removes obstacles. Also at the entrance we find the “tank”; looking much like a Western swimming pool, its purpose is for a washing that exteriorises an inner purification.²³

In this way the temple plan reflects the *Upanisadic* insight into the *atman*, the Self, which is one with the Person, the *purusha* and with *Brahman* “hidden in nature, even as the silkworm is hidden in the web of silk he made.” Thus it is hoped that the myriad reflections of this one Light, hidden in the ordinary “may . . . lead us to union with . . . Brahman.”²⁴ Griffiths draws on the work of Mircea Eliade, to show how the sky itself, limitless and filled with light/lights has always been linked with providence and awe. Ancient language similarities such as the Vedic *Dyaus Pita* or “sky father,” have the same root in the English, Latin and Greek, wherein we recognise, Jupita, and Zeus Pater. Similarly, we recall Jesus’ prayer to “Our Father in the sky.”²⁵

Significant too is Griffiths’ use of the image of “daylight” to describe the clarifying breakthrough from the mythical times of the *Vedas* that is “the night of the moon and the stars with all their brilliance” to the emergence into “the light of the sun and the day” which is the “light of pure thought” at the stage of the *Upanisads*, a time of “the perfect marriage of imagination and reason in intuitive thought.”²⁶ The imagery here articulates his understanding of the evolution of consciousness reflected in the evolutionary development in a religious tradition.

We have already introduced the image of the divine Light in the chapter “God of the Journey,” and marked its significance for Bede. We need to situate it more carefully in his own experience and thought. This will include his conversion experience, a further elaboration of his dialogue with the Hindu tradition and also contemporary philosophical movements and the new science. Here there is a particular focus on transcendent truth which is central to Eastern religions.

²² *Ganesh* is the rather comical figure of the elephant-headed boy.

²³ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 36, 37.

²⁴ *Svetasvatara Upanisad*, 6. In Juan Mascaro, ed., *The Upanisads*, 95.

²⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 32 – 34.

²⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Marriage*, 60.

2. Griffiths' Experience

It is interesting to note Griffiths' interest in the mystical thought of Pythagorus who refused to set his ideas down and committed on principle to *kerygma*²⁷ and Krishnamurti who wanted others to focus on "the teachings" which were for the whole world, not on him as though he were some special "personage."²⁸ Griffiths too emphasized the message rather than the messenger. His autobiography, *The Golden String*, and its sequel, *The Marriage of East and West*, should be understood within this perspective. For Bede, experience in this life is always part of the journey towards that which is always "beyond."

The image of light follows the contours of Bede's life and thought in peculiar way. We recall his symbol of the "Golden String." This is not a gaudy Christmas tinsel, gilt cord or yellow twine; it is the pure mystical light of the Christ, in the perfect form of divine *ecstasis* which when gradually perceived, comprehended and integrated through the journey of life in a transformative process, ushers forth into the eternal "City" and there dwells as divine *enstasis* in the glory of the unity of the Trinity. Just as the fullness of the light within the City of God²⁹ confounds the relative darkness outside, so the sunlight that heralded Griffiths' birth was, like the narrative of Jesus' crucifixion, strangely eclipsed at his death. This last assertion is not a fantasy of hagiographical proportions. Rather it is an eye-witness account, an heuristic inclusion that elaborates the very mystery of the journey into God which is the focus of Griffiths' theology and the images he uses to articulate it.

Bede's own story illustratively discerns the divine Light reflected in the very compass of material existence.

In its deepest sense, Griffiths believed, "the golden string" of Blake's poem represents "the grace which is given to every soul, hidden under the circumstances of our daily life" and that attending to it "involves a readjustment to reality which is often a long and painful process." He adds that without due attention, this grace is "easily lost."³⁰ He

²⁷ See John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, Chapter 2, "Science and Religion."

<http://faculty.evansville.edu/tb2/courses/phil211/burnet/ch2.htm#62> (accessed 19 May 2010).

²⁸ See *Jiddu Krishnamurti*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jiddu_Krishnamurti (accessed 20 July 2010).

²⁹ Bede refers to the City of God as "the real object of human search." It is "the state of transformed humanity . . . a 'heavenly country.'" See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 89, 90.

³⁰ Bede Griffiths, in Prologue to the *Golden String*, 11, 12.

shows how such grace manifests as “divine Light” which for him as a Christian is more and more deeply understood as the saturation of love that gives life.³¹

In Griffiths’ life then, “the golden string” is especially emblematic of this “divine Light” which illuminates the mind, enlivens sensuous objects and colourful scenes, signifies the life of the Spirit, and is present in absence in the most profoundly spiritually transformative times.

The light of the mind of which Griffiths is keenly aware can be traced through his autobiography as a cumulative description of influences from the literature he explored at different stages.

Like the Eastern classics he read in the period between Oxford and the Cotswold experiment, and which had acted as “a secret ferment” in his soul, to “colour (his) thought” as he says without his even knowing it,³² time and time again, books had brought him back to the raw experience of faith.

On the one hand Newman had, more than others, made him aware of the developmental stages of Catholicism and the role of theology which brought intellectual clarification of a faith that was, through the inspiration of the Spirit, conveyed to the imagination from the Gospel story of Jesus and his parables. On the other hand Jacques Maritain had shown him the importance of the relationship of science, philosophy and theology for human knowledge generally.³³ Indeed, his mind was opened to “the possibility of a synthesis of modern science and philosophy and traditional philosophy” by E.I. Watkins whose writing with its originality and comprehensive vision Griffiths says, “deserves to be better known.”³⁴

Gradually this grace, this divine Light, this Christ removed the veil to deeper understanding of divine revelation. In terms of Bede’s understanding of the evolutionary

³¹ Griffiths to Wayne Teasdale, after his stroke of 1990, “I found myself in the void, but the void was totally saturated by love.” See Meath Conlan, “Dom Bede Griffiths, O.S.B. Cam (1907 – 1993).” Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust. It is noteworthy that Griffiths’ experience witnesses to the Christian tradition where faith is a “participation in God,” and the Indian tradition where similarly faith is both a divine gift and the response to that gift. As Anthony Kelly wrote twenty years ago in *Trinity of Love*, “A *practical* (my italics) adoration of the Spirit of irrepressible, limitless Loving remains the condition for a theology of the Trinity. Only through the Spirit’s witness does faith discern the truth of Love’s revelation in Christ, and find a release into Love’s mystery as the all-inclusive realm of the one invoked as “Abba, Father.”” P 260.

³² Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 64.

³³ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 169.

³⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 169.

process already described it shows a Church in progress of coming to be. In his 1980 Forward to the much earlier written *Golden String*, he says: "It is only now that we are beginning to see the possibility of a Christian faith interpreted in the light of Asian and African experience, leading to a new understanding of the Church in the light of other religious traditions . . . a new understanding of the Church as a communion of churches (rather than uniform), united in faith and charity but with a diversity of liturgies and theologies." Ten years later, he is more emphatic and prescriptive.

Trapnell sees this as a further development than the "narrower" claim of Robley Whitson's and Paul Knitter's "unitive pluralism"; what Bede preferred to call, "unity in relationship."³⁵ Trapnell is referring to Griffiths' own elaboration of this:

The great religions of the world . . . have each to be renewed, not only in themselves but also in relation to one another, so that a cosmic, universal religion can emerge, in which the essential values of Christian religion will be preserved in living relationship with the other religious traditions of the world.³⁶

Here the religious traditions are unique and therefore plural but also in "intricate relationship to one another within a greater wholeness."³⁷

Not only, therefore, is the divine Light the ground of the perennial philosophy but in this present era it illumines the direction for a new turning towards this ancient wisdom which is not a static return but a dynamic recapitulation and transformative progression. In this way as intellectual illumination, it has further discerned and continues to inspire a new direction which distinguishes a new age. Griffiths sees this movement as being:

towards a science which . . . will learn to live in harmony with nature . . . towards a more human way of life . . . towards a unified vision of life, in which humankind and nature are seen to be part of a cosmic order . . . *rita* . . . and *tao* . . . which relates humankind both to nature and to the eternal realm of transcendence, on which humanity and nature both depend.³⁸

He believes that the rediscovery of God, Christ and the Church must be made "by each individual . . . from a different angle . . . in the light of our modern knowledge, of all

³⁵ Judson Trapnell, "Bede Griffiths' Mystical Knowing", 375.

³⁶ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 296. His concept of a "universal religions" therefore is compatible with a theology of complementarity, because rather than collapsing differences, it reflects the divine unity in distinction, where each though mutually benefiting the other and one with the whole is uniquely distinct.

³⁷ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 286.

³⁸ Bede Griffiths, in the Forward to the *Golden String*.

that physics, biology and psychology have to tell us.”³⁹ This is a further expression of how the divine Light, hidden in the “ordinary” of this present reality, is the Christ to be discovered and revealed as that special “grace” available for all. In a unique way, Christ and the Church are the answer to global needs. Furthermore, the revelation he received and the kind of process he underwent are possible for all.

His experience, unique in its own way, displays a recognisable human pattern. In a way that evokes a perceptible “annunciation” and a dramatic incarnational flourish the “divine Light” seems to have manifested in Griffiths’ own life and determined his theology. We have already treated the numinous experience he had at the end of his student days, which he himself described. After this especially at sunset, “nature began to wear a kind of sacramental character” that gave him a sense of “religious awe.” At such times, he “felt the presence of an unfathomable mystery.” Before the sun rose, he would get up “to hear the birds singing” while at night he would “stay out late . . . to watch the stars appear.” He maintained this aura throughout the day with his long walks alone in the countryside. The power of this prescience in nature, together with his reading of the Romantics, induced him to think at this time that Christianity was “a religion of the past.”⁴⁰

At the most transformative moments of his life, in a way redolent of Gregory of Nyssa’s description of the “divine Darkness,” the divine Light was most profoundly hidden. At the time of his conversion, it was in this terrifying “darkness” that Bede had surrendered his reason and will, in this darkness of unknowing, “the darkness outside the sphere of . . . consciousness” the darkness of “the abyss.”⁴¹ The power to which Bede ultimately abandoned himself was one that “presented itself as utter darkness.” In the desperate extremity of such a lonely experience even though he had never been “in the habit of meditating on Christ,” he “placed” himself “in the Garden of Gethsemane.”

In accord with what is known as characteristically Christian surprise and joy, (later evocatively described in C.S. Lewis’ own conversion experience *Surprised by Joy*) the time of darkness and death was followed by the resurrection. It was with the morning, at the end of the solitary vigil when Bede arose exhausted from prayer, that he heard an inner voice clearly directing him: “You must go to a retreat.” With this “the Golden String” had led him step by step into the Monastery at Prinknash. With this retreat he had come “through the

³⁹ Bede Griffiths, in the Forward to the *Golden String*, 13.

⁴⁰ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 62.

⁴¹ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 104.

darkness into a world of light.” He describes his awareness of luminosity: “The buses on the street seemed to have lost their solidity and to be glowing with light.”⁴²

Later in India, within a new culture, language and religious symbols, meditative practice led him to be at ease with the equivalents, the “void,” and “fullness.” This is significant for Griffiths’ focus on the need to transcend dualism and know *advaita*. The Lord of Light is Lord of all. Darkness and light are not polarities, but different aspects of the one transcendent reality. It is the “event” of the living symbol that can mediate the full depth of human integration.⁴³ Thus it will be found that evil is not of “darkness” as such, even though such images abound in religion; evil simply does not participate in reality at all in the true and ultimate sense.⁴⁴ In Hindu terms, evil is of *maya* or illusion.

On the other hand, the whole symbolic meaning of seeing depends on the image of light. In chapter three, we articulated the metonymic equivalent for journey as pilgrimage, as a joyful surrendering-up within the confidence-giving light of the transcendent other, the movement towards total surrender to God.

Trapnell has described how Griffiths’ own thought developed through his encounter with India, beyond the sense of the superiority of the supernatural light of faith compared with the light of intellectual intuition.⁴⁵ Later he recognises the illumination of the intellectual intuition as the divine Light. Whereas the intuition without reason is “blind” and the reason without the intuition is “sterile,” integration is found both in the Hindu tradition and the Christian mystical tradition in “the knowledge derived from contemplation . . . a wisdom which descends from above and directly enlightens the soul . . . and unites humankind directly with God.”⁴⁶ It is a “Universal Wisdom” which calls humanity in our present age to “unity” in a “new life in the Spirit.”⁴⁷

Finally, at Griffiths’ death the sun itself is eclipsed. The day of Griffiths’ burial “was hot and humid.” Evidently, when his body was being lowered into the ground a sudden and “dramatic” change “took everyone by surprise.” We must let Russill Paul de Silva complete his description. “The sky turned suddenly dark and a strong wind began to blow. The large

⁴² Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 107.

