

CHAPTER 9
INCLUSIVE DEVOTION:
BEDE GRIFFITHS' INTERPRETATION
OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA AS SEARCH
FOR A NEW CROSS-CULTURAL IDENTITY

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1. Bede Griffiths

Bede Griffiths was not a theologian who would have worked out a systematic theology. He was a spiritual seeker on a continuous journey. Any new impression of *Indian spiritual life* would create resonance in him, and he tried hard to integrate it into his Christian experience. If one wants to find a headline summarizing his thought one should use the term “beyondness”. Whatever he discovered—and he was so curious and childlike in getting excited about new dimensions of *spiritual insights*—he would reflect and realize that even this new excitement was but one step—“you have to go beyond” was one of the most cherished sentences he would use all the years of our friendship.

Beyondness—this is Bede’s deepest insight and prophetic drive. During his first years in India—cf. his book “Return to the Centre” (1976)—he was still selective and even judgemental, enjoying advaitic insights but distancing himself from the erotic mysticism of Krishna for his command of “immoral actions”, for instance. But more and more he realized what was beyond these religious expressions, and he became a searching citizen in several *spiritual worlds*. He was formed in the Christian West, received

a catharsis in Hindu India and became a prophet of an inclusive spirituality to the West.

What was so special about Bedeji (using the Indian honorific term which expresses respect, gratitude and love at the same time)? Bede was a person of a warm heart and an investigating, curious intellect at the same time. With typical British reluctance to show emotions a special tenderness surrounded him, a gracious gentleness which impressed me every time we met, always fresh and with amazement, even after about 20 years of knowing each other. He was deeply enchanted with India and had even a romantic perception of the Indian village though he lived there right in the midst of all the dirt and noise and even so much of human quarrelling. He was able to infect others with his love for India and thus to awaken a curiosity and depth in all the travellers who would gather at Shantivanam at tea time or in the chapel or in front of his hut for philosophical explanations or private counselling. His deepest intention was, to reconcile the contradictions of the intuitive and the rational, of religious experience and science, of arts and philosophy which had torn apart Western culture so deeply.

What was his attitude towards Christianity? He loved the church as the mystical body of Christ, and he suffered under the rationalistic and ritualistic distortions of the Christian heritage. He felt the truth in the Upanishadic expression of the Oneness of reality and at the same time celebrated mass according to the Catholic ritual. Certainly, indigenous elements such as Sanskrit mantras, readings from the Holy Scriptures of India, Tamil hymns and so on were part of the daily liturgy. But the mystery of the sacrifice of the mass remained the centre of daily life in Shantivanam. Bede was open to non-catholic Christian traditions, but it did not bother him too much to study the differences. He opted for an existential inclusivism. For him, the great mystical traditions were the answer to overcome the differences within Christianity and between the different religions of the world. Thus, Islam was of interest to him only with regard to its mystical traditions, especially in the form of the non-dualistic philosophy of religion

as exposed by Ibn al Arabi. Bede felt that this understanding of reality came close to Shankara, and even Mahayana Buddhism as interpreted by T.R.V.Murti and D.T. Suzuki seemed to him not so different from the great sayings of the Upanishads, the Gita and the great Christian mystics.

However, during the last years of his life he suffered more and more under the impression that *all* present day religions are masculine in their character. Bede who had left his monastery in England precisely for that reason and had embarked on his adventure to India, wanted to discover the feminine side, both in the religions and in himself. This was the main concern of the last months of his life, especially after his first stroke which had brought him the gift of a deep spiritual experience of "the mother", as he would say. This feminine side, he said, needs to be developed and nurtured. All the dualities of world and God, nature and mind, heaven and earth, male and female need to be integrated, and this was, so Bede, the task for our generation and the next ones to come.

