THE BEDE GRIFFITHS SANGHA NEWSLETTER

The Bede Griffiths Sangha

March 2003

Volume 6 Issue 1

10 Years on

May 13th is the tenth anniversary of Father Bede's death.

The significance of the life and vision of a prophet and sage such as Father Bede is as great now as it was 10 years ago.

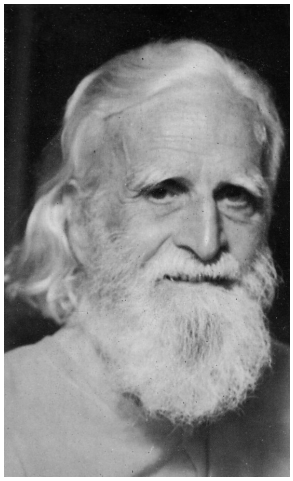
The Sangha is marking the occasion with its special celebration at Gaunt's House in Dorset.

There are still places left so please do book your place now if you haven't done so.

Speakers including **Shirley du Boulay** who wrote the biography of Father Bede, **Rupert Sheldrake** the revolutionary scientist who was deeply influenced by Father Bede and who wrote his first book at Shantivanam, and **Brother Martin** will be there as part of his UK and Ireland tour. Unfortunately Judson Trapnell from America can't come as one of the main speakers because of ill health. We think of him and put him in the light.

A special session will be devoted to Sangha members who wish to share their experience of Father Bede, either through meeting him or through reading his books. Please do let us know if you would like to share your thoughts with the Sangha at Gaunt's House.

For the newsletter that comes out in July we would welcome contributions, photos, reminiscences, recollections and thoughts on how Father Bede, through his life and writings, have influenced Sangha members. Please do contribute!!



This edition also carries news of new books, including Brother Martin's *You Are the Light*, which are coming out in time for the celebrations, and of course Brother Martin's tour in Europe this year.

Namaste

Adrian

The Bede Griffiths Sangha is committed to the search for truth at the heart of all religions

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Father Bede on non-violence

The words of the wise, the words of the sages and the prophets, always have a freshness and relevance, long after they have been spoken or written. So it is with Father Bede.

In this edition Father Bede's reflection on the Christian tradition of non-violence, published in this edition of our Newsletter, is as important today as it was when he wrote it forty-six years ago.

Then the threat was Communism; today it is the threat to international order posed by what we call 'terrorism'. Then, the response to Communism was the mutual deterrence of the hydrogen bomb; today the response to terrorism is the abandonment of the principles of 'just' war and the adoption of what we now call 'pre-emptive' war.

But history shows that, in the event, Communism was not defeated by war but by its own internal contradictions and the courage of women and men who challenged the powers

(Continued on page 2)

Father Bede on the internet

The internet is certainly one of the wonders of the modern world. Look up Bede Griffiths on the Google search engine and you instantly come up with almost four thousand sites that have some sort of a reference to Father Bede.

The Bede Griffiths Trust has *www.bedegriffiths.com* a comprehensive site with articles, news of events, items from The Golden String, the newsletter of the Bede Griffiths Trust, and, of course, copies of our own Bede Griffiths Sangha Newsletter.

www.shantivanam.org is the new website being developed by the ashram. It is currently being renewed and contains details of the ashram and its activities.

Http://uk.msnusers.com/sahajanandaashram is what is called a 'chat room'. It has been developed by Sangha member Bob Kite who lives in Ramsgate and contains photos and articles by Brother Martin and it provides the facility for users to 'chat' online about Brother Martin's teachings. The site contains a lot interesting discussions.

Finally, there is the option of having this newsletter sent to you as an email attachment. A number of members have asked for this option and have sent their email addresses with their subscription forms. Jane Saunderson will be collating all these but has a small problem because she can't read everyone's hand writing.

Surfing the net to find the teachings of Father Bede can be a rewarding experience—why not try it?

The Good Samaritan of Caerphilly

Caroline's carving of the Good Samaritan at St Helen's Church, Caerphilly

Caroline Mackenzie has been a Sangha member since our first retreat together in Wales all those years ago. She spent many years in India, including time with Jhyoti Sahi, and India is the inspiration for much of her art.

Certainly India is the inspiration for her re-ordering of St Helen's Church in Caerphilly, where her nativity has Joseph cradling the infant Jesus and a great Nadi bull fills the whole space and envelopes father, mother and infant in an embrace of love.

Caroline said, 'This is the final version...in all others Joseph is either admiring the baby or supporting Mary. I want Joseph to be celebrated along with the notion that nurturing can be both male and female. ,Elsewhere in the church, the same Nadi bull embraces the good Samaritan, another symbol of masculine nurturing.

Caroline is well known to Sangha members for her devotion to bhajans as a spiritual practice, a practice that she planted and is now rooted in the life of the Sangha. She is also the designer of the Sangha logo on the front page of the Newsletter.