⁴³ Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life*, 158, 159.

⁴⁴ Bede Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, 214, 286.

⁴⁵ Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life*, 63 – 66.

⁴⁶ Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life*, 66.

⁴⁷ Bede Griffiths, *Universal Wisdom*, 41-43.

palms of the coconut trees swayed in the wind and a mild dust storm caused everyone to lower their heads and close their eyes.”⁴⁸

The direct report of this experience in the immediacy of language used by this long-time friend and associate at Shantivanam has a bearing on the vital importance of *advaita* for Griffiths.

3. Divine Light as the Way of *Advaita*

Since we have named for Griffiths a hermeneutic of encounter, we can use this to better articulate his final image in terms of his understanding of a Christian *advaita*. As we have earlier pointed out, this differs from the Hindu *advaita* as generally understood. In comparison, rather than “pure *advaita*” which is an undifferentiated non-duality, it is the non-duality of the experience of union with the one, understood as unity in differentiation that that is utter wholeness. My interpretation of Bede Griffiths’ defining journey-image, that is the Golden String, finds that it is profoundly grounded in and celebrates a Trinitarian theology. I argue how it firmly validates the authenticity of its Christological denotation. This is now finally, clearly elaborated.

In his early years in Shantivanam, sixteen years after his entry to India, in dialogue with Ruysbroeck and Eckhart, he compares the Christian symbol “Father” with the “void,” the “darkness” that is, the Hindu *nirguna Brahman*, or Brahman without attributes. The “Son” is the self-expression or manifestation of the Father, comparable with *Saguna Brahman*, Brahman with attributes. The Son is:

the light in which everything receives name and form . . . revealing the power, the wisdom, the glory, the life, the light, the truth, the love . . . hidden in the Father. He is the consciousness (*cit*) of the Father, expressing his being, the Self in which he eternally reflects himself and makes himself known.⁴⁹

Furthermore, Griffiths is able “to discern a basic pattern” whereby the image of coming forth from the darkness to the light, from the divine “womb” into manifestation

⁴⁸ Russill-Paul de Silva, “Report for Griffiths memorial,” 26 June 1993. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

⁴⁹ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 126. Mindful of Panikkar’s emphasis on the need for clarity, we are reminded of the need to be conscious of the different roles of such comparable symbols that belong to different cosmovisions.

through the Word into the light of consciousness of all forms of “creation” is one which is found in all the world religions.⁵⁰

For this, he finds support in Plato’s and Aquinas’ concept of “original ideas” in God and relies on the expression of the mystics, Gregory of Nyssa, Ruysbroeck and Eckhart to articulate this pre-existent divine encounter that manifests in the primordial encounter in Christ. This leads to Christian community and must culminate in and through the encounter of human communion. Bede sees this “communion” as a cosmic whole, “embracing the whole created world, which we now know to be an integrated whole . . . a Body, a living organism, which is capable of embracing all humanity.” By this he means we can conceive of “a universal community capable of embodying the Universal Wisdom and uniting all humanity in one Body, one living whole, in which the ‘fullness’ . . . of the Godhead dwells.”⁵¹ This is because “humanity and creation are reunited in Christ and returned to the Godhead, returned to their being in the Word.”⁵² Bede can therefore speak of the unfathomable darkness of the depths of this encounter where “we exist” in “the Father” who “from all eternity” is “an unfathomable unity of being without distinction.” In the ineffable mystery of the Trinity, however, we exist “in the Son . . . eternally in distinction of being. This is our uncreated being in the Word.” We “come forth” into the light of being and time, “distinct and separate.”⁵³ (We see here parallels with Wilber’s thought that becomes more pronounced).

To illustrate understanding, Griffiths most prefers the “reflection,” an image which appears often throughout his corpus such as we find in *Return to the Centre*, where “each” is a “distinct and unique reflection of God.” He compares the Greek Fathers’ image of human being as a mirror reflection of God with Sankara’s image of pools of water reflecting the sun:

⁵⁰ Bede Griffiths, Introduction to *Universal Wisdom*, Bede Griffiths ed. 41. Bede Griffiths, *Return*, 126, 127.

⁵¹ Bede Griffiths, Introduction to *Universal Wisdom*, 42. We respect the tension in this in respect of atheistic faiths.

⁵² Bede Griffiths, “A Meditation on the Mystery of the Trinity,” (Bede Griffiths Trust). See also, Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 272, 273.

⁵³ Bede Griffiths, *Return*, 126 – 128.

There is only one sun, one life, one truth, one reality, and it manifests itself in this, in that, in you, and in me. These are reflections of the one reality. This, I believe, comes very near to the Christian understanding.⁵⁴

Material existence therefore can be described as a “relative reality.” And from this comes freedom, “a power to choose and to will our own being,” such that the choice to “separate from” God or “return to” God is “the drama of sin and redemption.” In these terms, to separate means “to refuse to recognise our dependence on God, to create an illusory independence and become subject to *maya*.”⁵⁵ Further he points out that this is to unite with illusion itself, “I would like to suggest that ultimately evil is unreal.”⁵⁶

A uniquely human sensory apparatus is employed in the divine/human encounter. But is it essential to it? Griffiths can describe how from the senses, thought is drawn up into the imagination where it is transformed into the pure idea. However, the movement into “experience” of the transcendent is beyond all thought and described as the “wayless way.”⁵⁷ This “unconditioned,” the mystic experiences in the “cave of the heart.”

The mystical experience . . . in each religion is an experience of God (the unconditioned) in the Spirit, that is, beyond image and thought, but in each religion the experience is conditioned by the images and thought patterns through which the experience is reached and necessarily seeks expression through those same images and thought patterns.⁵⁸

Thus for Griffiths the mystic’s recall of the experience itself and the report of it are affected by language and culture. On the other hand, the experience is not limited to this because of the process of life’s journey that brings a gradual accumulation of spiritual knowledge.

There is a very close correlation with Griffiths’ and Panikkar’s idea of experience of God. For Panikkar, the fundamental experience is the “pure experience.” When we “position” ourselves in the necessary attitude of purity of heart at the “very source of being,” there is silence but a silence within and surrounding relationship. The pure experience, little “e” which Panikkar describes as “the instant of pure life, of immediate

⁵⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 72.

⁵⁵ Bede Griffiths, *Return*, 127.

⁵⁶ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 214.

⁵⁷ Judson Trapnell names Griffiths’ position in this as a “moderate constructivism.” He suggests Griffiths reveals this himself, “Though the object of mystical experience itself is the unconditioned and though the mystical experience itself is ineffable, yet the divine reality (the unconditioned) is experienced in a conditioned being.” Bede Griffiths, “The Mystical Dimension in Theology,” in *Indian Theological Studies* 14, 242 – 243. See Trapnell, “Bede Griffiths, Mystical Knowledge, and the Unity of Religions,” 365.

⁵⁸ Bede Griffiths, in Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life*, 365.

experience” cannot be separated from the other elements of the whole, the big “E.” These are “the memory of that moment,” recollected and communicable and linked with language, “the interpretation of that experience” which is even more inseparable from language and “its reception in the cultural world” not of our making. Nevertheless the full Experience is always personal. Panikkar situates the “pure experience” in the formula, “E=e+m+i+r.” However, it is “paradoxical and oxymoronic” even to speak of “experience of God.” Experience of the ineffable, of “nothingness” . . . the contingency of “being with” is an experience that “eludes all comparisons.” There is an awareness of absence and presence, the one and the many. It is a mystical experience, conveying depth, conferring both humility and freedom.⁵⁹

The “void” or the “darkness” is the experience of oneness which Bede links with John 17:21-24. Where all is one, one is all. Just as the rainbow colours are reflected together as the one white light, what greets the ultimate human transformative experience as “darkness” is the blinding light of utter unity. In *River of Compassion*, Griffiths compares the divine brilliance that is identified with Jesus’ Transfiguration.⁶⁰ Elsewhere, he reminds us how Moses’ encounter with the *quabod*, or “essence of God,” presents as a blinding brilliance.⁶¹ When all is one where distinction yet remains, this light is love.

Griffiths describes the “abyss,” the “darkness” into which he was plunged in a precipitation of his *advaitic* experience and which evoked for him the Black Madonna and the Earth Goddess as the “womb” of God. He is “overwhelmed and deluged with love.”⁶² It reminds of Gregory of Nyssa’s wholly transcendent love, experienced as “darkness” as the “wayless way” which is transformative. The connection Bede makes with the Black Madonna and the crucified Christ gives him insight into “the divine Feminine and the mystery of suffering,” the means to integration and the experience of *advaita*. He confidently espouses Nicholas of Cusa’s “coincidentia oppositorum.” He speaks of being absorbed in the experience of complete wholeness:

I saw God in the earth, in trees, in mountains. It led me to the conviction that there is no absolute good or evil in this world. We have to let go of all concepts which divide the world

⁵⁹Raimon Panikkar, *The Experience of God*, 22 – 33, 40 – 44..

⁶⁰ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 217.

⁶¹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 210.

⁶² Judy Walter P9, in Pascaline Coff, OSB, “Bede Griffiths O.S.B.: The Man, the Monk, the Mystic” (Obituary) (Sand Springs, OK: Osage Monastery, 1993).

into good and evil, right and wrong, and begin to see the complementarity of opposites which Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa called . . . the coincidence of opposites.⁶³

Indeed for him this is “the whole purpose of creation”, that the human being “should develop the capacity until he/she receives the fullness of divine consciousness into him/herself.”⁶⁴ It is this divine consciousness that is represented as the divine Light.

Griffiths compares the *Gita's* teaching of the “one Light of consciousness manifested in the consciousness of each one of us” with Augustine’s teaching of the divine simultaneous immanence and transcendence: God is “*Summior summo meo intimior intimo meo,*” (higher than my highest being and more intimate than my inmost self).⁶⁵ In the *Upanisads*, we find a parallel verse:

He is immeasurable in his light and beyond all thought, and yet he shines smaller than the smallest. Far, far away is he, and yet he is very near, resting in the inmost chamber of the heart. BU 3, 1.⁶⁶

The intuition is present even in the earliest Vedas, with the idea of *Skambha*,⁶⁷ the cosmic tree whose roots are in the transcendent depths and foliage is the manifest creation.

Griffiths says that in all of this the sun is the definitive image:

The model is always the sun . . . shedding its light on the whole world and all the earth and everything is receiving that light, but the sun is not affected by it. The light is shining through all these different colors, in all these different forms and is received in all these different materials. They are all different but all are manifesting the one Light.⁶⁸

More and more for him these material forms announced the presence of the divine Light. He recognised this in:

the image of the brilliant golden marigolds and crimson roses coming up out of the darkness of the earth, the divine darkness, the abyss of being, to the light of the Word, radiant with its brightness reflecting its glory through the power of the Spirit, the divine Shakti.

Even before his *advaitic* experience he received this as an insight into holistic interdependency intimately grounded in the overflowing creative abandon:

⁶³ Pascaline Coff, “Bede Griffiths O.S.B.: The Man, the Monk, the Mystic”.

⁶⁴ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 240.

⁶⁵ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 240.

⁶⁶ Mascaro, ed., *The Upanisads*, 80.

⁶⁷ Raymond Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, 62.

⁶⁸ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 239.

They are in me and I am in them and both of us are in the Word and in the Spirit. The same Spirit moves the flowers to spring and me to contemplate them: both in them and in me it is the one Lord who rejoices in his works.⁶⁹

Towards the end of his life, he felt “trees more and more like spiritual presences or angels in the most real sense.”⁷⁰ Because God is the pure light of love and truth, transcendence of the ego is crucial for complete transformation:

God is light and manifests in creation and in all humanity and the degree of manifestation depends on the receptivity of the different elements. . . . The aim is that each person should be a pure reflection of the one light. That is the background of the whole of the *Gita*.⁷¹

Bede compares this with Matthew 6:22, “If thine eye be single . . . thy whole body shall be full of light”.⁷²

Light in scientific terms is a manifestation of the basic magno-electric field. It can just as well be described as a particular manifestation of primordial energy. Griffiths links energy in its transcendent reality and its various primary and secondary manifestations with the Holy Spirit. (We have already argued against Bede’s particularisation of this in terms of feminine gender). At the same time, he has used Hindu images to articulate a theology where all that we encounter reflects the divine life in a profoundly subtle way. Moreover, the human consciousness links all mundane reality with its divine source. Griffiths’ own story suggests that for those who have achieved personal integration of the kind described, just as Scripture attests nature responds in sympathy.

