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Christian *Samnyāsis* and the Enduring Influence of Bede Griffiths in California

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Christian *Samnyāsis* and the Enduring Influence of Bede Griffiths in California

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ABSTRACT This article thematizes a spiritual movement of ascetic hermits in California, which is based on the religious practice of Bede Griffiths. These hermits took their religious vows in India as Christian *saṃnyāsis*, in the hands of Father Bede, and then returned to California to ignite a contemplative renewal in the Christian dispirited tradition. Some tried to integrate such Indian tradition in the Benedictine order, while others traced new paths.

KEY WORDS Bede; Griffiths; California; *saṃnyāsa*; Camaldoli; Christianity

Preliminary Remarks— Sources and Definitions

The present paper profited greatly from its main sources, Sr. Michaela Terrio and Br. Francis Ali, hermits at Sky Farm Hermitage, who generously shared with me their memories of Bede Griffiths as well as spiritual insights of their life of renunciation as Christian *saṃnyāsis* in California. Several of the personalities mentioned in this article are personally known to the author.

I offer a definition of the main terms used here: '*saṃnyāsis*' are the renouncers, the acosmic hermits in the tradition of the Gītā; '*saṃnyāsa*' is the ancient Indian consecration to acosmism and also the fourth and last stage (*aśhrama*) in the growth of human life; '*guru*' is a polysemic word in India; its theological meaning depends on the religious tradition. For the

sake of this article, 'guru' is synonymous with 'spiritual father.' 'Dikṣha' in this article means 'initiation through celebration.' 'Hesychasm' is a form of quiet meditation and prayer that disappeared from Western culture but survived because the Orthodox Church embraced and preserved this tradition. I will use the classic, simple, definition of 'contemplation' as 'being present to God.'

The Examination

While the spread of Eastern religious practices in the West is a known phenomenon, the specific assimilation of the ancient Indian tradition of *saṃnyāsa* into Christian monasticism, both institutional and alternative, has received less attention.¹ The article presents a monastic or quasi-monastic movement of ascetic hermits, who live a life of solitude and prayer in California, within and at the borders of the Roman Catholic Church. This movement was inspired by the ideas of Bede Griffiths who like other spiritual seekers went to India to renew Western spirituality through contact with the Hindu Brahmanical tradition, and especially with its fourth *aśrama*, *saṃnyāsa*, meaning renunciation.

This work stands at the intersection of two main areas of research: Bede Griffiths and his legacy and the new monasticism, that is, the new developments in Christian monasticism as the result of the Vatican Council II, the influence of Thomas Merton on American monasticism, and the

1 I thank the editor and two anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments, which helped me improve the manuscript. A preliminary and partial version of this article was delivered as a paper at the Religion in California Symposium-University of California, Berkeley, April 24-5, 2014. I am grateful to the organizers of the conference for the invitation to speak and to the participants for their feedback.

Eastern-Western monastic encounter (See for example: Grayston 2015; Griffiths 2014; Mahieu-De Praetere 2007; Massein, O.S.B., 2012; Wingate 2014). This article is a critical examination of the life and practice of these hermits at the boundary between Christian faith and Hindu spirituality and shows how the return to contemplation through the reception of Hindu spirituality takes new routes in California. The main contribution of this article lies in an attempt to present the Californian *Nachleben* of Bede Griffiths' teaching and example, as well as information about the movement and the personalities participating in it. Since these ascetic communities are not fully known among religious scholars' studies, the essay fills a gap in academic discourse and stands as a starting point for further research.

The California forest hides the life and prayer of several hermits who became Christian *saṃnyāsis* after living in India with Father Bede Griffiths, OSB Cam. Father Bede (or simply Fr. Bede), was born Alan Richard Griffiths and became one of the Roman Catholic pioneers of Hindu-Christian dialogue. An Oxford-educated Christian monk who left the West to find enlightenment in the East, Griffiths instructed the Western visitors of his *aśhram* to take vows in the tradition of *saṃnyāsa*—the Hindu renunciation—and go back to their home in the West. More precisely, Bede used terms like *saṃnyāsa*, *guru*, and *dikṣha*, which originated in the religious tradition of ancient India and were adopted by him and his disciples with a particular meaning.