Father Bede on non-violence

A Happy Monk

(Continued from page 1)

that dominated their lives.

Father Bede tells us that non-violence is the radical 'way' of the gospel that inspired the early Church. He tells us how the 'way' of non-violence eventually defeated the Roman Empire, and, centuries later, it was the same 'way' that Mahatma Gandhi found in the Indian tradition and which played a great role in the ending of the British Empire.

These are very troubled times and we have to look to the inspiration of our sages and prophets, of all the religious and non-religious spiritual traditions, if we are to discern clearly the way ahead for our civilization. So we can give thanks for the wisdom of Father Bede and all the other men and women, including Thich Nhat Hanh who also writes in this edition, who fearlessly stand up to the domination of the power structures of our world and who cut through the conventional wisdom, to point out with clarity and compassion the way of truth.

A Big Thank You

A Big Thank-You to all of you who sent in your 2003 subscriptions and donations so promptly. I think our postman has got used to our letter numbers increasing so much in January and February! For any of you who haven't sent your subscription off yet, please do, it will be gratefully received. If you have lost the form or have any enquiries about subscriptions please call Jane on 01285-651381.

With love and many thanks Jane Saunderson.

And a Big Thank you to our East Kent Sangha seen here folding and collating and mailing your newsletters in the kitchen at Beech Tree Cottage. Left to right, David, Marcelle, Mellie, Angela and Avril.

A master and his student were discussing meditation.

The master that the right way forward was to cease needing, desiring and wanting. He told his student to go and practice.

They went their own ways and met up again a few weeks later. "How are you getting on with your meditation?" enquired the master.

"Well, I am having some difficulty", said the student.

""How can I help?" asked the master.

The student replied,

"I need to know...how to stop needing.

I desire to know...how to stop desiring.

I want to know...how to stop wanting.

The master just smiled.

India Body and Soul
A Study Tour and Pilgrimage

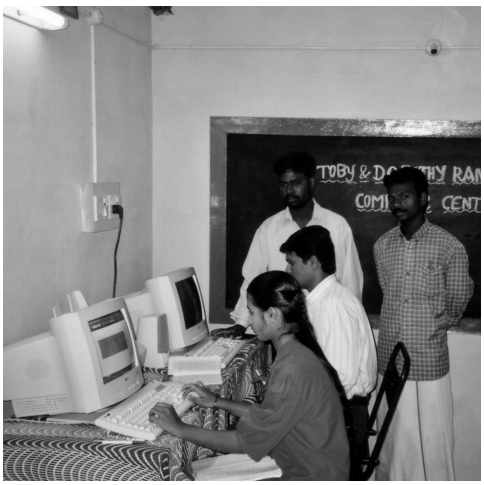
Sangha members Bernard and Janine Kilroy are organising a study tour and pilgrimage to India in association with Christians Aware.

The trip will visit the holy places of Southern India, including a retreat at Shantivanam, and social work projects in a number of villages. The practical arrangements are in the hands of Soul of India Tours who organised the successful Sangha pilgrimage two years ago.

The Tour will be taking place between 4th and 20th February 2003 and will cost £1495 a person in twin-bedded accommodation.

The trip will also take in a visit to Kovalam Beach, and to the famous shore temples at Mahaballipuram. Anyone wanting to take part in this trip should contact Bernard and Janine on

01252 843133
bernardkilroy@uk2.net



Village computer project near Shantivanam

A Sobering Thought

Sandra Roberts

"If you woke up this morning with more health than illness you are more blessed that the million who will not survive this week."

If we could shrink the earth's population to a village of precisely one hundred people, with all the existing human ratios remaining the same, it would look something like the following.

There would be fifty-seven Asians, twenty-one Europeans, fourteen from the Western Hemisphere, both north and south, eight Africans. Fifty-two would be females, forty-eight would be male, seventy would be non-white, thirty would be white, seventy would be non-Christian, and thirty would be Christian. Ninety-five would be heterosexual and five would be homosexual. Six people would possess 59% of the entire world's wealth and all six would be from the United States. Eight would live in sub-standard housing, seventy would be unable to read, fifty would suffer from malnutrition one would be near death, one would be near birth. One (yes, only one) would have a college education; one would own a computer.

When one considers our world from such a compressed perspective, the need for acceptance, understanding and education becomes glaringly apparent. The following is also something to ponder.

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness you are more blessed that the million who will not survive this week. If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of five hundred million people in the world.

If you can attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture or death you are more blessed than three billion people in the world. If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep you are richer than 75% if this world. If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy. If your parents are still alive and still married, you are very rare, even in the United States and Canada.

If you can read this message you just received a double blessing in that someone was thinking of you, and furthermore, you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world that cannot read at all. Someone once said: What goes around comes around. Work like you don't need the money. Love like you've never been hurt. Dance like nobody's watching. Sing like nobody's listening. Live like it's heaven on Earth.