Darkness itself can signify the divine presence and human integral transformation. This is paralleled in material existence where trace memories of the emergence of light at the birth of the universe persist deep within the subconscious:

We are all members of a cosmic whole which embraces many states of consciousness, and we all bear within ourselves not only the past experiences of the human race but also the course of cosmic evolution. Our bodies are linked with the first living cells and with the first atoms which came from the original explosion of matter.⁷³

⁶⁹ Bede Griffiths, *Return*, 34.

⁷⁰ Bede Griffiths in a letter to Sr Pascaline Coff, 17 August 1992. Available from the Bede Griffiths Trust.

⁷¹ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 23.

⁷² Bede Griffiths, *River*, 255.

⁷³ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 256.

Griffiths believes that this does have significance for the new consciousness of a new age. It would mean recognition of an existing rapport with all of creation in potential which promises a new creative vision and regenerative action. Conversely for too long, humankind has been acting from a different position:

In a very real sense all evil comes from seeing the parts and not the whole. I am I, and you are you and we come into conflict when we do not recognise our dependence on one another and in the unity of the whole. . . . I often think of the illustration of the relation between light and colour. There is one light and in that light all colours are contained. But when the colours come out of the light, red, blue green violet, orange, they all appear quite different and opposite; they even clash. Yet they are all manifestation of the one light. When we see only the difference, when we see only red and blue and green without relating them to the light, we are in the world of duality, the world of opposition, violence, of conflict, indeed of all evil. When we see ourselves as separate persons, separate from others, separate from the world, separate from God, that is the essence of sin.⁷⁴

This pinpoints for Griffiths the similarity between the *Gita* and the *Gospel*. In Arjuna's final response to Krishna, "By thy grace I remember my Light, and now gone is my delusion. My doubts are no more, my faith is firm; and now I can say 'Thy will be done.'"⁷⁵ Griffiths recognises what he believes is the "highest thing one can possibly do," that is to "spread" God's light and love; they who do so are *priya*, or beloved.⁷⁶ He believes this as being prior to actually preaching the *Gospel* which can only be attempted when the receiver is "ready."

Conclusion

This last of Griffiths' images of God that we have explored shows that to "spread" God's light and love, is to represent the light, to become and be the light for others. This is prior to, fundamental to preaching the gospel. The divine Light is both within and without. While Bede believes that the experience of the ultimate truth is different for each person, since each person is a unique image of God, a unique reflection of the one eternal light and love, nevertheless it is the one Light of truth which is experienced.⁷⁷ Griffiths quotes Thomas Aquinas who says, "God is present in all things by his power, his presence and his

⁷⁴ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 307.

⁷⁵ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 324.

⁷⁶ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 322 – 323.

⁷⁷ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 130.

essence.”⁷⁸ We can see here a profound connection with Griffiths’ grounding scripture, John 17:21-24. To be “one” in the Lord, is to be one with the Light. Furthermore, one can see that as “deep calls to deep,” (Psalm 42:7) so does the Light call to the Light. The divine Light resonating in one person awakens or brings to conscious awareness the divine Light hidden dormant in another.

Importantly, we note that writing in 2001, Georges Soares-Prabhu points out that this is especially significant for India where “religious tradition ‘sees the divine image’ (*darshan*) rather than ‘hears the word of God.’” He continues, “It is the witness of the individual and communitarian life, as the lives of our Indian saints have shown, that is crucial.”⁷⁹ We note the comparable positions taken by Pythagorus, Krishnamurti and Griffiths. The “personalization” which we find in the *Gita*, Griffiths regards as the highest religious development. One can only conclude that both the abstract mode of the message as a ray of the one Light and the personal witness of the messenger as that Light inaugurated, must be held in integral tension.

The light of love, life and truth images the whole of the journey led in, with and towards Christ. Divine Light is the beginning, the course, and the end of the journey. Griffiths describes this reality in Wilber’s words:

Bliss beyond bliss, it cannot be felt. Light beyond light, it cannot be detected. Only obvious, it is not even suspected. Only present it shines even now.⁸⁰

Griffiths points out, that this reality, just as the *Upanishads* direct, like the flash of lightning, commands wonder, and demands worship.⁸¹ It brings us back to his central emphasis on contemplative prayer as fitting for the journey. Furthermore, it is central to change, superlatively marked by the blinding light of the Resurrection. Change or transformation is integral. Although the ultimate Christian *advaitic* experience will be “a return to where one was in the beginning,” it is “now in total consciousness.”⁸²

The chapter brings to an end our exploration of Bede Griffiths’ images of God which together convey a profoundly holistic vision. We may respond, “Well, of course, he is after

⁷⁸ Bede Griffiths, *River*, 204.

⁷⁹ Georges M. Soares-Prabhu, *The Dharma of Jesus*, Francis Xavier D’Sa, editor (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 264. Soares-Prabhu refers to Diana Eck whom he quotes, in Diana L. Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Chambersburg, Penn.: Anima Books, 1981).

⁸⁰ See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 203.

⁸¹ See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 203.

⁸² See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 203.

all, Benedictine.” What is new, is a holistic vision in terms of the present times. It now remains in the final concluding Part 3, that is our final chapter, to sum up this “newness,” refine Bede’s indicators for what he believes is a new age and evaluate his journey in terms of the Christological interpretation as has been presented.

PART THREE: REFLECTION ON THE JOURNEY

Chapter 10

The Import of Bede Griffiths' Images of God: the Implications for our times of Christ the Golden String

The figurative heading provided for this last section is appropriate as it involves overall reflection on the "journey" we have made in the thesis, *"The Golden String" of Bede Griffiths' Spiritual Journey: a Christological Interpretation*. We have completed the arduous pilgrimage and must now review our findings.

As is expected of a pilgrimage, we have changed. The Journey's end is no mere cyclic return. We began by admitting a heuristic element. It recognises and makes room for Griffiths' theological method which prioritises experience of God. It also includes the awareness of a particular "texture" that is an essential aspect of any exploration of the images of God used by Griffiths to assist him particularly in communication of his message. This is avowedly prophetic and profoundly centered in a vision of beauty which relates to harmony and peace as attributes of divine Love. The reflection on the journey intends to recall succinctly the "flavor" and the "texture" of this journey.

I present firstly a list of implications which have emerged in the course of the dissertation that I have drawn from Griffiths' prophetic emphasis. This will assist the focus in the final conclusion on the overall Christological Interpretation of Bede Griffiths' journey imaged as "The Golden String." The conclusion will include an evaluation of this journey as it has been interpreted through Bede's particular use and understanding of the selected images of God.

Implications

Related sub-points are clustered under primary headings as the implications drawn from a survey of the thesis' chapters in which we have explored Griffiths' use of images of God:

The new consciousness is being inaugurated in these times and identifies a new age

The experience of a holistic reality in a profound sense is healing and integrative and as the next level of consciousness to which humankind is called, demands transcendence of the ego. Here, naming God as both Mother and Father is necessary in order to move forwards in response to the call to assume the new consciousness which promises a healing of disintegrative tendencies in the world. What will characterize the spirit of the new age are

humility, hospitality, openness to change and encounter, and self-giving and abandonment to God. Together these indicate movement to a new level of consciousness. At a formal level, “soulless” systems with disintegrative tendencies must be replaced by those which are integrative and life-enhancing. Griffiths advises that women are uniquely poised to lead the way into the new level of consciousness and that this role is prophetic.

Lay contemplative communities are essential for humankind to assume the new consciousness.

Lay contemplative communities linked to religious centers will take leadership roles centered in humility and flowing out into charitable action in the wider community which is a mark of authentication. Connected with such centers will be the practice of meditation that is necessary for every person to discover further the depth of humanity and to grow towards the new consciousness. In this, Griffiths’ method which prioritises experience of God is basic to interreligious dialogue. The different modes of expression of the contemplative life in the lay and religious vocations will mutually support but not compromise each other. In the movement into the new consciousness, humankind is being particularly called to contemplation in action especially with regard to social justice. The Christian tradition in the West and Eastern religious traditions can offer each other mutual support in this regard.

There is a vital need of a marriage of east and west and integration of the masculine and feminine for entry to the next level of consciousness to which we are now called.

The techno-industrial society of today when ordered according to the Western mind-set that has been a dominant influence for many centuries has proved destructive. For the integrated, wise person, masculine and feminine are complementary, equal and supportive. Integration which is necessary for the new consciousness involves the whole person and Eastern traditions can assist the West in this regard; interreligious dialogue is a duty of all of humanity, not an option. Especially for the sake of dialogue which is vital for the future of humanity, religion itself must be better communicated and understood as basic to human life; it is the vehicle of revelation, and transmission of the code of life in response to such revelation and the means of community celebration of God’s message of love. Thus, humanity as one may celebrate, in a life-giving way for the well-being of humankind and all of life, a universal wisdom. All religions must be revitalised by returning to their hallowed

core experiences. This introduces the possibility of travel as a necessary extension of education; its unavailability for the poor should not be ignored and this is a justice issue.

Encounter and change is profoundly human and basic to the movement towards the new consciousness.

If life, as Griffiths' images represent, is a journey of encounter, change is to be expected and welcomed as the challenge to growth and the way of wisdom. The symbol of the horizon is particularly evocative in these times and can encourage growth. Hospitality in respect of the divine Pilgrim who journeys with a people that is now understood as the whole of humanity, must be cultivated. Recognition of all humankind made in the image and likeness of God as one family means the cultivation of mutual respect between individuals and among peoples and nations. The recognition and expression of a personal deity and an abstract divine principle as different perspectives of the one reality, both of which are to be found in the Christian tradition, encourage Christians to "go beyond" the limits of their horizon and encounter different ways of response to the transcendent reality. Griffiths' own admission of mistakes in his approach with regard to living out in practice the dialogical encounter with the Hindu tradition represents the kind of transparency and humility which is needed in order for humankind to move forward. While the theological method Griffiths espouses can give rise to misinterpretation and the need for further reinterpretation, it still represents a radical expression of dialogue through encounter and openness to change. This is seen to especially resonate a prophetic way of being and a bold means of gaining insight in precarious times which demand such courageous action and example. However, at the same time, the thesis recommends a mutual respect for different theological methods with the goal of balance as being vital for our times.

Symbol, myth and image are basic to religion and religion is basic to human life in this world.

Symbol, myth and image are vitally important to religion in the areas of experience and communication of the transcendent reality. As the working of the imagination is important for symbol, myth and image, cultural systems including education must encourage rather than stifle its exercise. A vision based in the experience of unity in multiplicity recognises the divine reality as both immanent and transcendent. The primary central Christian symbols, Christ, Trinity, Eucharist must be expressed in ways and in language which best represent a holistic grasp of unity in multiplicity that is both relevant for our times and communicable

across the religious traditions. Because ultimately in the experience of God we go beyond all symbols, myths and images, we are encouraged to be open to different perspectives, to change and encounter.

Unity in diversity is evocative of the triune God and represents the pattern as a goal for humanity.

Openness to the pattern of unity in diversity will characterise leaders who would be summoned from within a local community to lead by virtue of the holiness (wholeness) of their lives. This means that church structure would be neither clerically ordered nor expressive of uniformity. Patriarchates as modelled in the early church with Rome as centre of unity (not a juridical centre) would best represent a holistic approach that prioritises unity in diversity. Coming together in community is the goal with *kommunio* as the ideal to strive for. It is necessary to explore other areas of specialisation in society, in particular the new science in order to find how God is manifesting in the ordinary, to discover parallel expressions of the divine mystery and the means to respond to pressing needs in the areas of justice and peace. This will enable cooperation with the reign of God coming to be amongst God's people within God's creation.