In between the two world wars, Christian monasteries in the West were overflowing with people, but the rather rigorous communal set-up rarely offered opportunities for hermit life. In this context, Bede—with Abhishiktānanda, Thomas Merton, Jacques Winardy and a few others—can be seen as part of a stream within the Benedictine order that was instrumental in restoring the hermit life to Catholicism. The main aims of this form of monastic renewal were the attempt of moving away from

the devotional, neo-scholastic understanding of monastic charisma, and the re-discovery and emphasis on contemplative Christianity and the mystical path. When considered in the context of Roman Catholicism, these pioneers' goal was to re-awaken the contemplative tradition within the Church. These hermits took different paths: Merton never left his abbey and Winandy relocated to North America. Bede was one of those spiritual seekers who went to India, in line with the path of Abhishiktānanda (Henri le Saux) and Francis Acharya.

These hermits who went to India were to operate like bees, collecting the honey at the deepest sources of Hindu spirituality for their Western brothers and sisters. The overall idea was that the encounter with Indian spirituality could fill the contemplative deficit of the Western Church. Although the problem of a so-called 'contemplative deficit' in the Roman Catholic Church had been perceived and discussed for decades—and identified as one of the main challenges of that time—it had never been a priority in practice. Bede and the other hermits in India offered their remedy in terms of Christian *saṃnyāsa*. These Western *svāmī* recognized that contemplation, in terms of *in excessu mentis stare et videre* (to be in mental ecstasis and see), was dying out or becoming sociologically impossible in the Christian tradition.² Today, the visitors of Bede's *aśhram* share a sense of urgency once expressed by Griffiths, that is, Christianity should return to its mystical sources, or "it has nothing to offer." (Griffiths 1996, 315)

In 1968, Bede Griffiths moved to Shantivanam, an *aśhram* in Tamil Nadu, that had been founded in 1950 by the French Benedictine monks Abhishiktānanda and Jules Monchanin. These monks had developed a religious lifestyle in Indian fashion, using English, Sanskrit, and Tamil in

2 *In excessu mentis stare et videre*. Source: Hemerken a Kempis 1903, 202.

their religious services, constructing the *aśhram* buildings by hand in the style used by the poor of the country. After relocating to Shantivanam with a group of Benedictine monks from Kurisumala *aśhram* in Kerala, Bede transformed the hermitage into a center of prayer and meditation, inculturation and inter-religious dialogue, open to everybody, especially Western visitors. While Abhishiktānanda never left India after arriving in Colombo in 1948, and Monchanin left India only to go back to France in 1946 and then again in 1957, Fr. Bede engaged in extensive travel, paying annual visits to the United States and Europe, giving lectures and leading retreats. Thanks to his travels, books, and a voluminous correspondence, increasingly Bede came to be seen as a Christian guru, attracting the interest of many who could not find God in their traditional churches. He transformed the original *aśhram*, a grove of coconut trees of about 20 acres, a chapel, two or three huts, and a small library, into a world famous retreat with a variety of buildings, guest rooms, and kitchens (cf. Dupuche 2011, 251-253).

Since inception, Shantivanam had been under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Tamil Nadu, Monsignor James Mendonça. In the 1970s, Bede realized that the new bishop, Thomas Fernando, was not as open and supportive as his predecessor and decided to *incorporate* Shantivanam as part of a monastic congregation. In the Roman Catholic Church (also 'Catholic Church' or simply 'Church'), a person and a community belongs to a jurisdiction of a bishop or an order. Bede envisioned for his *aśhram* a future that was protected by the authority and prestige of a recognized monastic institution (cf. Dupuche 2011, 253). In 1981, he and his *aśhram* joined the Camaldolese Congregation of the Order of Saint Benedict (O.S.B. Cam.). The Camaldolese Congregation was established through the efforts of the Italian monk Saint Romuald at the beginning of the eleventh century, and now is the only stream of the Benedictine family that integrates the

eremitical tradition of monastic life with that of the coenobitic life. During the 20th century, the congregation spread to several countries on different continents (Americas, Africa, and Asia).