Sandra K Roberts

Sisters of St John of God

Brother Martin will be launching his new book during his UK and Ireland tour this year.

He will also be visiting Italy, Germany, Belgium and France.

Brother Martin's new book *You Are the Light* is being published by O Books in June of this year. The book delivers a profound and inspiring vision for the renewal of Christianity. Martin shows that the Christian tradition has yet to discover the good news of Jesus Christ. The core of his message is that human beings are greater than religion, a message that reveals that God is everywhere and that human beings are living and moving in God just as fish live and move in the Ocean. Although they experience themselves as separate, they are ultimately one.

Martin's book brings together many of his previous writings published as small booklets in India.

This is one of a growing number of publications in the West. Last year a compilation of some of Martin's work was published in Italian and we hear that there are plans to translate some into French.

Medio Media, the publishing arm of the World Community for Christian Meditation will also be publishing new editions in the UK of Father Bede's *Golden String, The Marriage of East and West* and *Return to the Centre*. This will please many Sangha members as these books have been unavailable for some years.

You Are the Light ISBN 1 903816 30 0. 288 pp. Published by O Books, Price £9.99

Brother Martin

The Perennial Philosophy
Joan Campbell Grant

Some years ago I began to keep a commonplace book, a misnomer, since the things one puts into such a book are not commonplace at all. They are generally nuggets of wisdom, or insights, or poems, or prayers, or things which simply impress the book's owner by their truthfulness.

One of the earliest entries in my book was a series of quotations from *A New Vision of Reality* by Bede Griffiths, in which he wrote so wonderfully about the perennial philosophy, or universal wisdom, which prevailed in the world until about 1500 AD. I first came across this phrase in Aldous Huxley's 1947 introduction to Christopher Isherwood's translation of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, but I think that Father Bede' describes it very well.

In *A New Vision of Reality* Father Bede wrote about the coming together of modern physics, Eastern mysticism and Christian faith today. He explained how the perennial philosophy was 'found in China in the development of Taoism and Confucianism…in India in the development of Vedanta; in the rest of Asia in Mahayana Buddhism; in Islam both the philosophical development of Islam and Sufism; and finally in Europe in the whole development of medieval Christianity.'

Father Bede wrote: 'It was based on the belief in a material world which was studied scientifically with considerable accuracy, although of course modern science has gone far beyond its limited achievements. What was distinctive about the universal wisdom was its understanding that the material world was pervaded by, and would find its explanation in, a transcendent reality…This philosophy began to be gradually undermined in the Europe of the sixteenth century. Widespread developments took place at that point and the new materialist philosophy began to emerge, coming to a head in the nineteenth century.' Amazingly, in our lifetime, it seems that modern science is at last beginning to discover and acknowledge that 'transcendent reality'. Not only that, but there seems to be a fresh awareness of the spiritual dimension among people everywhere.

When Tibetan Buddhist monks fled from the Chinese invaders into exile they brought their beliefs with them to the West, and shared their knowledge with us in the person of the Dalai Lama. Meditation came here recently via the Hindu tradition of Advaita or non-duality, and has become enormously popular worldwide, whether simply as a relaxing therapy or as a way of reaching the spirit within each of us.

John Main revived the practice of meditation in Christianity and now the Church of England has many meditation groups. Our local one includes Roman Catholics and members of the Salvation Army as well as middle-of-the-road Christians from our own congregation.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is a deep thinker who, for example, two years ago led a seminar in Australia on the theme of the wisdom of the Desert Fathers. Retreats, whether Christian, Buddhist or simply quiet places where one can 'recharge the batteries' are attracting people who may have no formal religious allegiances. This regeneration of the spirit also shows itself in ecological groups, in magazines such as Satish Kumar's *Resurgence*, in the increasing popularity of yoga. Father Bede was among the first to bridge the East-West gap in modern times, by his published writings and by his work in India. There he lived in a community which transcended all boundaries to grow together towards a unity in truth, which is the goal of all genuine religions.

When *The Marriage of East and West* was first published I obtained a copy and it was lying on a table in our London flat when a friend arrived from America. He was a professor of psychology. Instead of spending the day resting to recover from jetlag, he picked up this book and devoured it. He was astonished by it – Father Bede's approach was completely new to him, and he has told me it changed his own attitude to religion, which had become 'rather stale'. There is much joy in all this too, as there always was with Father Bede. I only heard him speak once, and was struck by his terrific sense of humour and his warm smile. It was so refreshingly down-to-earth.

my working life I was a book publisher but have been retired for over ten years. However, I still keep in touch with publishing trends and over these past few years I have noticed that the biggest growth area has been in what are commonly known as mind-body-spirit books. Not just the feel-good ego-trip or the how-to-stay-healthy-for-ever sort of title, but serious reading from Julian of Norwich to books on the old Celtic spirituality.