Conclusion

The process of my Christological Interpretation of the Golden String of Bede Griffiths' Spiritual Journey has been an exploration of the images of God he uses centred in his master image. The reason for a dearth of research on this subject to this stage is possibly on account of the need to transcend images both in Christian and Hindu contemplative paths. However, as we have seen, images that are profoundly connected to Griffiths' interfaith dialogue abound in his writings and communicate a prophetic edge. While the prophetic tenor of his contribution is acknowledged in the work of other scholars, concentration on the selected images in this dissertation has enabled me to explore the depth of his prophetic contribution in a more focused and systematic way. The implications gathered together above demonstrate this and also evoke the movement of his spiritual journey.

The thesis puts considerable emphasis on Bede's openness to encounter, marking this indeed as his hermeneutical mode. The chapter, Divine Feminine, is central. It emphasizes the importance of Griffiths' relationships with special women in his life and takes up the lacunae left by other scholars who have relied almost entirely on sources by

men. Importantly, it discloses Griffiths' attention to the feminine as central, vital for our times and basic for the movement to the next level of consciousness to which humankind is being divinely called.

Because the dissertation demonstrates that the "the Golden String" (together with related images) is an efficacious Christological symbol for Griffiths, it may assist those seeking to understand his use of images for the Divine and to reconcile this with his insistence that ultimately we must go beyond all images to experience God. So, too, it may advance the cause of scholars wishing to determine the breadth and depth of his prophetic authenticity and influence.

Exploration of these images has led to an acknowledgment of various concerns raised by others but is supportive of the fundamental authenticity of Griffiths' theology. His goal of *advaita* interpreted in accordance with a Trinitarian theology appears in various sections, such as God of the Journey, and Divine Host. Wayne Teasdale questioned whether Griffiths had adequately determined and explained the *advaitic* significance of *sannyasa* in his self-identification as a Christian *sannyasi* in comparison with the Christian formal religious adherence. My response attends to Griffiths' understanding and communication of a level of consciousness that simultaneously apprehends realization of the Divine in the present, and also the movement of transcendence as an evolutionary process. In so doing, it comprehends the immanent and transcendent dimensions of the one reality that is integral to human beings. In any event, Christian discipleship, as Griffiths explains, bears the stamp of the "universal monk," one who lives with God revealed in Christ uppermost in mind, whose life is centred in prayer and who lives for *kommunio*. "Going beyond" is attentive to the universal dimension of the movement of the Spirit, and to the absolute claims of the divine Mystery. Griffiths' use of the images explored shows how this is compatible with a theology of complementarity and faith in Jesus Christ as the absolute symbol. This demonstrates an expansive Christology.

In response to Dupuis' critique, I supported the authenticity of Bede's articulation of the hidden reality of the Godhead in relation to a personal God or as manifest in the three divine persons as Christianity holds. Just as Dupuis admits the limitations of language in articulating truth at this level of mystical insight, so too, I showed how Griffiths turned to the symbolic expression of Ruysbroeck to clarify his own meaning.

"A Christological Interpretation of The Golden String of Bede Griffiths' Spiritual Journey" has in this way delineated Bede's theology and vision for the church more clearly.

The thesis concludes that his use of his focal image and others embedded in it promotes exploration and analysis in order to more insightfully understand the pressing concerns to which he himself responds in prophetic voice. For Bede, God who is both Mother and Father embraces in love all humanity and by extension all of creation and in and through the divine Word calls all back through a process of transformation to the divine Unity which is One in relationship. We have found the images such as those surrounding light and colour, love and hospitality, man and woman, journey, reflection and horizon, along with associated others, such as web and pearl, lingam and yoni, coconut, womb and lotus, powerfully evocative when handled by one who, as a contemplative, insists on the need to experience God who is beyond all images.

Griffiths' expansive Christology is profoundly incarnational and Trinitarian. God is wholly present in and towards creation, immanent and accessible, revealed in the ordinary and yet wholly transcendent ultimately bringing all through a process of transformation to enjoyment of the divine life. As the ground of this movement the Holy Spirit is the basis and vivifying principle of "church" which ultimately encompasses all humanity united in worship and thanksgiving. It is this Spirit who now "blows" afresh stirring creation in a new stage of the process that Griffiths names as the movement into a new level of consciousness. Diversity, centred in experience is integral. The image of the horizon intimates infinitely more than we can ever imagine. Griffiths responds with a flexible, dialogical theological method based in what I call a "hermeneutic of encounter." Trust is essential. Despite Bede's belief that the world is headed for times of a global catastrophe, a chaos which now must unfold because humanity (and the Church) has not heeded the signs of the times, he has faith in God's loving revealed plan for the "new creation" accomplished in Christ.

For its ultimate fulfillment, humanity is called to co-operate with God's will. To this end each person is summoned to find the inner space, the place of contemplative listening, to open their hearts in love to all others, and to the gift of mother earth itself. It requires that religions rediscover their core experience. The masculine/feminine integration and male-female partnership in decision-making are vital. It demands participation in interreligious dialogue and daily exercise of prayer alone and in community.

In the chapter Divine Feminine that has emerged as central in the thesis, I show how Griffiths emphasizes prophecy as paramount in importance in our times. In this women have a decisive roll to play. On the recognition of the value of the feminine hinges the movement to the next stage of evolution of consciousness, which underlies the journey of life.

The direction Bede's journey took is marked by a particular angst overtly ostensibly centred in his dissatisfaction with industrialization. However, the journey, as he avers, belongs to the wider multidimensional myth of humankind's cosmically interactive movement in space and time. To me this posits a deeper primordial stir and it is to this mysterious guidance in his own life within the interdependent realms of reality sourced in mystery that Griffiths consistently submits.

It is by fidelity to "Mystery" which is also divine Love, that which is always "beyond," that the images of God Bede uses obtain, as we have demonstrated, on the one hand their apophatic significance, on the other a unique grounding in human existence.

This is the heart of Christian paradox, the event of the Incarnation centred in the divine mystery: the revelation of the divine saving Reality, *una substantia et tres personae* made manifest in the heart of material creation. It is this very paradox that I believe explains and even attends instances of ambiguity, even confusion that critics have pointed to in Griffiths' theological endeavour. It is also, however, a poignant basis for humility in the face of human limitation, and, significantly, Griffiths' emphasis on a necessary disposition for the journey: openness to encounter. Mistakes or wrong direction, such as possible confusion with gender terminology, or, as we have already described, Griffiths' enthusiasm to equate the Holy Spirit with the feminine principle, flow from just such openness. Karl Rahner would support Wilber's premise that such mistakes remain within the embrace, within the transforming action of the Holy Spirit.

Likewise with Griffiths' concern for a "marriage of East and West." Despite critique of his lack of clear articulation that may result in ambiguity or suggest gender polarity and stereotypes, an overall survey reveals a deeper logic flowing from his theology of complementarity, that on a wider scale, finds a balance. In view of Grenz's exegesis of Genesis in respect of the male, female relationship in the chapter *Imago Dei*, Griffiths' understanding of each person and each Religious tradition as being in a unique relationship with God reflects positively on the "marriage" issue. The "marriage partners" through loving interaction, not a co-dependency, rather than either competing with or seeking to complete the other, enable each other to attain whole personal integration in their own right. The same fullness of being through interdependent mutual interaction would be the goal for each party in a "marriage of East and West." It is the heart of unity in difference centred in faith in the Trinity. This conclusion finds support from Griffiths' dialogue partners in concepts such as, Panikkar's "cosmotheandric unity," Sri Aurobindo's "integral wisdom,"

Rahner's human self-transcendence and the "absolute future," Gregory of Nyssa's infinite horizon of relationship, and Lonergan's sustained questioning and transcendence of "limit horizons."

Life as a pilgrimage in, with and through, Christ the divine Pilgrim, insists that change is inevitable and brings growth, and that the necessary predisposition is readiness for change and openness to encounter. This is especially significant for interfaith dialogue which is vital for the present era of transition and global crises.

In Griffiths' terms, the new consciousness is profoundly Eucharistic. This new way of being signals the recognition of life as process with an evolutionary development and transformation over time but simultaneously the vehicle for realization of the divine in the present. It means for our day a particular contemplative "listening" that is not a contemplative life-style necessarily, but a contemplative way of being which apprehends material reality in an interdependent three-dimensional relationship that includes the material, psychic and spiritual domains. It motivates to contemplation in action in the service of a transformation of all of lived reality towards universal justice and peace, for the self-realisation of each unique person, each unique religious community and ultimately the human family and creation as a whole.

Through this, Griffiths is able to find central to the revelation of divine life and the goal of humanity, the idea of sacrifice in the true sense – making sacred. In this, primordial faith underlies the emergence of material existence. Outside of it, that which is not of life is mere illusion. In this sense, humankind is divinely gifted with the freedom "to be or not to be," to respond to the promptings of love, the seed of faith, to be of Light and Love or, through free choice, separated from Self, the transcendent Source, and from others.

A word must be said at this point, with respect to Griffiths' theological method. It gives the impression of being eclectic. We have seen how Griffiths is selective in his use of other sources for support, in this thesis specifically in his use of images of God. It is particularly obvious in his use of Nassr. What saves his method from mere eclecticism and gives it coherence is its motive in dependence on the movement of the Holy Spirit which "blows where it will." As I have suggested above, it is strongly influenced by Ken Wilber's anthropological/theological perspective which finds the Spirit underlying all forms of any recognisably truly human endeavour. Griffiths' method indicates a corresponding generosity that takes into consideration a very wide reservoir of thought. His great contribution is bringing together with the hope of synthesis, these diverse voices. For the

sake of dialogue and to avoid controversy, which he “detests,” he sometimes overlooks areas of non-convergence while drawing on other points of agreement. At other times, for example, in the case of Aloise Pieris, even though the issue comes up in private correspondence, we note how he has balanced criticism with recognition of Pieris’ overall valuable theological contribution. True to the “hermeneutic of encounter” we have named for him, Griffiths’ use of images of God, like all his theological endeavour is purely in the cause of dialogue centred in his vision of divine Love manifest in history in the person of Jesus Christ.

Overall, it remains to be said that we have not neglected “the elephant in the room”; the structure we have imposed on the thesis relates to Griffiths’ own theological method which has sometimes provoked critique, such as that of Panikkar. However, join with this Griffiths’ own criticism of what he sees as deficiencies in Lonergan’s and Teasdale’s methods, and we get a better picture of the dilemma. Of course, this point is not meant to denigrate in any way the great contributions of any of the theologians named. The structure I have used is intended, by its openness, to symbolically and at the same time critically evoke Griffiths’ own method. Our suggestion is that for the sake of inter and intra- religious dialogue, method in theology urgently needs a sharing of, or at least mutual respect for different approaches.

A final word remains to be said in relation to evaluation of Griffiths’ theological contribution, as gleaned from this exploration of his master image and related images. The Golden String, God of the Journey, Divine Host, the *Imago Dei*, Divine Feminine, Divine Lord and Divine Light, each independently and together communicate passion of love. While words used in the process of the Christological interpretation, such as “radical” and “sacrifice” in terms of the monastic habit or discipleship might suggest a spiritual asceticism opposed to humanity, in point of fact Griffiths’ mature spirituality more and more finds expression in theological rhetoric and articulation characterized by gentleness. It embraces a profoundly human way of being that values the body.

The myriad “little” deaths and rebirths in the process of a human life are not just a preparation for eternity. As Griffiths himself says, through faith we are already participating in eternal life. Griffiths’ description of aspects of church “falling apart” and the trees as “ministering angels” may very well represent a final metamorphosis taking place at the end of his earthly life. This understanding allows space for a gentle response to his existential predicament that corresponds with the gentleness of his own method.

There are different ways for the journey, which each religious tradition of spirituality represents, preserves and protects. The way which Bede Griffiths' theological method and spirituality exemplify as expressed in his use of the images we have explored represents a gentle passion, means of growth, a training for love before the final plunge into the divine passion.

APPENDIX 1

The Motive

Introduction

Thirty years ago when this project was an unimagined future event, I was introduced to the writings of Bede Griffiths through the gift of *The Golden String* presented to me by my mother who was Anglo-Indian. Considering Griffiths' metaphor of "journey" whereby we are all somehow connected, this gift and the memory of its circumstances hold a poignant significance. The subject I chose for my thesis was an amazing act of providence. Furthermore, for one such as myself who was neither familiar with India nor with monasteries, the initiative to do a "walk in Dom Bede Griffiths' footsteps" in order to "get beneath the skin" of the subject proved to be invaluable research. From the outset, it carried the hope that the experience would assist my understanding of *advaita*,¹ a concept that is both central to the development of Griffiths' thought, and Hindu experiential knowledge and philosophical development. I was not disappointed.²

This exploration of the image of God of the Journey takes the form of a pilgrimage I undertook accompanied by my husband. Together with the video that was made in response to the suggestion by ACU research officer, Ms Carmen Ivers, it overtly demonstrates on the one hand an heuristic dimension of the thesis and on the other its proposed organic development.