After aligning with the Camaldolese Congregation, Bede's status as a well-known Christian guru and the aura of deep spirituality radiating from the *aśhram*, allowed the community to maintain its primary focus on meditation, interreligious *lectio* practices, and stricter forms of asceticism. This heterodox orientation helped shape the unique status of Shantivanam in the Camaldolese community by attracting monks to India from the rest of the congregation. Monks moved to Shantivanam and spent short periods of time with Bede, ultimately returning to their communities and continuing their lives of regular monastic observance without any major practical change or other outer manifestation of Bede's influence. A few monks, including Bernardino Cozzarini, Thomas Matus, and Francis Ali were, however, affected to the extent that they decided to take *saṃnyāsa dikṣha* (embracing a life of renunciation) under Bede, although maintaining their commitment to the Camaldolese congregation.³ They embraced Hindu monasticism without ever ceasing to be Christian monks. These monks also initiated articulating—at least at the theoretical level—the contours of a Camaldolese form of *saṃnyāsa*, which would have been a paradox, as by definition *saṃnyāsa* is not tied to any particular tradition (cf. Matus

3 In the Roman Catholic Church, the religious vow, in a form of a *public* vow or 'recognized private vows,' is binding in Church law. By making a religious vow one becomes a member of a unique state of life which is neither clerical nor lay, the consecrated state. It is a matter of opinion if *saṃnyāsa dikṣha* is binding in Church law. A distinction should be made between those who took *saṃnyāsa dikṣha* after their monastic vows—they added *saṃnyāsa dikṣha* to their regular public vows, and those who took *saṃnyāsa dikṣha* only. One of the four vows taken for *saṃnyāsa dikṣha* is: "I vow to go forth beyond all religion, every human institution, every scripture and creed, until I come to that Reality which all these signify."

2009).⁴ Bernadino Cozzarini spent a year with Fr. Bede at Shantivanam and was the first Camaldolese to have made his *saṃnyāsa dikṣha*. Later, he became the Prior General of the Camaldolese Congregation, a post he held until recently. After a life of study and meditation across three continents, Thomas Matus is currently teaching monastic spirituality and interreligious dialogue at Santa Clara University, while residing at New Camaldoli, a Camaldolese hermitage in Big Sur (Lucia Bay). Francis Ali eventually left the fold of regular monastic practice and religious life to initiate a path that would lead him to start a new eremitic community outside the Benedictine order. Not surprisingly, there was a lack of consensus among Camaldolese monks at Shantivanam on *saṃnyāsa* and other developments in liturgy, spirituality, and worship, with some agreement that regular observance of Benedictine monasticism could be renewed and reinvigorated from within by incorporating insights from Fr. Bede's life and teaching. Others preferred framing Bede as an innovator crossing traditional boundaries, and pursued new forms of Christian monasticism which emerged from Bede's influence and inspiration.