Among many ordinary people there is an impatience with organised religion when it just focuses on organisation or dogma. The true religious experience is what we seek, not the dead hand of theological analysis. Even less do we want to be involved in negative sectarian strife. Unity is what we seek, more and more of us, unity through universal love and respect for others' beliefs. As Jesus said: 'In my Father's house are many mansions'.

Of course if one only reads the newspapers or watches television there would be precious little evidence of the emergence of the Holy Spirit, as one might call it. But look around you. Talk to real people. It is quietly happening, it is unstoppable and it will carry the human race through whatever is to come in these difficult and dangerous times. The perennial philosophy, the perennial truth, has always survived everything.

Joan is a Sangha member from Great Malvern, Worcestershire.

Out of this World—further reflections on non-duality

Winifred Dearden

In June 1990 a Sangha member who lives in Hove, Sussex, had an experience of non-duality.

In this moving contribution she recounts that experience and once again shares with us what Father Bede wrote to her.

Winifred writes:

I have always hesitated to share my experience of non-duality with anyone except Father Bede, thinking it might appear too personal and private. But after reading the article by Steve Woodward in the December Newsletter I will try and describe it as best I can, and also pass on some extracts of the letter of explanation Father Bede wrote to me after I had asked him whether it was a genuine spiritual experience.

…I was not sitting in a beautiful meadow surrounded by flowers and the loveliness of Nature, but reclining in a warm bath looking at the curtains which hung in front of the window directly before my eyes.

Suddenly it all disappeared and everything was bathed in a glorious, bright golden light. What I 'felt' is more difficult to describe. Perfect and Absolute LOVE engulfed 'me', only there was no 'me'…I felt at one with everything but there was nothing there: Bliss engulfed consciousness: all was ONE and 'I' had been swallowed up in the ONENESS. Then the curtains re-appeared before my <u>open</u> eyes, the world and 'I' returned but I had known, for a timeless moment the meaning of SAT CHIT ANANDA.

As you can well imagine, this was the most wonderful experience of my entire life, but as Fr Bede points out it will probably never happen again. What has always struck me through the years is the tragedy of knowing that this glorious state exists within but the world is too strong.

"As you can imagine this was the most wonderful experience of my whole life"

Father Bede wrote:

…Your experience at Torquay was very revealing. It seems to have been a genuine experience of Transcendent Reality, the reality beyond the senses and the mind, in which the ego dies and you experienced total bliss. But there are two things to remember about this experience.

The first is that it is very rarely repeated, so few people get established in this state; normally it is a 'peak' experience, an insight into reality which is given us to encourage on the way, and has a permanent affect on our lives, but as I say is not repeated unless we are living a very privileged life. The second thing is that there are different interpretations of this experience. The strict Advaita is that the ego simply disappears and it is realised that the ego and its whole world of experience was simply an illusion and only the eternal Self remains. But my interpretation which is that of Christian experience is that the empirical ego with its world of images and concepts disappears, but there is a transcendent Self in which all our experiences of our past life are taken up into a higher mode of consciousness and we know ourselves no longer as isolated human beings but as 'persons in communion', each enjoying its own unique individuality but all alike participating in the one eternal Being, which is pure consciousness and bliss.

Whether one believes in reincarnation or not, it would still be true that one takes one's whole experience of life in this world into eternal life, which does not annul but completes and fulfils one's whole being.

More reflections on non-duality

Iain Frith

I was very interested in Steve Woodward's 'A Reflection on non-duality' in the last newsletter. He has found Buddhist teaching helpful in searching for the truth. My experience of Christianity as a child and a teenager was not good and I decided I was better off without it! After many years meditation was recommended to me as a way of dealing with 'stress', and my second wife and I gradually got more and more involved in Buddhism. That was 15 years ago and it has been enjoyable and fun too, because that is how our local group is!

We heard something of your Sangha and Bede Griffiths through open-minded Christian friends near Canterbury who meditate regularly.

Having gone outside the Christian community and found a helpful alternative, we have found it very helpful to be in a group or Sangha. I am pleasantly surprised to find I am more comfortable at weddings. Funerals and christenings than, I suspect, many of the bemused looking members of the congregation – there must be something in Christianity after all!!

Our local Buddhist group now meets less often due to changing circumstances and it is good to find that we can take part in the Bede Griffiths Sangha locally.

May you all be well and happy, peaceful and successful.

Shelagh@ifrith.freeserve.co.uk

In Memory of Father Bede
Karen Sussman

I was fortunate to visit Shantivanam twice while Father Bede was still alive and to benefit from his spirit and his teachings which pervaded the whole way of life at the Ashram.

For those unfamiliar with the term, an ashram can be described as a spiritual community. It is similar to a monastery but with less of a hierarchical and institutional organisation. Ashrams in India can range from informal families who run an 'open home' allowing visitors to come and go as they please, to strictly disciplined centres with a whole programme of spiritual and educational activities taking place throughout the day. In all cases, however, there is a strong emphasis on visitors' participation in the daily life of the ashram and some sort of spiritual practice and teaching is offered.