We were able to explore first-hand the ancient image of God of the Journey that is celebrated in the Church's liturgy in the context of Dom Bede Griffiths' understanding of "The Golden String" as Christ. Joining in his encounter with Eastern religions in this way provided us with a whole new perspective of the God-journey image. The hermeneutical process involves a particular interaction insofar as my journey (the author) and yours (the reader) interact at this point to encounter Griffiths' religious quest in India and also his religious life before-hand which can very well be understood as preparation inspired by Providence. Griffiths states, "myth is a symbolic story which expresses, in symbolic terms which rise from the depths of the unconscious, humankind's understanding of God and the

¹ This is the Sanskrit term for the concept dealing with non-dualistic apprehension of reality.

² The text and the DVD made from this pilgrimage, form Appendices I and II.

mystery of existence.”³ His words resonate his own life-myth that is his unique story lived in and through his symbol “The Golden String”.

Judson Trapnell’s reflection: “Griffiths . . . not only lived a life, he created a work, a “text””⁴ show the image as multivalent. It includes the interior spiritual journey and encompasses the general idea of humankind’s movement in space and time, historical to cosmic with the evolution of consciousness. It underlies Griffiths’ urgent appeal for engagement in religious dialogue at a core level in order to allow humankind a way forward towards the ultimate goal in God.⁵

This grounds his developing theology of complementarity, “All redeemed humanity . . . are called to experience . . . communion of love in the mystical body of Christ which embraces the whole of creation . . . (to) engage in this task . . . not fully accomplished.”⁶ Yet, while “the Cosmic Revelation has shown the Hindu the real transcendence and immanence of God in creation and in man . . . a revelation of divine love . . . it leaves out the reality of this world . . . caught in the wheel of *samsara*.”⁷ On the other hand, although “the life and death and resurrection of Christ have not only a meaning for all, but also an effect on history . . . the danger of Christianity today is that it over-emphasises the importance of matter and science and history and human progress in this world striving for a better world.”⁸ The kind of frustration Griffiths felt is relayed by Shirley du Boulay from an unpublished interview with Griffiths’ friend Wayne Teasdale who reports that Bede said many times:

The Church is still in the nineteenth century it has not progressed . . . Just as Jesus stood before the Temple buildings and said, “I tell you solemnly, not a single stone here will be left on another: everything will be destroyed”, so one could equally well stand before St Peter’s and say “Not a stone upon a stone will remain”.⁹

Nevertheless, there is hope. In *A New Vision of Reality* Griffiths adds, “We are learning, and we shall continue to learn, that all the different religious traditions, from the most primitive to the most advanced, are interrelated and interdependent and that each has its own

³ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 115.

⁴ Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 1.

⁵ Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*, 26.

⁶ Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*, 130.

⁷ Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*, 118.

⁸ Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation*, 128.

⁹ Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 254.

particular insights.”¹⁰ Such ideas which underlie his image of God of the Journey, and are explored further throughout the thesis motivated me to search beneath the “skin” of his story. It is important because it assists us to understand Griffiths’ theological method. Trapnell points out that Griffiths’ basic approach which he described in 1954 remained “normative” for his life:

It was the experience which came first and so it must always be. All our knowledge comes to us directly or indirectly from experience, from the vital experience of the senses and imagination. The philosopher can interpret our experience..., but ideas can never take the place of experience. An idea of God which had no relation to my own experience would have no interest for me.¹¹

Raimundo Panikkar is even more emphatic. At a memorial service in Chicago, referring to Griffiths’ corpus of dialogue, he says:

We can find fault with many of his ideas in which the presentation was not up to the point. That was not his forté. That was not his mission. The importance of Fr Bede which we should never forget, for us, was his person . . . was his being there.¹²

Thirty years ago when this research was an unimagined future event, I was introduced to the writings of Bede Griffiths through the gift of *The Golden String* presented to me by my Anglo-Indian mother. My parents migrated to Australia in 1948 two years before I was born which incidentally was the very year that Monchanin and Le Saux founded Shantivanam in Tamil Nadu. My mother died in 2001 and although my choice of this subject shortly after was to all intents and purposes an objective one, her gift and the memory of its circumstances hold a poignant significance. The journey can spring surprises.

Relevant then is my “walk in the footsteps of Bede Griffiths.” I relished the idea as a way to better understand the concept of *advaita*¹³ so central to the development of Griffiths’ thought. There was also a longing to see with my mother’s eyes, “to connect” with that dimension of her which I believe I share at a deep level of my being, a dimension of being which had become suddenly significant in my professional life. I became aware that—just as for Griffiths — my needs necessitated a geographical shift.

Gratitude is the residual emotion after the pilgrimage - for the friendliness and human concern everywhere encountered in the four countries visited — no matter what the

¹⁰ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 287.

¹¹ Bede Griffiths, *Golden String*, 56. See Judson Trapnell, Introduction to *A Life in Dialogue*, 5.

¹² Kenneth Cracknell, in Forward, to Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue*, xii.

¹³ This is the Sanskrit term for the concept dealing with non-dualistic apprehension of reality.

race, culture or creed. This provided a more acute appreciation of Griffiths' understanding of the Holy Spirit present in all times and places. Griffiths' overarching image is most profoundly Trinitarian and closely related to an image which became manifest during our travels. This is the perfectly hospitable divine Host, one who is out-flowing love revealed as generative relationship; the One who engenders, provides and gathers together in celebration. In light of both of these, as Griffiths insists the *Imago Dei* can only truly be understood in terms of community, community which reveals men and women in partnership, interdependent and mutually supportive.

Engagement with India's Journey

Griffiths' contemplation of the fruits of his engagement with the religion, land and people of India was complemented by his appreciation of the sheer age of the sub-continent with its diversity of life. His imagination was nourished through sustained attention to the question of the interrelatedness and interdependency of the worlds of mind and matter. He describes the initial marked difference that had existed once between the ancient northern Aryan religion "of a nomadic people, of warriors, and much more dynamic," and "the southern religion, the Dravidian, of the earth and the Mother goddess." Nevertheless, "Hinduism evolved from that creative meeting."¹⁴ Furthermore, the image of journey which can be imaginatively stretched to a pre-history which has been the source of industry and excitement for archaeologists, anthropologists and geologists is not absent from his delight in the network of relationships that stretch back into great geological antiquity. While Griffiths encountered this as an "event" first-hand, nicely documented surveys may be found even in sophisticated travelogues, such as Nicholson's *Traveller in India*¹⁵ which I consulted along with the writings of Griffiths and Ninian Smart in preparation for our journey and which support the brief background sketch presented in this section. It provides a greater breadth of perspective.

One may discover that six million years ago there existed the one land mass, "Gondwanaland" comprising Africa, South America, India, Antarctica and Australia which separated five million years later – so that India over the next hundreds of thousands of years drifted north to meet the China plate; as they pressed together, from the depths the ground swelled up rising to great heights to form the Himalayas. From these awe-inspiring

¹⁴ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 14.

¹⁵ Louise Nicholson, *Traveller in India* (Washington: National Geographic Society, 2001).

heights, source of the holy Ganges to the River Cauvery, the Ganges of the south that nourishes the flat rice paddies surrounding Saccidananda Ashram, all breathed a story of a land and people with a vast history. As Griffiths had done before his departure for the Ashram of the Holy Trinity, I had stood braced on the wind-scoured Mountain of the Cross¹⁶ with its view of the lower terraced gardens of Kurisumala and the breathtakingly splendid sun-kissed ranges of the Western Ghats so loved by my mother and source of the sacred Cauvery River which meanders, somewhere beyond the horizon, past Shantivanam. Was the experience of peace and unity this gave me once that of Griffiths? Initially, he had conceived humankind's journey as the way back to Eden. After ten years wrestling a raw mountain wilderness into a state of serene monastic cultivation, he must have gazed down upon the terraced hill-sides with satisfaction and been encouraged to go forth to make Shantivanam a success.

Francis Mahieu had lyricised on the variability of the play of light on the mountains¹⁷ but for Griffiths, the desolation of the site for the ashram sometimes had seemed daunting, "You realise out here how heartless and inhuman nature is." Yet the magnificence of fine days encouraged him to philosophise, "So much beauty and yet so subject to change – that is our life on this earth." Ever interested in welcoming guests, he had also reflected: "Who will come here?"¹⁸ But the seeming inaccessibility did not deter the crowds of inquirers who came in his time and still come today. These days, the Abbot of Kurisumala explained to us, they need to take strict measures to control the numbers of visitors.

Like Aboriginal spirituality, the Hindu tradition can be traced to pre-historic times. Today India carefully preserves the traces in museums and protected parks where tourists are led by English-speaking guides. Despite his misgivings with regard to in-roads into Indian culture and religious life from the West through tourism and investment, and Indian assumption of the Western life-style, Griffiths nevertheless increasingly emphasised the need for the meeting of East and West. Deferring to the great age of both Australian

¹⁶ *Kurisumala* means the Hill of the Cross, a name it was given in the nineteenth century when it was a place of pilgrimage. Griffiths and Francis had found it a "good omen" that the cross "had originally been erected in honour of St Benedict and that two medals of the saint were buried beneath it." See Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 122, 123.

¹⁷ Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 123.

¹⁸ Hugh Waterman considered that Father Francis and Bede Griffiths differed in their visions for Kurisumala. Francis' was of a simple monastery regenerative for the neighbourhood, while Griffiths' was of a centre devoted to study and discussion where people could come and go. Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness*, 144.

Aboriginal and Indian spiritual traditions, he reminds Christians of the West that they do not have a monopoly of the Holy Spirit.

Humankind itself in India is very ancient. We only visited the south and the south-west India but in the north near Bhopal there are ancient paintings in rock caves which appear to be between 10,000 and 40,000 years old – though human life itself on the continent goes back 400,000 years. The intricately carved quartz, agate and carnelian arrowheads found at Rajasthan suggest a possible ceremonial purpose, and there are stone hammers from the Palaeolithic age – 30,000 years ago. The people became hunters, gatherers and traders. In 5,000 BC, there were herds of humped cattle and in 3,500 BC pottery wheels and mud-brick granaries are evident round the Indus basin. There is evidence that the great civilization here with its stone temples on the heights, and stone seals (still existing though indecipherable) and affinities with the Sumerian and Elamite cultures, is the forerunner of the Southern Dravidian culture.

This Indus civilization died out, most probably pushed aside (and the Dravidians moved south) by the war-like semi-nomadic Aryan invaders who came over the mountains round 2,000 BC with their horses and chariots from the Iranian plateau, or southern Russia. The warrior chief, the *raja*, had *Brahman* priests who later produced the oral *Vedic* Sanskrit verses. The “Aryans” or “noble people” were fair; the Dravidians, dark. The introduction of the caste system was colour-based. In due course, elements of Dravidian worship were subsumed into the Hindu religion as it developed from the *Vedic* root. For example, the dark ancient Dravidian god *Shiva*, associated with violence and death, becomes a more benevolent Hindu deity. On temples and paintings in Tamil Nadu one sees he still retains the dark blue colour.¹⁹

This is the astonishing journey Griffiths encountered in India. He points out that the “marriage” of the religions of the Aryans and Dravidians is responsible for the “richness” of Hinduism. And to his great satisfaction he finds traces of the ancient Dravidian worship of the Mother goddess and its religion of the earth which Griffiths finds “in all the villages around us” where “the principle temple is always that of the Mother, the Mother goddess – the object of worship.”²⁰ This is significant in the chapter, the Divine Feminine.

¹⁹ Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision*, 57.

²⁰ Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 13,14.

Ninian Smart's description of Hinduism as "the trunk of a single mighty tree; . . . its past . . . a tangle of most divergent roots"²¹ is apt but it is this complex tapestry that Griffiths finds so "rich." The religious background will be roughly sketched to the present as it further demonstrates the complexity of the tradition, a tradition which Griffiths believes India must explore and re-examine.