Bede himself seems to have embraced both options: the integration of the *saṃnyāsa* into the Camaldolese tradition, or the generation of an alternative contemplative tradition. In the last years of his life, he travelled to Big Sur, helping monks to return to their communities after living at Shantivanam as Christian *saṃnyāsi*, and meeting a new generation of monks. He also visited Camaldoli, the mother house of the congregation,

4 All the monks who joined Shantivanam during those years were first initiated into the training period through a *sadhaka dikṣha*. Those who took solemn vows then went through the *saṃnyāsa dikṣha* as well. In addition, a handful of Benedictine monks and nuns received *saṃnyāsa dikṣha* from Fr. Bede. Fr. Bede never took *saṃnyāsa dikṣha*. Up until his later years, Fr. Bede recorded the names and personal histories of many of those who followed in the Christian *saṃnyāsi* lineage. Source: Register of persons receiving Saṃnyāsa Dikṣha from Bede Griffiths, 1968-92 [box: folder 22:8], Bede Griffiths Archives at the GTU, Berkeley.

made up of a hermitage and monastery high in the mountains of central Italy, to cement his legacy inside the community. One of the last Camaldolese monks to be impacted by Fr. Bede was Cyprian Consiglio, the current prior of the New Camaldoli Hermitage, who met Bede in 1992. At that time, Fr. Bede was advising American monks such as Wayne Teasdale, who was his disciple and took *saṃnyāsa dikṣha* at Shantivanam, to return to America and live as a 'monk in the world.' Teasdale ended up living a solitary life on Chicago's South Side, on the campus of the Chicago Theological Union, where he served as an adjunct lecturer until the end of his life.⁵ Fr. Bede envisioned a reticule of unrelated, founded, or reformed small communities, with a nucleus of three to four people, either religious or laity, dedicated to a life of contemplation and *agape*. Unlike the monks and nuns in the Benedictine Order, whose lives are regulated by a monastery or an abbey and its rules, Bede assumed that communities exist primarily for inspirational purposes and to become centers of pilgrimage for the lay and religious population. He hoped to celebrate the birth of a 'Shantivanam of the West,' a seed of contemplation rooted in the American soil, an *aśhram* eventually located in California, where many of the practices of Shantivanam continue in a Western context. He visited a few places, including Sky Farm, a hermitage founded by Benedictine hermit, Fr. Dunstan Morrissey in 1975 in the isolated Sonoma Hills. In 1991, Fr. Bede spent two weeks there, dedicating the newly built chapel but failing to reach an agreement with Morrissey. He also suggested that Francis Ali and a cloistered Poor Clare nun, Michaela Terrio, explore the possibility of founding a contemplative community in the West, an organized monastic-

5 The Bede Griffiths Collection, Bede Griffiths at New Camaldoli, Big Sur, CA. ca. 1991 [box: folder 20:3-4] and Bede Griffiths at Camaldoli, Italy. 1992 [box: folder 20:5], Bede Griffiths Trust archive, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA. As for Wayne Teasdale, see Teasdale 2002 and *The Mystic Heart*, (Teasdale 1999).

religious life coming directly from their experience of *saṃnyāsa*, and as a result of meeting Fr. Bede.

While California seemed to be the perfect location, ultimately the ‘Shantivanam of the West’ was established in Oklahoma. Bede, who suffered a stroke in January 1990 and again in December 1992, died May 13, 1993, clearly feeling close and intimate to Jesus (cf. Freeman OSB 2010, 7).⁶ A few months earlier, he had celebrated the Eucharist at the Osage Monastery Forest of Peace in Oklahoma, a foundation of five Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, especially Pascaline Coff, OSB, who had spent a year at Shantivanam under the guidance of Fr. Bede and had published a renowned biography.⁷ Fr. Bede affectionately referred to Osage as the “Shantivanam of the West” and went to visit both before and after the construction of the main house and individual cabins.

The tradition of Christian *svāmī* rests both in New Camaldoli and Sky Farm. Inspired by Bede’s pioneering work on interreligious dialogue, the Camaldolese community in Big Sur created the Camaldolese Institute for East-West Dialogue to promote deeper understanding between the contemplative traditions of East and West. Accordingly, the Camaldolese monks there advocate a form of interior interreligious dialogue, an inner dialogue, or a spiritual-contemplative approach to dialogue, which has been clarified in recent interreligious monastic meetings in Big Sur, including a conference in celebration of the centenary of Fr. Bede’s birth (see Barnhart and Wong 2001). Indeed, although the archives of the Bede Griffiths Trust are located at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, the Bede Griffiths Trust was established in Big Sur.