Shantivanam falls somewhere between these two extremes, providing a carried spiritual and educational programme, but retaining a relaxed and unstructured atmosphere. Being a Christian ashram, there are three services a day held in the small chapel where in typical Indian style, people sit crossed legged on the floor on straw mats. Although these are Christian services, one being a mass with communion and the other 'office' type services with recitations of psalms, a strong Hindu flavour is brought in with singing of Indian devotional songs, the Hindu rituals of blessing by means of the circling flame and the dabbing of red dye on the forehead. This is one of the many manifestations of Father Bede's 'bridging' between East and West.

Being a contemplative, Father Bede attached a large amount of importance to the practice of contemplation (meditation) allowing each person time to take his attention inwards and be with himself while also taking part in the community life. Thus two hours a say are set aside for individual silent meditation.

Meal times are a refreshing change: the vegetarian diet provides a variety of vegetables and bean dishes cooked without too much oil or chilli. Meals are taken in the long narrow dining hall, again with people seated on straw mats on the floor.

Karma Yoga forms an important part of ashram life. At Shantivanam it is not compulsory but the running of the ashram relies on the voluntary help of visitors. Vegetable chopping is a sociable part of the say's activities and there are also other tasks such as gardening and sweeping to be done. As part of the ashram's educational programme a daily talk is given by Brother Martin, one of the resident monks. His talks offer a fascinating insight into the fundamental similarities between the Eastern and Western religions once their spirituality is explored at its deeper levels. Brother Martin draws on concepts taken from Hindu philosophy as well as from Jungian psychology to explain Christian teachings.

In my experience, however, the most valuable lessons came from Father Bede himself. At one time he used to give regular afternoon talks. After he became ill his verbal input was limited to commentaries on the lessons read in the chapel services. These in themselves offered an entire new insight into the Bible and to sit in the small and intimate chapel listening to such wisdom being delivered with such warmth as well as humour, gave me a feeling of having been privileged to be there.

In accordance with Father Bede's ideas, the way of life at the ashram 'marries' the humility and love of Christian teaching with the holistic 'mind-body-spirit' approach of the East. Thus yoga plays an important part in the daily programme as a way of integrating the body with its devotional activities.

For many years Yoga was taught by Father Amaldas, one of the long-standing brothers of the ashram. Since his death in 1991, the Christian style of Yoga developed by Heinz Grill in southern Germany has been taught. In this flow the deep principles of *bhakti* (devotion) and *jnana* (knowledge) as found in the gospels, so that deep devotion and love is expressed in the asanas.

Participants in the Yoga classes notice a greater feeling of calmness than usual and become more sensitive to the whole environment of *bhakti* at the ashram. Brother Martin remarked on the way Father Bede's principles of living in a devotional and meditative way, shedding the outer personality, are put into action through this Yoga. Each posture is performed with complete devotion, in the same way that, at the ashram, life in its every aspect is lived, and each action is carried out from the heart.

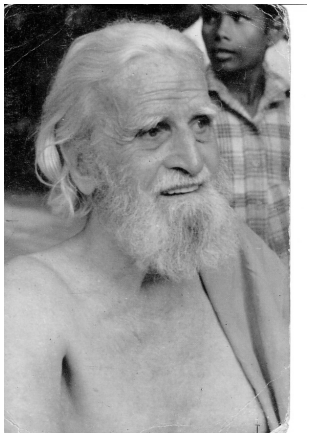
Yoga will continue to be taught at Shantivanam each winter. Undoubtedly it will provide an invaluable means of perpetuating the spirit of love, embodied and spread by Father Bede.

This article was first published in Yoga and Health shortly after Father Bede's death on May 13th 10 years ago. We felt that to republish it now is a lovely way to remember that important time.

Karen is a Sangha member who lives in Dorset, and is a yoga teacher in the tradition of Heinz Grill. She will be offering yoga at our Gaunt's House Celebration in July.

The Ideal of Non-Violence

Fr Bede Griffiths



This article first appeared in June 1957 in the American Catholic journal, Commonweal

It is obvious that the coming of the hydrogen bomb must radically affect the Christian attitude towards war.

Until now it has been a matter of debate whether it is legitimate for a Christian to refuse to fight, but now the question must be whether it is legitimate for him to fight at all. Even in the last war it was difficult to find a moral justification for the 'area-bombing' of Germany, and still more for the use of the atom bomb on Japan. But now the means of destruction have become so indiscriminate and their affects so far out of proportion to any conceivable 'just' end, that the whole concept of a 'just war' seems to be imperilled.

This, however, is a matter for moral theologians and ultimately for the Church herself to decide. But there is another aspect of the problem which should be of more serious concern to the individual Christian. Moral theologians tend to be concerned with finding how far it is possible to go in any particular direction without actually committing sin. But the Gospel of Christ is not at all concerned merely with the avoidance of sin: that, on the contrary in what in terms of the Gospel comes under the 'law'. It is concerned to show the ideal of life which Christ sets before His disciples. In the Sermon on the Mount we have the Christian ideal set before us in the most absolute terms, and this is the very essence of the Gospel. It is not just a counsel of perfection given to a few chosen disciples; it is the call of the Gospel itself, addressed to all men and communing them to a new way of life.