The Vedic myth in the form of verses of hymns for worship was transmitted secretly and orally – the *sruti*. The religion became ever more esoteric, with life dictated by the rigid caste system: the priests or *Brahmins*; the *Kshatriyas* or warriors; the *Vaishyas* or craftspeople; and the *shudras* – the dark workers – not of Aryan stock; and, finally, a fourth class was added – the untouchables. Earliest priestly cultic practices were joined with the contemplative insights from the *rishis* or 'forest dwellers' with their first-written Sanskrit text about 1,000 BC. Some 200 years later when alternatives to the *Vedic* religion arose in the form of Buddhism and Jainism which had no caste system, a new form, *Brahmanism* absorbed *sramanic* ideas of reincarnation, liberation, *yoga* and *tapas* (self-mortification) all to be found in the later *Upanishads*. Later, great epic symbolic narratives were created. One book in particular, the *Bhagavadgita* or "Song of the Lord" (the *smriti* or tradition), from the *Mahabharata* around 300BC, inspired belief in the value of ordinary life combined with loyal relationship (*bhakti*) with a loving deity (*Brahman*) and commitment to ethical principles of right living (*Dhama*). On this was built the *Vedanta* or philosophies and it is to the *Advaita* or non-dualist school to which eighth century Sankara belongs. The school introduces the question of the illusory quality (*maya*) of the world of multiplicity.

Following the Classical Age (300 to 650CE), regional fighting and Islamic conquests (from the eighth century) preceded the great *Moghul* empire of the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Portuguese Christian missionaries arrived in the sixteenth century at Goa and, in the seventeenth century, British Christianity came with the East India Trading Company and the development of British rule in India. Finally, led by Hindu Mahatma (Great Soul) Gandhi, India broke with British Imperialism and won over its independence in 1947 simultaneously with the partitioning of India. During the mass cross-migration which ensued, it is estimated that over two million people were massacred. Gandhi, an adept of non-violence (*ahimsa*), wept over this bloodshed. Unsurprisingly Griffiths was deeply

²¹ Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 43.

impressed by this man who based his life on the teaching of compassion in the *Bhagavad Gita* and maintained devotion to Jesus as an exemplar of love and forgiveness.

Our Experience in South India

More than half a century has passed since Independence. It was not India's espousal of Western science and technology, but the tendency to separate science and religious faith which disturbed Griffiths.²² The passage of time has mitigated negative attitudes from painful memories of the British Raj. As we noted during our Indian pilgrimage, English is "in" — along with vast multi-lane highways and fast imported cars. Elsewhere, far from such improvements and despite unbelievable driving conditions — completely deficient in road rules except perhaps for the biggest having right of way —, we did not encounter one example of road rage for the two and a half weeks we were in Tamil Nadu. In Kerala, with its greater Western influence, better education, generally higher standard of living and more cars - mostly inexpensive Asian models - we had our first encounter with such aggression. One suspects this aggressive action is exponentially related to material acquisition.

Griffiths was concerned about the erosion of the kind of personal dignity and graceful ways of the poor of Southern India due to post-Independence Western capitalistic influence. He saw the solution to such an impasse in global terms, namely, through the religious traditions returning to their founding inspirations. Furthermore he believed this to be the true basis for authentic dialogue.

Can the dichotomy which Griffiths observed between science and religion in India be arrested? Even while Christian churches are responding to social justice issues that beset the West, the situation was plain enough to our eyes during our recent Indian pilgrimage. In religious terms, India represents an even more pronounced division between the material and the spiritual than what is observable at a global level.

Pilgrimage as a Response to Present Challenge

The journey in Bede Griffiths' footsteps had held the promise of satisfying my needs as a scholar and creative artist. For one born and bred in the West, of mixed-race, immigrant parents, I hoped it would demonstrate my readiness for and commitment to the kind of intellectual transaction which would be certain to effect inner change. There was also the spiritual dimension that was basic to such a pilgrimage.

²² Bede Griffiths, *Cosmic Revelation*, 116.

This journey experience can therefore be analysed physically, intellectually, psychologically and spiritually: to strip away the inessentials; to physically “walk” Griffiths’ way and track the developmental stages of his thought and access distant archives; to understand my style of thinking; to risk change, expect conversion and overcome fear of the unknown; to encounter the East; to enter into “conversation” with “the other” and to seek and accept my roots; to form networks of support and mutual interest; to uncover unexpected questions and/or anomalies and to move into the area of creative freedom.

As theology is “god talk,” concerned with understanding, communicating and sharing ever-growing and deepening knowledge of the Author of creation and the presumed relationship thereby initiated, this “trip” may be seen to reflect albeit in an infinitesimal way, the “calculated risk” that the perfect Exemplar of Creative Freedom took in the divine act of creation and the bestowal of free will. One may surmise in any “calculated risk” there is the excitement of desire along with the possibility of reward and the probability of growth. In regard to the calculated risk of the One who is Three, though the source and return of all is Love, there are “messy bits” in between. Similarly, the risk with such an adventure is to suspect that, despite the best of all plans, things are certain go awry at times and expectations are disappointed. Who knows what might happen!?! Yet, the desire, hope and expectation of growth remain. Presumed is the “otherness” within “same”/self. The divine Other is both self-revealing and indwelling “. . . known by participating in the movement which he (sic) is”²³ as “Being in love” and apt to surprise, the spirit “blowing where it will.”²⁴ Theology, after all, is “a response to the dialogue which God initiates.”²⁵

Such a pilgrimage is also indicative of “the homeless Christ’s inner freedom before the Father” which is a reminder to Christians not to be dependent on “place” but to be always aware of the need for the exercise of detachment. Every place and every moment speaks equally of God to those who learn how to discern and witness to the “seeds of the Word,” the signs of the in-breaking of the Kingdom.²⁶

Putting aside material goods normally taken for granted — packing only essentials — strengthens resolve and gives a general sense of purpose; it also witnesses to friends and

²³ Anthony Kelly CSSR, *The Trinity of Love, A Theology of the Christian God*, Vol. 4. New Theology Series, ed. P. C. Phan (Delaware: Michale Glazier, 1989), 157.

²⁴ Anthony Kelly, *The Trinity of Love*, 229.

²⁵ Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 254.

²⁶ Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 252, 253.

family on whom one must rely for support over a period of some years that the purpose is also mission. “Christians are committed to the practice of breaking the borders by constantly departing for ‘elsewhere’ in imitation of the homeless Christ.”²⁷

Preparation for this pilgrimage necessitated clarifying one’s objectives, widening one’s interests and strengthening one’s life-purpose. It also involved establishing contacts overseas where Griffiths’ archives are kept. Important too was the need to develop an increased exercise programme. A few places of special family interest were included in the itinerary. In this way, a much wider circle of family and friends became interested in the project (as faith and scholarship-orientated) than if it had been limited to the academic dimension.²⁸ It is reflective of the interdependency and networking so central to Griffiths’ theological vision of the life-journey.

Engagement with the Other

I hoped the engagement of the imagination and the senses in this most experientially-immediate way would prompt more questions and further avenues for intellectual exploration. The mere preparation had prompted questions about the effect of geographical change on human consciousness. How deeply was Griffiths’ consciousness affected by such movement? He had no idea that his journey to India would necessitate a greater degree of asceticism, nor that his simple Benedictine robe, writing desk, and eating utensils would separate him from solidarity with the really poor. His choice to become a *Sannyasi* was directly a result of the geographical move and the immediate effect of the changed environment.

It is indicative of the sincerity and dedication of Griffiths’ journey with/to God in dialogue with Hinduism that it came to be set in the context of an Ashram through his identification as a *Sannyasi*. He shares profoundly his contemporary Raimundo Panikkar’s conviction that, “without in some way sharing in (other people’s beliefs),” we become involved in “the inauthentic hermeneutical device of interpretation by proxy,” that in

²⁷ Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 250.

²⁸ In Chennai we met an Indian priest, Fr Simon Thomas. At his parish church of the Presentation (prior to Vatican 11 - The Purification) he produced for us brown-paper and plastic covered excellently preserved registers of funerals and baptisms dating back to the early eighteenth century and here we discovered baptismal, marriage and funeral records of many of our Dique forebears. They were French colonists at Royapetta, Catholics, who had escaped from France during the dangerous times round the end of the 18th century.

assuming a particular “paradigm of intelligibility” we practice condescension.²⁹ Griffiths had learned Sanskrit only to find that in Kurisumala Mass was celebrated in the West Syrian Malankara rite!

The Loci of Griffiths’ Journey

Shantivanam

Our stay at Shantivanam came early in the pilgrimage; by journey’s end we were more out-going. We have been changed in other ways too. I think we have developed more sensitivity towards those committed to building Christian community; in particular, we were sensitized to the poor. Even though at Shantivanam we became more acutely aware of the challenge of the non-dualistic (*advaitic*) spirituality which flows from an urge/longing for unity with God, paradoxically for us diversity with its surprises and unexpected beauty has a sharper outline. We arrived to find that Brother (John) Martin was leading the community in the temporary absence of the prior, Fr George. He was one of those present in Griffiths’ time. He is a joyful person of theological eloquence and he has given talks on invitation in other countries. As a group we gathered each day in the octagonal hall to hear him speak and respond to our questions.

Another person who had known Bede Griffiths well was Father Augustine, and he laughingly related how Francis Achyra and Griffiths, “disagreed on almost everything.”³⁰ We also met Brother George the most silent person on earth. I was disappointed my camera was not at-the-ready when he left so quietly in the bullock cart laden with heavy sacks — as I later discovered, to distribute the monthly rice donation to the poor. Sister Sara Ananda, a French Benedictine had lived in the women’s Ashram across the road nearly all her monastic life and was an exponent of Francis Achyra’s views. We were fortunate to meet Dr Peter Tandon who also had known Bede Griffiths. A West Australian of Indian descent, he annually recruits Australian doctors (this time he had 16 others with him) to accompany him in a philanthropic movement – Equal Health – to work for six weeks in the area.

People no longer throng in their hundreds at Shantivanam with its charismatic guru gone, but the ashram still attracts retreatants from all over the world. Besides local Indian

²⁹ Raimundo Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 21.

³⁰ This is supported in *Beyond the Darkness*, where Francis is quoted as saying, “I loved Father Bede and respected him but I could not agree in meetings,” 114.

visitors, there was a quiet monk from the Camaldolese congregation in California, a Canadian psychologist, a Lutheran minister from Germany and a couple from Romania.

Together with the permanent monastic residents, we met three times each day before meals for meditation and prayer and morning Eucharist, always with traditional rites and chanting. The experience of communal asceticism and corporate silence in the peaceful Shantivanam community within its exuberantly-colourful Indian setting brought home to me the shock of cultural and geographical change Griffiths had described. His enjoyment and celebration of the beauty he discovered in South India underlines his theology.

Overall, as in Kurisumala later, we were inspired by the ashram's commitment to inculturation. In our country we have barely begun to mine the vein of gold which is the Gospel expressed in Australian culture and language.

Kurisumala

At Kurisumala, we met one whom I regard as a living saint, the Abbot, Dom Jesudas Theliel who impressed me with his total dedication to inculturation, the primary focus of his Ashram. He was joyful and humble. His English was not good. Barefoot and dressed in a rough, cotton saffron tunic, he was small, slender, energetic, and from the one interview he gave me, assuredly an astute thinker. Simple and gentle in the extreme, never having ventured far from the high mountains of Vagamon in the Western Ghats between Kerala and Tamil Nadu, he asked had we met his niece in Sydney for whom he had no address — she was Indian and so, Dom Jesudas said, probably easier to notice. . . Meeting Dom Jesudas (servant of Jesus) and worshipping in his Ashram initiated a life-time friendship. It was an emotional farewell centred in mutual acceptance and hospitality from this isolated mountain place. Yesudas held our hands as the car drove away, his face with long hair and beard and soulful eyes indelibly engraved in our memory as he invited us with great kindness to return again one day.