6 Quote: “It struck and moved me deeply when I was with Fr Bede for a week shortly before he died to see how close and intimate he felt to Jesus.”

7 Pascaline Coff O.S.B., s.d. *Bede Griffiths: Man, Monk, Mystic*, The Bede Griffiths Trust, at <http://www.bede-griffiths.com/bede-griffiths> [accessed July 30, 2014].

The *saṃnyāsa* tradition resembles the Camaldolese focus on contemplation. In a recent work called *Prayer in the Cave of the Heart*, the New Camaldoli Hermitage's prior, Cyprian Consiglio, OSB Cam, offers a reflection on prayer that is based on Bede Griffiths' universal call to contemplation. The universal call is based on the notion that the contemplative life comes from the direct experience of God within, and a contemplative's vocation ultimately is to help convey to people an experience of interiority, an experience of the inward Presence.⁸ What lies at the core of Consiglio's book is the notion that for this to happen, Christians should temporarily put aside much of their intellectual expressions of faith (names and forms), so that the inner experience can fully reveal itself. As might be expected, the recognition of an inner experience that goes beyond concepts requires a distinction between the more superficial level of formulations and the deeper level of the heart. Bede addressed this point in 1956 (See Griffiths, O.S.B. 1956). Another Camaldolese monk, Bruno Barnhardt—whose style is also reminiscent of Bede Griffiths—is in search of a return to simplicity, a return to the mystical Presence of the Christ that was evident in the first few centuries of Christian history, but which has been lost, to a large extent, in the intervening time (cf. Barnhardt 1998 and Barnhart 2007). Both Consiglio and Barnhardt (who look for a replacement of a static, scholastic, institutional system of dogmas and doctrines with a more dynamic, personal experience of the Spirit) ultimately use the distinction between the intellectual and the spiritual to propose the superiority of the latter over the former, the primacy of experience over

8 Cyprian Consiglio, OSB Cam, is a monk of the New Camaldoli Hermitage in Big Sur, California, where he currently serves as prior of the community. A student of the world's spiritual traditions, Consiglio is an accomplished internationally known performer, recording artist, and composer; he has numerous collections of original sacred, world, and liturgical music to his credit. He is the author of *Prayer in the Cave of the Heart: The Universal Call to Contemplation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010).

theological formulations. The assumption is that personal experience is more authentic, significant, and profound than notions created by the intellect, which assumes an inevitable dualism between the thinker and the thought.

New Camaldoli, a hermitage founded in 1958 in the Central Coast of California, is the Camaldolese eremitical answer to Thomas Merton's contemporary call to contemplation. For Merton, the monastic life is not an escape. He notes:

[A]s long as I imagine that the world is something to be 'escaped' in the monastery—that wearing that quaint costume and following a quaint observance takes me 'out of the world,' I am dedicating my life to an illusion. (Merton 2013, 333)

The monastic life is not an escape but a choice which grew from the depths of modernity. The monastic vocation is traditional and counter-cultural at the same time. "The monk," he says, "is someone who takes up a critical attitude toward the contemporary world and its structures." (Merton 1975, 329) He does not reject the world—he criticizes it from within. In their effort to return to the spiritual and theological source of Christian monasticism, the Western *svāmī* also renegotiate the relationship between monasticism and modernity. The aim of the 'Shantivanam of the West,' however, is not the critique of modernity, but the restoration of contemplation as an indispensable component of modern life. It becomes clear that even in a world no longer organized by religion, in a society in which engagement with the worldly is an absolute priority, there is increasing space for forms of inner- or other-worldly contemplation.