At first sight these words strike us as an overwhelming paradox; they seem to go contrary to all normal human values. 'Blessed are you poor…Blessed are you who are hungry…Blessed are you who weep…Blessed are you when men hate you and cast you off and revile you, when they reject you as something evil for the Son of Man's sake…' These are words which it is difficult even now for us to accept. Is it not the whole philanthropic and humanitarian work of the world aimed at relieving poverty, hunger, misery, oppression, and here it seems these very things are praised? It is the same in regard to property, to marriage, to courts of law; Christ seems to call on his disciples to renounce all civil institutions. 'Unless a man will renounce his father and his mother and his wife and his children and everything he has, he cannot be my disciple.'

There is a deliberate force of paradox in these words which warns us not to take them too literally, but at the same time they are meant to present a challenge to all our worldly values. Christ does not deny the value of civil institutions, of property and marriage and law courts; nor does he deny the need to relieve the poor and the hungry and the afflicted. But he wishes to assert that all natural institutions and all human values are of no account in comparison with the kingdom of God. A Christian may accept what this world has to offer; he may marry and possess property and defend himself at law, but he must be prepared to sacrifice all these things at any moment. We cannot exaggerate the radical renunciation which the Gospel involves; we can never properly belong to this world again.

It is in this light surely that we must read the words about non-resistance to evil, which strike us still more with the sense of paradox. 'But I tell you that you should not offer resistance to injury; if a man strikes you on the one cheek, turn the other cheek also towards him; if he is ready to go to law with you over your coat , let him have your cloak with it; if he compels you to attend him on a mile's journey, go two miles with him of your own accord…' Christ does not here deny the right to self defence; he acknowledges this right, but he calls upon his disciples to renounce this right. It is not a command; like the call to renounce marriage and property it is a 'counsel'. But it is a 'counsel' which is offered to all; it is part of the universal challenge of the gospel.

This call, therefore, not to resist evil is embedded in the very heart of the gospel. Like the call to renounce marriage and property it is a part of the challenge of Christianity. This is the conception which we need to recover in our present situation. It is not a question whether it is 'legitimate' to fight in a war, but whether the world has not reached a point where we may be called upon to renounce this very 'right'. At least we have surely reached the point where we must face this question seriously. We can no longer simply accept war as part of a normal life. It has become something so vast, so inhuman, and so destructive that it challenges us to ask whether there is not a way out, a way which is indicated in the gospel itself.

At present it must be admitted that the command 'Resist not him that is evil', has become almost a dead letter in the Church. We are so sure that it does not take away from us the right to self-defence and from that we go on to accept a whole system of defence with modern weapons of war till the gospel counsel ceases to have any meaning. In the same way we know that we have the right to marriage and property and so we put all our energies into building up a world based on these two institutions which grows more and more complex every day,

until we almost forget the meaning of the words, 'Unless a man renounce his father and his mother and wife and children and all that he has, he cannot be my disciple'. This then is the fearful paradox that Christianity, which is based on poverty and non-violence, has come to be identified in the eyes of so many people, with capitalism and war.

How has this come about? In the early Church there is no doubt that the sense of urgency of the gospel was overwhelming. The first act recorded of the Church after Pentecost was that 'all the faithful held together and shared all that they had, selling their possessions and their means of livelihood, so as to distribute to all as each had need.' It is true that we hear no more of this experiment in common living and presumably the need of private ownership soon re-asserted itself, but the gesture is significant. It shows the original impulse of the Church in regard to private property, and it was destined to endure and to take permanent form in the Church in the religious orders which make the renunciation of private ownership the basis of their way of life.

In the same way we know that in the early Church, that is in the Church of the first three centuries, the command now to resist evil was taken very literally. The Christians believed that they belonged to a new age, an age in which non-violence was now the law. So they boasted, 'We do not draw the sword against any nation, and we no longer learn to fight because we have become, thanks to Jesus, sons of peace' (Origen). Military service was not forbidden, but it was not encouraged. It was not considered worthy of a Christian. His duty was not to fight but to pray, and it was thus that he could best serve his country. This was, of course, the attitude of a small community of Christians, in the midst of a great empire, in which the regular army could be trusted to defend the country. The Peace of Constantine would change all that, and yet it retains its significance for us still.

But the non-violence of the early church was carried further than this; it was carried to the point of death. The goal of life in the early church was found in martyrdom; this was the consummation of the Christian ideal. This is what gives its peculiar character to the early church. The Christians of those days were not afraid to marry and to possess property and to carry on business of all sorts, but they were made to realise that all these things might be taken away from them at any moment. They lived under the constant threat of martyrdom. And this was recognised not as something to be feared but as something to be desired. It was in this way that the Christian could best follow his master. It was not by fighting but by suffering and death he would overcome the world and establish the kingdom of God.

