

Stefan Reynolds and Father Bede Griffiths

I knew Fr Bede in the last years of his life and I was in my early twenties. It was a privilege to spend time at Shantivanham listening to his wisdom, learning to meditate and enjoying his presence. He taught me many things, most of all the value of human love. He showed me that embodied love is the meaning of the incarnation. All religion points to the 'Word made Flesh'. This is why in the end the human person is more important than religion. Some years ago I wrote this poem of seven verses in eight lines of mixed rhyme. I think it still reflects what I feel even though it is all in the commas!

Fresh and green,
his river flowed past my stream,
and yet we were one,
for all that flows
flows to the sea.

Memories of Fr Bede Griffiths

Like water holiness has no colour or form of itself
And because of that it reflects the sun.
The whole universe is reflected in it, moon and stars,
And we see ourselves as in a mirror.
Holiness bears no description,
Like water it moulds itself to the changing earth,
It cannot be discussed or analysed, it simply is,
And the mind awakes to recognise the real.

Father Bede wrote many books,
His story was famous throughout the world,
Hailed as a prophet, and yet to me
His silence what stays in the memory.
It is of that silence I would like to speak
If it is possible to speak of silence.
To do so we must cast aside
The familiar furniture of the rational mind
And make a space for the great unknown.

For in that place Fr Bede was at home.
In all humanity he found the image of God
That was prior to all belief in God.
And he gave to each an infinite value.
In all religions he found that core of unity,
Each has its unique truth and yet the fullness

Of truth was found in their meeting
And the meeting place was the human heart.

His mind soared higher and higher
To take in a universal view
And yet, as an Eagle keeps its nest
At the centre of its flight, so did Bede keep Christ.
Then there, in the depth of silent prayer,
Taking care not to bring any thought with him,
He entered the heart and deep within
He discovered the eternal feminine.

He found the other half of his soul, the eternal One,
In the place where no image or thought can come,
And his life, like a shadow within a fold,
Was folded back to eternity. God took him home.
But we are not left behind to adore
One who passed on to the further shore,
For that same spirit that was inside him
Is deep in the heart of everyone.

I knew him in his final years, after his stroke,
When, sitting in his hut by the river,
I would listen to the silence of long Indian nights.
He and the river combined to bear all thought away.
For the mind is itself a river
That flows from the source to the open sea.
When it encounters the sea its own current dissolves.
In that hut the sea was sitting next to me.

A prophet, a teacher, a personal friend,
I was with him by his bedside when, close to the end,
He spoke of the heart as a furnace of love
And complained that the Indians just couldn't make tea!
He remained to the end just an Englishman
Who had fallen in love with another land,
But the Spirit of God made Fr Bede
A light on the hilltop so that all might see.