A purer form of Indian *saṃnyāsa* is experienced in Sky Farm. Sister Michaela and Br. Francis are hermits at Sky Farm in Sonoma, members of

the informal network of people who have been touched and inspired by Bede's life and teaching. In 1992, Sr. Michaela, who had been cloistered for 17 years, came under the influence of Fr. Bede and Abhishiktaānanda. Upon leaving the Poor Clares she proceeded to spend an extended period at Shantivanam, at the end of which she received *saṃnyāsa dikṣha* from Fr. Bede, who advised her to return to the West to live out her vocation. Michaela spent the next several years living a semi-eremitical life, while running a retreat center in Santa Cruz and then serving on the staff of the San Damiano Franciscan retreat center in Danville. Since 2003 she has lived in the hermitage at Sky Farm. Br. Francis lived 8 years as a Camaldolese hermit-monk at New Camaldoli Hermitage. Toward the end of that time he was allowed to spend six months at Shantivanam with Fr. Bede, and the day before leaving he took his vows of renunciation as a Christian *saṃnyāsi* under Fr. Bede in the River Kavery. Francis then returned to New Camaldoli but ultimately decided not to remain, and he returned to Shantivanam to spend more time. He considered relocating permanently to India but Fr. Bede urged him to remain in the West and live out his vocation as a Christian *saṃnyāsi*. He then lived for 13 years in a forest hermitage in the hills of Corralitos, California, and now lives in the hermitage at Sky Farm. Fr. Bede encouraged Sister Michaela and Br. Francis and hoped that an eremitical foundation of Christian *saṃnyāsi* would be established in California. They kept this vision alive and it finally came to pass in the summer of 2003 when they moved to Sky Farm Hermitage, where Fr. Bede had spent two weeks in 1991 while exploring the possibility of a contemplative community in the West.⁹

9 When Fr. Dunstan went into retirement, he handed over the trusteeship of Sky Farm (a non-profit organization) to Br. David Steindl-Rast, Br. Francis, and Sr. Michaela. Br. David, who is a monastic pioneer in the East-West dialogue, has contributed to a wide range of periodicals and books, including *Belonging to the Universe* (winner of the 1992 American Book Award), a dialogue on a new paradigm

Today Sky Farm is a hermitage open to people of all faiths, and is increasingly visited by Christian religious and lay people; executives and entrepreneurs of Silicon Valley; monks who have chosen never to enter organized religious life and yet still consider themselves to be ‘monks in the world’; disciples and initiates of Fr. Bede, and solitaries in search of silence. When not at Sky Farm, some of these visitors reside in urban apartments or single family houses in the rural countryside, living an original form of religious vocation based on Wayne Teasdale’s example. As for Sr. Michaela and Br. Francis, they consider the hesychast tradition of the prayer of the heart the original source of their own journey, which ultimately led them to the ideals of *saṃnyāsa*. Accordingly, they describe their life as an eremitical life in the tradition of the hesychasm and the *saṃnyāsa* ideal of renunciation and vulnerability, a life devoted to God alone, a life of joy.

While New Camaldoli and Sky Farm focus on the renewal of the Christian monastic life through *saṃnyāsa*—I can be a better Christian monk if I am a better *saṃnyāsi* (male) or *saṃnyāsini* (female) according to the ancient Indian tradition of radical ascetism—other communities and individuals contribute to the diffusion of this contemplative tradition to ordinary people in California and beyond. Sangha Shantivanam was formed in Santa Cruz in 2004 under the guidance of Cyprian Consiglio, OSB Cam. After his initial years at New Camaldoli, he spent ten years living in a hermitage near Santa Cruz; he has lived back with the community in Big Sur since 2012. Members of Sanga Shantivanam are a group of varied ages, backgrounds and religious and lay status, and some have been to Shantivanam in India. Chuck Barroo is bi-coastal, living in New York City and spending long periods of time in California. Chuck has been in correspondence with Fr. Bede since

for thinking about science and theology—a topic that was central in Bede’s thinking—with Thomas Matus and physicist and fellow Austrian, Fritjof Capra. Fritjof Capra, David Steindl-Rast and Thomas Matus. 1991. *Belonging to the Universe*. San Francisco: Harper.