It is impossible to exaggerate the strength of this gospel of non-violence in the early church. It was by this that the Roman Empire was overcome. The whole power of Rome was organised to crush this religion; yet it had to admit defeat and Christianity itself became the religion of the Empire. But this very victory brought with it a change. From this time the ideal of non-violence seemed to lose its power in the church. Gradually the ideal of the 'martial' virtues, first of the Romans, then of the Gothic peoples, was substituted, and the ideal of Christian chivalry was formed. There is no doubt that this ideal had its own beauty, but it belonged to a very limited period of history and was open to grave abuse. It was not an intrinsically Christian ideal but an attempt to 'baptise' pagan virtues. The result has been disastrous; it has simply been the triumph of paganism. The Christian nations have become distinguished above all others for their violence and brutality, and the very ideal of non-violence seems to have faded from men's minds.

> ***"This then is the fearful paradox that Christianity which is based on poverty and non-violence, has come to be identified in the eyes of so many people with capitalism and war."***

There have of course been honourable exceptions like the Quakers, who have preserved the ideal of non-violence down to the present time. But if we could see the force of non-violence in the modern world we have rather to turn to India and to Mahatma Ghandi. It was he who, partly through the influence of the gospel and partly through that of ancient Indian thought, recovered the ideal of non-violence for the modern world The ideal is basic in Indian religion and, one might say, in the Indian character. The Indian has always understood the true strength of character which lies in non-resistance, and it is this which makes an immediate appeal to him in the gospel. On the other hand he is all the more shocked to find how little place it has in the life and thought of so many Christians. But it was the genius of Mahatma Gandhi which enabled him to discover in non-violence a means of political and social action which was found to be no less effective against the British Empire than the early Christian action against the Roman Empire.

Maritain, in his *Man and the State*, has written of the importance of Ghandi's example in words which deserve to be quoted. 'In my opinion Ghandi's theory and technique could be related to and clarified by the Thomist notion that the principal act of the virtue of fortitude is not attack but endurance; to bear, to suffer with constancy. One has then to recognise there are two different orders of means of warfare (taken in the widest sense of the word), as there are two kinds of fortitude and courage, the courage that attacks and the courage that endures the force of coercion or aggression, the force that inflicts suffering on others, and the force that endures suffering inflicted on oneself. There you have two different keyboards, that stretch along the two sides of our human nature, opposing evil through attack and coercion, a way that leads at the last extremity if need be to the shedding of the blood of others, and opposing evil through suffering and enduring, a way which in the last extremity leads to the sacrifice of one's own life. To the second keyboard belongs the means of spiritual warfare.'

This is surely a suggestion of great value to us today. We need to recover this ideal of 'spiritual warfare' of a form of non-violent resistance, which is specifically Christian and at the same time is the highest form of courage or fortitude that can be found. It is, certainly, no easy form of virtue. As Gandhi himself always insisted, it demands complete self conquest before it can become effective. In other words, it is essentially a call to sanctity. It cannot be practiced without training and leadership. Ghandi spent all his life trying to train his people for this, and in the end he had to admit himself defeated. Yet it is something to which many people feel themselves drawn. It seems to be the only way of giving oneself wholeheartedly to a cause without seeing it reined by the use of unworthy means. Maritain has also spoken of the need of a new type of sanctity today. May it not be

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that we have here the means of such a new type of sanctity?

It is not, of course, a virtue which can be practiced in isolation. It has to be closely related to the other virtues which constitute the Christian idea, especially to poverty, chastity and obedience. In fact, it is among the religious orders that one would like to see this ideal take the deepest root, so that it is seen habitually as an essential element of Christian perfection. But it should not be confined to the religious orders. It needs to be embodied in social and political life and become and force of inspiration there. Perhaps Dorothy Day and her companions on the Catholic Worker can give some idea how it can be realised in this way, especially in close association with poverty and the care of the poor.

"Non-violence on the other hand, is essentially an affirmation of the law of the spirit. Gandhi described it is as the 'power of truth' and the 'power of love".

The picture on this page is of the front gate at Shantivanam Ashram

Communism, it is generally recognised, cannot be finally overcome by force. Ultimately, it can only be overcome by a spiritual force greater than its own. It has often been said that Mahatma Gandhi was fortunate in having the British to deal with, since they could always be trusted to observe a certain code of honour, however ruthless they might be on occasion. But would his methods have been of any use against Communism? In the same way, the early Christians were able to overcome the Roman Empire, but again the Romans, although they were far more ruthless than the British, had not the Communist's absolute ruthlessness and determination to eliminate all religion. Can a technique of passive resistance be found which can not only endure all that the Communists can inflict but also convert them?