Bede has always remained a Christian, if the usage of this terminology is proper altogether. However, he had heard an echo in the Hindu contemplative experience which he had discovered first in the great mystic texts of Christianity. So in a way he is an example for dual religious citizenship, Christian and Hindu, and the question how this can be expressed theologically was present to him all the time. In later years he went *beyond inclusivism* in realizing the beauty and truth of other religious expressions in their own right, i.e. without seeing only the echo of the Christian experience in them. Yet, more than that, he took the Great Mother not only as a symbol, but as a mental and even political basic attitude from which a transpersonal pattern of our understanding of God and world would emerge so that our life should become more harmonious, softer, more graceful and gentle. This was his message.

In honouring Bede Griffiths' contribution to World Spirituality we need to address the question of religious identity, perhaps even *multiple religious identity*. Solutions to the quest for a multiply religious identity must be concerned with *internal* pluralism that

exists in any tradition and in each believer, whereas the *external pluralism* which results from the encounter with other traditions is a highly disputed matter of present day theologies, for it focuses on the problem of syncretic historical identities as being addressed by the pluralistic theology of religions. The first one describes the internal relationships within a given identity of a religion (or religious believer), the second one describes the relationship between traditions.

Solutions to both questions would have to be worked out as a Trinitarian theology.¹ The whole creation is derived and depending on God, so all that bears the divine dignity and possibility to be a link with its origin. Christ as God incarnate makes the universal reality of God a historical presence under all broken and incomplete experience of the human condition (the cross), and God the Spirit universalizes this historical presence and delimits it again into a universal realm of divine presence not bound by human historical delimitation. In so far as all the works of the Trinity (creation-redemption-sanctification) are not divisible in His external work (*opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*) the presence of the One God in all His acts is not limited to any culture, religion, language etc. Therefore, *in principle* any historical identity can be an identity of/in/with the One Triune God. Whether this is so *in reality* needs to be looked into carefully, as I will show at the end of this paper. I will start with two preliminary remarks before I enter into the arguments proper.

First, simultaneous belonging to different traditions, groups, religious symbol systems etc. is a historical fact. I want to look into the question: What does that mean logically and theologially? Logically, we have to clarify the term identity. Theologically,

¹ This insight I owe very much to my first year in India 1975-76, when I spent a considerable time in the presence of Bede at Shantivanam and discussed the mystery of the Trinity with him under the inspiration of the thought of Monchanin, Abhishiktananda and Panikkar. I cannot go into details here. The structure would follow the line of Trinitarian thinking I have suggested in: *The Unity of Reality. God, God-Experience, and Meditation in the Hindu-Christian Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press 1991).

we have to clarify the concepts of truth and salvation and their relationship.

Second, there is also a psychological and/or epistemological problem to be considered: There is an unavoidable incongruence in human development. What we learn during the first years of our life we learn differently from the learning processes in later life. The mother tongue is picked up differently from later modes of acquiring languages. In early years, due to the plasticity of the brain, synaptic links and structures are shaped which form the patterns of processing information that are hardly changeable later. Alterations and additions are possible, but a basic formation is being acquired which shapes our "character". The early years are fundamentally formative. Later knowledge is acquired additionally and interpreted into the early structures or into what has already been there. Thus, I may be able to add identities later, but this is qualitatively different from earliest identity formation, for later identification processes are clustered around what is already there. This well established incongruence has consequences for the building of identities including religious identities. I exclude here the question whether it is possible to grow up in two mother tongues or two religious primary identities simultaneously in early childhood. Evidence seems to suggest that this is possible. In most cases, however, we come across the fact that additional identities are acquired later in our lives. How? And what is identity after all?

2. Remarks on the Problem of Identity

The notion of identity may be considered in our context in two ways, first as a philosophical or epistemological term, second as a psychological and sociological term. Philosophically, identity is established in case something refers to itself. The problem lies in the term "itself". Something is given as representation to itself in as much as an objectification of a subject happens. If this is so, the identifier and the identified are the same and not the same at the same time. Interestingly enough, time comes into play here. Between the subject and the object in the process of cognition there

is no difference in space, but in time. Identity implies identification, and this is a temporal process. In other words: identity is not a fact but a process in the making. Much more would have to be said here, but this may suffice.