1969 and has been with him at Shantivanam numerous times. He spends part of each year in India and lived as a 'monk in the world' since. He is a member of the New Monk Project, a network of individuals, married and singles, who attempt to live the life of a 'monk in the world.' The New Monk Project was founded by Sunder Wells, a Catholic convert who some forty years ago underwent a spiritual transformation that she felt to be a call to the monastic life. However, as the wife of an Air Force officer and mother of two young children, such a call made no sense. She initiated the New Monk Project with the spiritual blessings of Bede, who was instrumental in fostering the project; he witnessed the taking of vows for the *saṃnyāsa dikṣha* by several during his lifetime. Bede served as one of the Elders of the New Monk Project until his death in 1993. The New Monk Project celebrates the monk within, an understanding of monasticism as an archetype of human spirituality rather than an institutional form of spiritual life of distinct religious traditions (see Panikkar 1982). For monastic legacies in danger of extinction, for a world that has never needed them more desperately, the archetype of the monk within is for anyone who seeks the mystical cloister beyond any one traditional (ecclesiastical) form.

Finally, a generation of young leaders is working on the project to inject contemplation into social life, linking contemplation and activism. As a close friend and mentee of the late Brother Wayne Teasdale, Los Angeles-based Rory McEntee is a contemplative in the world working at an intersection of spirituality and social justice. He is currently focused on the development of a new monastic theology. With Adam Bucko, an activist and spiritual director of New York City's homeless youth who has also spent time in India, Rory has recently written the "Manifesto on New Monasticism" (McEntee and Bucko 2015). Rory and Adam are young leaders of the new monastic movement that attempts to introduce a vision for contemplation as a social force to right the wrong in the 21st century. The underlying assumption is

that spirituality can ignite and spread the wild fire of change; spirituality is the most radical and effective form of social transformation precisely because it changes minds and hearts. While drawing from the long traditions of Eastern and Western spirituality, the authors talk specifically to the new generations of spiritual seekers with a strong sense of social justice, aiming to

cut across the boundaries of religious traditions, of contemplation and action, and endeavor to create intergenerational alliances between those immersed in the depths of our traditional religious frameworks and those who are being called to contemplative and prophetic life outside of those frameworks. (McEntee and Bucko 2015, 11)

While drawing on the work of Fr. Bede Griffiths, Thomas Merton, and Wayne Teasdale, among others, the book also incorporates an afterword of Fr. Thomas Keating, who speaks to young people about creating a more sacred and just world. In their book, Rory and Adam integrate Bede and Merton to articulate a transmission of the contemplative wisdom of modern *saṃnyāsis* reimagined for a profoundly unjust world.

Conclusion

This article is a study of some ascetic hermits as a legacy of Bede Griffiths, the renowned Christian pioneer of Hindu-Christian dialogue, that focuses exclusively on the Californian religious landscape. In this work, the study of Bede's disciples is accurately located between a broad theological area of interest, new monasticism. Despite Fr. Bede's respectful and carefully-framed approach to the religious traditions of India, the perspective of

his disciples has remained mostly Christian-influenced; in this regard, the experiences of Benedictine monks and self-declared Christian hermits who live in the West mirror those of the *sādhus* who live in the East. However, these Christian hermits recast the experience in terms of a spirituality with an ecclesial horizon. Accordingly, the life of these Christian hermits can be seen in terms of a renewal of Christian monastic tradition while championing a contemplative shift within the Church. These Christian *saṃnyāsis* envision a spiritual renewal, a return to the mystical sources of Christianity through the engagement of Indian spirituality. They believe that Christian tradition should recover its mystical source and live it, as the experience of divine is mostly absent from ordinary life today. They inculturate Indian spiritual tradition for the sake of an essential Christian re-enchantment.

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