Significance of Shared Experience

The conviction grew that encapsulating the whole of the thesis in the image of "journey" draws attention to the underlying paradox of the subject of "Bede Griffiths' Images of God." Griffiths' insistence on the ultimate *advaitic* experience of simple unity that demands transcendence of all conceptualisation proceeds through the avenue of relationship and communication with others by means of images which serve to describe

the worth and the end of such an endeavour. It drew others to learn his insights and motivated him to share his experience. The way guests were drawn to converse with him in Prinknash and Farnborough was a prelude to the role of *Sannyasi* in an Indian Ashram and his continuing interest in the kind of monastic life which reached out to the wider community in an original way. An experiential knowledge of the transcendent is for Griffiths profoundly Trinitarian. It acknowledges spiritual interdependency, the reality of communion. Furthermore it is incarnational. The idea of breaching new frontiers in the journey to/into That which is at once wholly Other and the deepest centre of self, is grounded in a celebration of difference, in the belief/understanding that the Word profoundly present in all creation and uniquely enfleshed, confers value on all life.

The highest Hindu expression of this and Griffiths' visual symbol *par excellence* is the *Nataraja*, or dancing *Siva*. Griffiths had brought one such bronze object and presented it to Sister Pascaline at the opening of Osage Monastery in Sand Springs, Oklahoma. In this beautiful ancient *Vedic* symbol, Griffiths recognizes Christ's Resurrection; a transcendent, cosmic and universal signification.

On the flight between Chennai and Frankfurt I met a German lawyer, who was engaged in such "outreach" and "celebration." Due to retire this year and anticipating a new role as advisor to the United Nations in Ethiopia, he had just completed yet another interesting "holiday" project. His extra-curricula interest was visiting various countries (his favourite being Burma) where he gathered shots of cultural and religious interest with an old-fashioned (though according to him particularly good) video camera. On his return to Bavaria, he would spend three weeks writing up an analytical reflection of his experience. Then he would call together his customary interested party and give his report. His enviable retention of fact and detail was apparent in his impassioned, even poetical descriptions. He shared with me the kind of insight he took back to his "group" such as his observation of the Hindus who gathered for the extraordinary celebration when the gods are taken out of the Temple and placed in "vehicles" (huge wagons) to be paraded through the streets with great pomp and spectacle, accompanied by camels and elephants and so forth for the sake of the worshippers. At this time he could "feel" the energy being received by or entering into the Hindus fully focused on the deity and wholly engaged in their chanting. Here was a northern European who knew nothing of Griffiths and his life's mission but was yet in his own creative way engaged in bringing together East and West. It was a sign of the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Towards the Still Point where Journeys Meet

While the idea of “journey” suggests activity and geographical shift, the objective is the “still point.” Griffiths would have agreed with Pascal’s observation: “All man’s (*sic*) troubles stem from a single cause: his inability to sit quietly in a room.”³¹ The “still point” though, is not to be confused with the idea of a vacuous emptiness. It is stillness-in-fullness, the place in the mind, heart and soul where all journeys meet, where all that is experienced as multiplicity “exists” in potential and in cumulative transcendent ultimacy. This underlies Griffiths’ vision of a new global consciousness grounded in a revolutionary understanding of the vital necessity of the contemplative dimension in everyday living together with related insistence on the quality of community interaction. Bede’s message, “always to transcend our divisions — religious, social, psychological, linguistic — the fragmented state of humanity — and recover the wholeness . . . the unity behind diversity”³² can be compared with Panikkar’s “cosmotheandric vision” of “the three irreducible dimensions of the divine, the human and the earthly” which, existing as one in relation, “expresses the ultimate constitution of reality . . . constitutive of the whole, but flash(ing) forth, ever new and vital, in every spark of the real.”³³

In all there is a mutual indwelling and a rising to a greater complexity culminating in utter simplicity which for Christians is divine Love. Griffiths proposes that “unselfish love” is “one of the keys . . . which can open up (the) deep centre . . . deep Self” and that meditation, demanding surrender of the ego, is the way to unselfish love. This approach to communication with the transcendent is, for Griffiths, the way “to happiness and peace.”³⁴

We found this expressed symbolically in ancient Hindu temples which we toured en route to Shantivanam Ashram. They provided insight into the movement of the Holy Spirit among an ancient people. We noted the magnitude of the entrance to impress upon the worshippers (as it was explained) that they were entering a place concerned with a greater reality. In comparison, we had to bend to enter the *Ghaba-griha*,³⁵ the inner sanctum,

³¹ Margaret Gee, ed. *Journeys Timeless Travel Quotations Words of Wisdom Selected Quotes* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2000).

³² Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond Darkness*, 252.

³³ Raimon Panikkar, cited by Gerard Hall, in “Colligite Fragment for an Integration of Reality”, *Prayer Peace and Unconditional Love Seminar*, ‘Alienation for Atonement’, 74. Mumbai, 20th – 23rd Dec., 2005.

³⁴ Meath Conlan, *The Wisdom of a Prophet* (Ill.: Templegate, 2006), 4.

³⁵ The Sanskrit word for “womb-house.”

where the priests dispensed cultic blessings and chanted prayers of advocacy for the Hindu adherents who were present. Griffiths points out that this symbolized the inner “cave of the heart,” the entry to which is humility.

Ooty: Human Dignity

Later at Outagumund (Ooty) we encountered on one walk along the mountainside (not far from the luxury of our hotel which 100 years ago served as a summer hill-station home for one “Lady Maby”) the direst poverty we experienced in India. In this freezing cold place — in early March India is still coming out of its winter — perched on the side of the hill was a small village set amongst piles of garbage down one side of the track, huts of rough wood gathered from the nearby forest, kids barefoot and lightly clothed running out to be photographed, and a young dad coming quietly from the forest his shoulders laden with fire-wood. Correspondingly, here I was most sensitive to the quintessentially human faith in a transcendent reality that I subsequently experienced. Moreover, I also experienced the devotional faith of the people, *Bhakti*, expressed in gracious trust and friendliness. We entered the forest where the late afternoon light was dim, filtered through dense stands of Eucalyptus trees and native shrubs and firs. As we walked, my eyes were attracted to a bright colour. On a wide flat rock beside my feet next to the path, tiny marigolds had been arranged in a pattern. Just as I noticed the little picture of Shiva propped up above the marigolds at the edge of the rock and registered this was a shrine, there was a movement of colour among the trees and a woman appeared. Her gracious smile silently acknowledged my hesitant greeting. We moved away with a fleeting impression of her, dignified and graceful in a yellow and red sari. I was deeply touched. I understood how this poor woman with her gentle manner and welcoming smile standing beside her place of worship was profoundly held in the embrace of a loving God.

Tombs of the Three Founders

Serenely set amongst shrubs and vines at Shantivanam there are four tombs side by side. Here one can reverence the last resting place of l’Abbé Jules Monchanin, Père Henri le Saux (today better known as Abhishiktananda),³⁶ Dom Bede Griffiths and Swami Amaldas. Together they symbolise interdependency in relationship both devotional and profoundly ascetical subsumed into eternal life.

³⁶ This means, the bliss of Christ.

Griffiths had been somewhat disappointed in Abhishiktanda's seeming disinterest in the Ashram and eventual complete absorption in the Hindu experience of *advaita*. Nevertheless, Jacques Dupuis points out what he considers to be the real value of this man's radical living out in himself "the symbiosis of the two traditions, the Hindu and the Christian, in so real a way that both became part of himself." The experience of what Abishiktananda calls "two forms of a single 'faith,'" Dupuis understands to be a prophetic witness to the kind of existential encounter possible in inter-religious dialogue in the "marriage of East and West" and "in full respect of their differences and without lurking ambiguity."³⁷ It echoes Gautama Buddha's sentiments on "travel": "in order to travel the path, you must become the path."³⁸ Although it can be seen to be interpreted differently in respect of personality and situation, it is the underlying principle for "pilgrimage."

Radical Hospitality

My research includes the grasp of Derrida's concept of "radical hospitality" whereby "the other" is welcomed no matter how, what or when as the goal to strive towards. It is more than a matter of "ethics"— rather a striving "within justice for a better justice" which is a movement beyond set morality containing always the sense of incompleteness.³⁹ It is this kind of a challenge which Griffiths encountered following the Golden String. His journey involves a personal intuition that what is perceived as "other" will be discovered to be not radically so.⁴⁰ Can he be said to be the kind of theologian Barnes is referring to when he speaks of "the task of telling the Good News of God's own act of welcome and hospitality . . . in all its complexity and most unlikely manifestations"?⁴¹

³⁷ Jacques Dupuis, cited by Judson Trapnell in *Abishiktananda's Contemplative Vocation and Contemporary India*. Available from http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/society_essays.htm; (accessed 21 January 2006).

³⁸ Margaret Gee, *Journeys*.

³⁹ Bob Plant, *Wittgenstein and Levinas* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 185,191.

⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that as far back in 1790, in his anonymously published, "In Vindication of the Hindoos," "Hindoo" Stuart, an Englishman employed by the East India Trading Company had written, "Whenever I look around me, in the vast region of Hindoo Mythology, I discover piety in the garb of allegory: and I see Morality, at every turn, blended with every tale, and, as far as I can rely on my own judgement, it appears the most complete and ample system of Moral Allegory that the world has ever produced . . . (the *Vedas* were) . . . written at that remote period in which our savage ancestors of the forest were perhaps unconscious of a God; and were, doubtless, strangers to the glorious doctrine of the immortality of the soul, first revealed in Hindostan." See William Dalrymple, *White Mughals, Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India* (London: Flamingo, 2003), 48.

⁴¹ Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 21.

It is relevant to point out that *The Rule of St Benedict* written one and a half centuries ago includes “this happy state”⁴² of humility and hospitality whereby each stranger “should be received just as . . . Christ himself”⁴³ as traits recommended for practice for our earthly pilgrimage that are perfectly exemplified in the Divine Pilgrim.

Shantivanam exemplified this kind of hospitality. It would be the prototype I think if one were considering founding such a place of contemplative prayer in a country other than India. It is inclusive and yet outward focused, with a number of projects flowing from the life of prayer to benefit the needy. So the spiritual energy which is generated through contemplative prayer benefits many others in practical ways besides what is “hidden in God” on a spiritual dimension. One actually becomes vaguely aware of this as one drives closer to Saccidananda Ashram: there is a certain elevation in morale; the houses are better kept and painted; the people walk with fresh energy. . . .

Such expressions of radical hospitality encountered on this journey joined me in agreement with the artist, Ken Done: “When you travel, your mind can too. When all the world can travel, the world will be a better place.” This in itself could be considered as a point of justice!

Key Questions

Before we set out I had singled out a few other points of inquiry. What was the situation in Shantivanam now that its charismatic guru had been gone these past ten years? How does this relate to Osage Monastic Ashram (known as “Shantivanam of the West”) in Tulsa, USA, shaped by the Shantivanam experience of its foundress, Sr Pascaline Coff, a Benedictine Sister of Perpetual Adoration? How do they relate to Kurisumala Monastery? How different were they from the English and Scottish Benedictine Monasteries which had a key formative role in Griffiths’ life as a monk? Would I have the opportunity to compare the Camaldolese Monastery at Big Sur? What do these places of contemplative prayer have in common? Could they possibly hold a key to the present puzzle of contemporary Christian communities? It was a puzzle Griffiths was trying to solve right up to the time of his death.

⁴²*The Benedictine Handbook*. “The Rule of St Benedict” (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003), 32.

⁴³ *The Benedictine Handbook*, 74.

The Monasteries:

Osage Monastery

There is opportunity here to reflect on a few things learned. In Osage Monastery, in Oklahoma, the most profound connection significant for this study is the central image of the Osage Indian *Sundance Circle*. This symbol, so central to the beautiful worship space and its community life in general was integrative; it made me more clearly aware of the possibilities of Bede Griffiths' vision for communities of people, lay and ordained, for different peoples and cultures.

At Osage Monastery, we found integrated in the architecture, worship space and natural surroundings, motifs and symbols representative of a the religions and spiritualities of the world. It represents a balance of the universal in the particular, reflecting a generous acceptance of and hospitality towards all visitors, a clear demonstration of the spirituality of the founders, the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in relation to Griffiths' example.

Also relevant is the habit common to all the monasteries of corporate silence during the day, including certain meal-times. We found that there is something intimately communitarian in this monastic habit. Others on retreat commented that friendship seems to be deepened through such an experience.