Secondly, psychologically identity means a cluster of dependencies: we depend on relations established during the process of maturing, relations to the parents, to language and environments etc., generally speaking: psychological identity is a function of social processes which are continuously interpreted and reinterpreted in a changing identity matrix. The relation is not symmetrical: “my” identity is depending on given relations, and my own interpretation is always some reformulation, representation of what has been experienced. Identity is a shift of a “something” into a new context, and this context is my present experience. Since this experience is shaped by fields of relations that differ during my life and in several social contexts, I naturally live in different psychological identities which are marked and shaped by different social contexts. To give an example:

As a Saxonian living in Bavaria I have an identity as a Saxon, remarkably recognizable by my accent in German. As a German living in Europe I have an identity as German, remarkably recognizable by my German accent when I try to speak English or any other European language. As a person living, say in Africa, I will easily identify as a European and not as an American—especially in these times, i.e. assume an identity that is not only given but partially chosen for obvious reasons. If some ET would visit planet earth I would be easily identified as human as being different from ET’s.

Thus, the construction of identity has two notable marks: first, it is a process which leads to ever changing results, second, identities overlap and can be simultaneous like defined systems such as Chinese boxes, where one includes the other. But sometimes and in certain contexts identities may exclude each other—such as the gender difference when identity is an identifying process in Gender relations, which however do not exclude the different subjects from being identical as humans.

What has been said so far holds true for religious identities. Consider the term Hinduism. We know that Hinduism comprises different religions in terms of typological definitions of religion used by scholars in religious studies. But for those looking from this side of the river Indus all those behind the other banks were called Hindus, Buddhists included, by the way. Later the term became more refined, and Buddhists were excluded, but even today Hindus often regard Buddhism as an aspect of their own religion, namely "Export-Hinduism".

It is a similar case with Christianity. Are Protestants and Catholics both "Christians"? In a sense yes, but under other considerations "no". In certain Asian languages different terms are used to translate the difference, and all depends on the psychological, political and social circumstances. In times of persecution in Japan all the different Christian religions were one subject of persecution, thus establishing one identity. But in terms of organizational structure, self-definition and also theological identity which was and is historically constructed we have to speak of differing and perhaps different identities.

Thus, already the notion of identity shows that identity is a construct in multiple relationships which are to be interpreted in a host of multiple or plural parameter. Thus, if we look into identity we cannot avoid facing reality as a pluriform and pluralistic field of references. Identity constitutes "I" and "we" in facing and interpreting something or somebody as "other". Thus, identity is pluriformity. But how to understand pluriformity in the context of a continuous search for identity which seekers like Bede Griffiths were engaged in not just theoretically but with their whole life experience? In order to answer this question we will look into a few aspects of Bede Griffiths' interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita which to me seems to be typical not just for the approach Bede worked out for himself but for quite a number of Christians who are fascinated by Eastern religions which they interpret on the background of their reading of the Christian mystical tradition.

3. *Bede Griffiths on the Bhagavad Gita*

A most common typology of religions distinguishes religions emphasizing either the immanent or transcendent, the personal or impersonal aspects of God. Western theistic (personalistic) traditions would be identified with the personal, “Eastern” traditions with the impersonal view. Religious reality, however, is more complex. The Gita is an example of Indian spirituality which tries to combine both aspects in a consistent way, and that is why it has been one of the most favoured texts of Bede Griffiths. To highlight his hermeneutics as being based on his Christian concept and experience of devotion I will focus only on three striking examples:²