It may be said that Communism represents the spirit of absolute violence. Violence belongs to its very essence; it arises from the nature of its creed. Materialism is of its nature a kind of violence to the spirit of man. It is an attempt to subject everything, and above all the human person, to the law of matter, and the law of matter is the law of violence. It seeks to impose itself on every form of spiritual life; it seeks finally to subject everything to the power of this world.

Non-violence on the other hand, is essentially an affirmation of the law of the spirit. Gandhi described it is as the 'power of truth' and the 'power of love'. It is the power of truth because it is the recognition of the spiritual ground of all reality and the determined effort to bring everything, that is, all matter, into subjugation to this spiritual law. It is the power of love because it is the recognition of the spiritual character in every man and the inviolable respect which this demands.

Gandhi saw clearly that one must be absolutely uncompromising in one's attachment to non-violence. You can counter the absolute spirit of violence in Communism only by a no less absolute spirit of non-violence. Once you allow any compromise to enter in, however legitimate, it may be from another point of view, the whole strength of resistance is lost. One must be committed to the principle of non-violence utterly and completely to the point of death. The secret of the power of non-violence was revealed in the death of Christ. There was then revealed a love which was capable of bearing every insult and torture and, finally, death, without the least resistance, and which thereby raised up a new power of life capable of transforming the world. The secret of this power still remains within the Church; It is in our power to learn this secret and to show forth this life upon which the Church and the world depend.

War and Peace

Thich Nhat Hanh

Thich Nhat Hanh

Perhaps those seeds of violence are sprouting now and explain the result of public opinion polls in support of war. But now, while the attack on Iraq seems imminent, how would you talk to the American people that you know during one of the most dramatic moments in their history?

"I would ask them not to start a war that would harm not only Iraqis but all of us. Who strikes another hits himself. To the governors, then, I would say that to act without the approval and support of the United Nations would greatly generate evil. If America goes ahead by herself, she will destroy the UN's authority, and we will lose the only instrument we have to maintain peace in the world, the Security Council.

The US has to listen to the collective wisdom of the UN as if this were the sangha (the first community of the Buddha's disciples) of all nations. America is part of that sangha. To destroy its prestige would be a terrible thing. The White House should instead honour it, asking for a meeting between the American an Iraqi governments in the presence of other nations able to share their wisdom."

It seems, following his words, that the UN's collapse would be as disastrous as a war. During a tea break the master reflected on the non-violence trainings that are practiced in his village. Working for peace begins with small day-to-day conflicts.

"At any level," he continues, "the most skilful means to overcoming disharmony is deep and compassionate listening of the other's words. This helps to understand the other's suffering and to communicate. To a government I would say, listen to yourself and to what other countries say, in order to share your own suffering and to understand theirs. It is a practice. Here, for example, we do not speak of inner peace only, but we practice deep and lovely listening.

It is a practice of reconciliation to train oneself in, thanks to breathing meditation. Sometimes couples (husband - wife or parents - children) try to reconcile on the spot, even rushing to the telephone booth to call the other side of the world."

In your many books, the royalties of which sustain the monasteries, you write that violence is born from fear and pain. But what are the Americans and their president afraid of nowadays?

"Bush lives among fear and is too busy to practice breathing meditation, and he can do so much harm. He needs advisors capable of activating compassion, but he seems instead to be surrounded by belligerent people. The American spiritual leaders should work for Bush to bring people near him animated by a deep sense of peace. The same citizens can do something like my disciples are trying to do: after September 11th I sent an appeal to non-violence and I fasted for ten days to highlight its spiritual and non political aspect and many Americans joined us. In the US there are many people with a compassionate consciousness and Bush should listen to them. They are not fighting him; they are only trying to help him.

If I had the chance to meet Saddam Hussein I would repeat to him the same words. I met with Islamic communities in America and I spoke with them in a new way, to understand their fears and their hopes. This is the only way to peace."

This interview appeared in the Italian Newspaper Il Corrierre Della Sera', February 20th 2003

Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist master and peace activist, will be leading a five day retreat at St Andrews, Fife, Scotland, with members of his Sangha from Plum Village in France.

25—30 June 2003

Details from:

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Future Sangha Events

June—July: Brother Martin's tour—*see enclosed leaflet*

July 17—20 A Celebration of the Life and Vision of Father Bede. *See enclosed leaflet*

November 28-30 Sangha Advent Retreat at St Peters Grange Prinknash

Sangha Contacts and Groups

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If any one would like to have their names added as local contacts please let us know. Please also let us have details of any groups you would like included

And a welcome to our first members from Argentina

In the light

All those suffering from the war in Iraq

Please also put in the light Sangha members Margaret Knox, Joan Burns, Winifred Dearden, Noreen Read, Anne Dew , Helen Maher, Elizabeth Phillips., Hazel Redford, Gilliam McClennin , Ann Tilly and Jean Kensit.

If you know of anyone who is ill or otherwise suffering and who you would like us to put in the light please let us know