Prinknash Monastery and the Universal

At Prinknash Monastery, Abbot Francis demonstrated a deep appreciation for Griffiths' contribution when, in referring to his "special calling," he called Dom Bede "a bridge," By this he acknowledged Griffiths' classic work, *The Marriage of East and West*, and his later engagements with the new science and the lay church. On the wall of the chapel of the new abbey was a large painting of the Resurrection with Christ framed in the spread feathers of a peacock. It was painted by Fr Gabriel (a much loved member who had died just a year ago and who had also designed the chapel stained-glass windows as well as a set at Pluscarden depicting "The Visitation"). We discovered that the peacock is a symbol with universal significance particularly for immortality. In Hinduism it is the vehicle of one of the deities. In India I had bought a small oil lamp — made for domestic use — and at the top is a brass peacock. I was immediately drawn to this picture in an English monastery which demonstrates how symbols can be discovered to have a universal significance and thereby be a means for inter-religious dialogue.

Pluscarden Monastery and Ancient Chant

Pluscarden Monastery was Griffiths' final residence in Great Britain. Here he was sent as novice master for two years prior to his departure for India. It was here — just at the start of this Benedictine foundation and the great work of restoration with so much energy put into projects such as roofing, restoring windows and planting gardens — that Griffiths wrote *The Golden String*. To come out of the cold from a snowy landscape and kneel in the apse of the medieval stone chapel warmed by the refracted light from large brilliantly-coloured windows and the soft haze of incense is a joy. CDs produced here witness to their devotion to liturgy and continual celebration in the Gregorian Chant. For the few days we were there, this daily liturgical celebration was a feast. It is hardly a “museum piece” as someone later suggested! Many people come, individually and in groups, for retreats or simply to regularly celebrate week-day and Sunday Mass. This Monastery has managed to bring out, shine up and share with great generosity something “good,” though “old” out of the “store-room” of the Christian prayer tradition.

The New Camaldoli Monasteries in California

In California, on account of the hospitality extended to us by the Salesians in the Don Bosco house in San Francisco, we were able to visit two New Camaldoli monasteries, Incarnation in Berkeley, and the other isolated on the mountain at Big Sur. At Incarnation Monastery we met Arthur, a priest-artist well known for his paintings which are an integration of organic and transcendent — to me suggestive of Van Gogh, pointillism and Aboriginal dot paintings. At Big Sur high on the Californian coast where Griffiths had once spent some time in one of the hermitages, in response to my question whether the incorporation of Shantivanam into the congregation had been negative in any way, Dom Robert Hale spread his arms and smiled widely, “Oh, no, Shantivanam has enriched us.”

Conclusion

I had made the pilgrimage, explored for myself the different geographical loci of Griffiths' amazing journey, burrowed under the skin of his life-myth. This had shown me on the one hand the lasting value of the Benedictine tradition and on the other the extent of Griffiths' unique calling. It put into perspective the images that I found surfacing in his life's work, lent them a particular interpretative resonance.

I had also been surprised at the emergence of an image I had not contemplated that came forward sharply into focus and at the same time found greater discernment with respect to others.

Finally, the video I made with ethics approval and which is included with thesis testifies to a reality that is profoundly significant for all the images explored in the thesis. This is the idea of a “dynamic network of interdependent relationships” underlying all details of existence that Griffiths emphasised as source of healing and growth and of life itself.

APPENDIX 2

Ethics Forms

Included here are:

- The Human Research Ethics Committee Approval form signed by our Ethics officer, Kylie Pashley
- Information Letter signed by Supervisor and Student Interviewer
- Approval Form for the Monasteries signed by Supervisor and Student Interviewer
- Individual Consent Form for Participants signed by Supervisor and Student Interviewer

ACU National

Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Rev Dr Gerard Hall Brisbane Campus

Co-Investigators:

Student Researcher: Ms Bet Green Brisbane Campus

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:

Dom Bede Griffiths' Images of God

for the period: 1 February 2006 to 22 March 2006

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: Q200506 11 _____

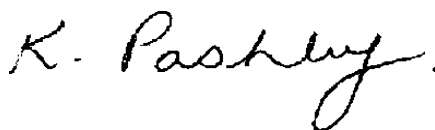
The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999) apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
 - security of records
 - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
 - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as;
 - proposed changes to the protocol
 - unforeseen circumstances or events
 - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than minimum risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimum risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.



Date: 21 November 2005

Signed

(Research Services Officer, McAuley Campus)

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Australian Catholic University Limited
ABN 15 050 192 660
Brisbane Campus (McAuley at Banyo)
1100 Nudgee Road Banyo
Queensland 4101 Australia
PO Box 456 Virginia
Queensland 4014 Australia
Telephone 07 3623 7420
Facsimile 07 3623 7242
www.acu.edu.au 21/11/2005

NAME OF SUPERVISOR:
DR GERARD HALL SM.

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER :
MS BEATRICE (BET) GREEN

NAME OF PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED:
PHD RESEARCH DEGREE

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in some discreet video-taping of the Monastery and grounds in line with the research project I am presently pursuing, *A Christological Interpretation of the Golden String of Bede Griffiths' Spiritual Journey*.

I have the opportunity to do "A walk in Bede's footsteps" to gain a deeper understanding of the central insights which came to him during his journey, following Christ, "The Golden String." Where possible, I am also requesting access to relevant archived material and participation in informal conversation of a non-invasive kind.

I have written one chapter which introduces Alan Griffiths' motive – "The Golden String" and his output is set in the framework of five peak experiences in his life.

1. Alone with nature.
2. Living the simple life with friends and discovering the Word.
3. Community in the Catholic monasteries in England and Scotland
4. Opening an Indian Ashram and becoming a Sannyasi
5. Opening to the feminine and extending the concept of community.

The pilgrimage we are undertaking follows this same journey.

Apart from the unique opportunity it provides to 'get under the skin' so to speak, of Griffiths' insights and creative expression, there is opportunity along the way for academic research. On the one hand this is to be undertaken in a most discreet way through informal conversation. On the other, however, there is the opportunity, particularly in Osage Monastery US, and in Berkeley University for the study of Griffiths' archives.

The video-tape of the journey will be used to support the thesis by demonstrating the physical movement from a Western cenobitic monastic tradition to the combination of cenobitic and eremitical which Griffiths espoused in the Eastern *Sannyasi* tradition in Southern India, reflective of the Western Camaldolese tradition which Griffiths finally entered and which has two monasteries near Berkeley, the Incarnation and Big Sur Monasteries. At

Shantivanam, Tamil Nadu, the main target group for Griffiths' missionary endeavour was lay people and I understand from Griffiths' writings the Osage community outside Oklahoma well exemplifies the unique kind of inclusive, serene atmosphere which was achieved during the 25 years that Bede Griffiths lived on the banks of the sacred Cauvery River.

Around the world, in Australia, Wales, England, Germany and the US, other similar small communities endeavouring to live this particular pattern based on the Benedictine principles have grown up. It is on account of the necessary interdependent process of prayer and activity in such communities that this study of the creative, life-giving potential through dialogue between different religious traditions, specifically in this case, the Hindu tradition has been undertaken.

Its aim is to further establish the vital importance today for Christians and especially our own Catholic Church to conscientiously and assiduously take up the challenge to dialogue with other world religions. Moreover, my research will hopefully provide details of process, new insights and explorative structures that will generate interest for those hoping to go one step further in humanity's journey towards unity with one another and with God.

I am hoping the video can be made in service of this goal

My husband is accompanying me and may assist with videotaping when I may need to be included in the video.

My husband and I are undertaking the journey as a pilgrimage. The accent therefore is on simplicity, quiet and discretion. We understand that there are no risks involved for you.

We expect to spend a few days in/at your Monastery/institution and to abide by whatever protocols are in place. Any research that may require your direct co-operation, such as by way of conversation, or direction to different places would not presume on your time.

Results from the research may be summarised and appear in publications or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not compromise the dignity or privacy of the participants in any way.

The research is entirely motivated for non-profit purposes. If the video-tape were produced, it would be included as part of my PhD thesis which would be available on request.

You are entirely free to refuse consent or to withdraw consent at any time without giving any reason for doing so.

As regards the daily life of the Monastery complete care will be observed in accordance with the "Australian National Privacy Principles".

My contact details are:

Bet Green
 School of Theology
 Australian Catholic University
 ABN 15 050 192 660
 PO Box 456, Virginia QLD 4014
 Phone: (07) 3623 7437 Fax: (07) 3623 7435
 Email: b.green@mcauley.acu.edu.au


At any time you may wish, I am very happy to provide feedback on the project.

This study has the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study or if you have any query that the researcher has not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Ethics Committee care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Unit:

Chair, HREC
C/o
Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Campus
PO Box 456
Virginia QLD 4014
Tel: 07 3623 7294
Fax: 07 3623 7328

If you are satisfied with the above details, could you please sign both copies of the consent form.



Student researcher



Principal Supervisor



Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

Bet Green
School of Theology
Australian Catholic University
ABN 15 050 192 660
PO Box 456, Virginia QLD 4014
Ph: (07) 3623 7437 Fax: (07) 36237262
Email:b.green@mcauley.acu.edu.au

Dear

I am requesting your permission to do some discreet video-taping of the Monastery and grounds in line with the research project I am presently pursuing, *Dom Bede Griffiths' Images of God*, as described in the Information Letter for participants.

As we have booked our flights from January 28th to March 28th, 2006, it is important to expedite the formal ethical clearance.

If you are satisfied with the request, could you be so kind as to complete the short approval form attached and fax it to the address above as soon as possible.

B. a. Green

(student researcher)

Carroll Bell

(Principal Supervisor)

I

Grant permission for Ms Bet (Beatrice) Green to enter the grounds of the monastery and engage in some discreet video-taping of the monastery and grounds with the assistance of her husband, Greg.

I accept that this will be done in accordance with the formal ethical guidelines as specified in the Information Letter for participants.

Signed.....
Date.....



Australian Catholic University Limited
 ABN 15 050 192 660
 Brisbane Campus (McAuley at Banyo)
 1100 Nudgee Road Banyo
 Queensland 4101 Australia
 PO Box 456 Virginia
 Queensland 4014 Australia
 Telephone 07 3623 7420
 Facsimile 07 3623 7242
 www.acu.edu.au
 21/11/2005

TITLE OF PROJECT: *A Christological Interpretation of the Golden String of Bede Griffiths' Spiritual Journey*

NAME OF SUPERVISOR:
 DR GERARD HALL SM

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:
 MS BEATRICE (BET) GREEN

CONSENT FORM

I (*the participant*) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that this process will involve (a) my participation in the video-taping of the monastery and grounds, (b) may involve my joining in discreet conversation on the topic described in the Information Letter. I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without comment or penalty. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not compromise the dignity or privacy of the community/institution.

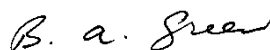
NAME OF PARTICIPANT:
 (block letters)

SIGNATURE DATE/...../.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:



DATE...../...../.....



SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

DATE:/...../.....

APPENDIX 3

DVD: A Walk in Bede Griffiths' Footsteps [Inside back-cover]

Author: Ms Bet Green

Interviewer: Ms Bet Green

Interviewees: Abbot Aldhelm OSB, Abbot Francis OSB, Fr Aelred OSB, Abbot Hugh Gilbert OSB, Abbot Yesudas Thelliel OCSO, Fr Christudas OCSO, Fr George OSB Cam, Fr Amaldas OSB Cam, Fr Augustine OSB Cam, Sr Saranda OSB, Dr Mark Tandon, Ms Janneke Punt, Fr Paul Hunt, Sr Pascaline Coff, Dom Robert Hale OSB Cam.

Approved Ethics Forms

Filed Consent Forms from:

Prinknash:

Dom Francis Baird OSB on behalf of the Prinknash community.

Pluscarden:

Dom Hugh Gilbert OSB on behalf of the Pluscarden community.

Kurisumala:

Dom Yesudas Thelliyil OCSO on behalf of the Kurisumala community.

Shantivanam:

Fr George Nelliyanil OSB Cam on behalf of the Shantivanam community.

Fr Augustine Vichaff OSB Cam

Br John Martin OSB Cam

Fr Amaldas OSB Cam

Sr Sarananda OSB

Ms Janneke Punt

Dr Mark Tandon

Fr Paul Hunt

A Diraviam

Osage:

Sr Mary Benita Luetkemeyer OSB on behalf of the Osage community.

Sr Pascaline Coff OSB

Mr Michael Floyd

New Camaldoli Hermitage, Big Sur:

Dom Robert Hale OSB Cam on behalf of the Big Sur community.

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