a) Gita Chapter 9 discusses the problem of the One and the many, and in 9,15 it is said that certain people worship God “by oneness” (*ekatvena*) and by manifoldness (*prithaktvena*), this oneness variously manifested facing all directions (*bahudha vishvatomukham*). How do they do that? “By the knowledge-sacrifice” (*jnanayajnena*). Bede bases his interpretation on a translation which reads “sacrifice of wisdom worship”. To Bede—“wisdom is a sacrifice because wisdom always comes from God” (River, 168). He comments more clearly in elaborating that “if we offer our mind to God, do we receive the illumination of wisdom”. (River, 168f.) That is, what is required is attention and/or devotion to God, and this precisely is the attitude in which wisdom is being received. To focus the mind on God is proper devotion. This is precisely what the Gita has in mind. Bede goes on in commenting on 12,3-4 that those who worship the Imperishable, the Infinite, the Transcendent, the Unmanifest (*avyaktam*) reach the “very self” of the personal God Krishna. Against Zaehner he declares “that there is no real difference between the personal God and the impersonal Godhead”.

b) An other example for Bede Griffiths hermeneutics of Hindu tradition in a Christian context is his interpretation of love as fig-

² Bede Griffiths, *River of Compassion. A Christian Commentary on the Bhagavad Gita* (New York: Amity House 1987).

ured out in a certain context of the Gita. God Krishna reveals in 12,4: *samniyamyendriyagramam sarvatra sambuddhayah te prapnuvanti mam eva sarvabhutahite ratah*, that is: “Controlling the multitude of the senses, even minded in all regards, rejoicing in the welfare of all creatures, they also attain to Me”. Bede, however, relying on Mascaro’s translation in Penguin Classics, interprets this text as a statement on love. Mascaro translates *sarvatra sambuddhayah* “the same loving mind for all”, whereas what it means is rather “even minded in all regards”. It is a saying on the mental attitude of equanimity, not on love, at least not on first sight. But if one looks deeper it is precisely the Hindu understanding of love that is portrayed here, indeed. Love is equanimity beyond emotional attachment, otherwise it would be *kama*, desire. In so far what is said here is closer to *agape* than to *eros*, and in this way it may well be an interesting interpretation of the deeper Christian experience of love beyond attachment. Bede comments on this passage: “But they also need to have their souls in harmony and to have loving minds to all. Thus love is an essential condition of union with God, whether he is conceived as the Absolute One or the personal God.” (River, 221f.)

This concept of love is demanding. However, in the commentary to the next verse (12,5) he falls back in interpreting this “love” as devotion which, Bede says, would be easier for most people than “the path of the transcendent”. He continues: “This is evident in Christianity, but even in Buddhism with its strictly impersonal character, the Mahayana or Great Way, introduced the idea of the bodhisattva, the figure of the compassionate Buddha who becomes an object of devotion.” (River, 222) However, both, to Buddhism and to the Gita, the question is not so much about devotion or not, but about the mental attitude. Does devotion to the personal God imply attachment or not? Yet, what is attachment? To be inclined to one object over against others. Attachment implies particularity, i.e. the logical opposite to the *sarvatra* in the sense quoted from Gita 12,4 above.

c) We can connect this problem with an analysis of Bede’s reading of Gita 12,8: *mayy eva mana adhatsva mayi buddhim nivesha-*

ya nivasishyasi mayyeva ata urdhvam na samshayah “Keep your mind on Me alone, make your intelligence enter into Me. Thus you shall dwell in Me henceforth, there is no doubt about it.”

Bede interprets: “So Krishna calls for surrender to him alone, the offering of both the mind and the heart which leads to ‘living in him’. There is an exact parallel to this in St. John’s Gospel where Jesus says that if anyone loves him, he will come to dwell in him (John 14,23).” “Manas” and “buddhi”, of course, are not mind and heart, but analytic and synthetic (intuitive) mind. Both do not comprise all mental faculties (for this the term *citta* would be appropriate), but they represent “reason”. Again, what the Gita says here, is, that all intentionality should be directed on God, but here this is not so much linked with emotional devotion which we usually express in the symbol of the “heart”. Bede, however, interprets the intention of the Gita in a wider sense, and I would say it is his Christian understanding which makes him read the text the way he does. This becomes obvious when he declares an “exact parallel” to John’s gospel. What the term “exact parallel” might mean in cross-cultural hermeneutics is highly debatable, but what interests us here is only the fact, that Bede does not hesitate to read the text on his understanding (and experience!) of devotion which has a Christian or—to be more precise—a neo-Platonic background. For to Bede perfect contemplation is “to see all the created universe in the One and the One in the whole created universe”. (River, 222) God is in the world and the world is in God. He compares this with Dionysius the Areopagite (Divine Names 2.10) who suggested to go beyond names and forms, words and thoughts to the “unutterable, ineffable, beyond mind, beyond life, beyond seeing”. Yet, this One Reality is “manifested in the whole creation and in every person”, as Bede interprets. Bede adds, that there is a “defect”, sin, and this requires redemption. But he does not connect this Christian insight with his Gita text. Devotion to Bede is an inclusive reality—it comprises the whole of reality and makes no distinction, but at the same time it is expressed in specific forms which—according to Neo-Platonic thought—differ in ontological degrees in the quality of Being.

This, however, is not Bede's interest: He sees the One reflected in all reality, and the one truth is reflected in the Gita, in John and potentially everywhere. This is why devotion cannot be exclusive, it needs to be inclusive in order to be up the omnipresent reality of the One True God..

Yet, what is truth? Bede, who reads the Gita text obviously on the background of his Christian experience, needs to ask the question whether a Christian understanding of truth would legitimize his hermeneutical approach. As far as I know he did not ask this question theoretically, but gave an answer with his life-experience, as a prophet who goes "beyond" cultural and religious limits while being thoroughly rooted in a particular tradition: his Christian inclusive devotion. We, however, shall try to give this question a historical and theoretical turn, and this shall be the next section of this paper.

4. The problem of Truth and Religious Identity in Community

Theological concepts depend on a community which accepts those concepts intersubjectively. Thus, the community seems to be the presupposed basis for any debate on values. On the other hand a community is formed as a coherent structure only because of a specific identity. Identity, however, is shaped both by delimitation from other identities and by building up structures of a worldview which is the basis of tradition, collective memory and a consistent structure of rules. Therefore, it seems to be this set of assumptions and beliefs as collective memory which is the presupposed basis for any community. In other words, we cannot focus on either of the two factors without looking at the other factor at the same time: *Community comes into being because of a shared set of collective ideas, and those ideas live only in a specific community.*

Here we will focus only on one aspect of the complex matter, i.e. the problem of the consistency of a set of "truths" which seem to shape a certain culture, country, continent or tradition.

4.1. Truth

But what is truth? Truth is not just a theoretical or epistemological question but an existential concern as we can learn from Hebrew *'emeth* (trust), Greek *aletheia* (revealing the covered) and Sanskrit *satya* (self-expression of being as it is). Here comes in Bede Griffiths' most important contribution: His interest was less the theoretical argument, but the living model of an authentic response to the calls of life. And these calls led him to a comprehensive openness, integrative approach and *beyondness*.

Here, we cannot go into the details of the philosophical problem of truth as it has been discussed in Western and other philosophical traditions.³ It suffices to keep in mind that any discourse on this question needs to cultivate an awareness that the question itself is culturally conditioned: There is not one universal question of truth which might be answered in different material ways through cultural conditioning, but the very *structure* of the question of truth or the whole *concept* of truth is different in different cultures, both diachronically and diatopically. Thus, Indian Buddhism developed the concept of *satyadvaya*, the two levels of being or truth (*satya*), viz. the conventional or relational level and the absolute or holistic level.

This was modified in China where the model is not a hierarchy of levels but an organic harmony of the interplay of mutually dependent forces. This Chinese concept of "truth" as the balanced harmony of mutually dependent forces or powers found its specific expressions in Confucianism, Taoism, Chinese Buddhism etc., but it was always there and is a distinct paradigm compared to the Indian model of hierarchies and levels.⁴ Very different from the Indian and Chinese concept is the Greek and European model of truth. But even one culture develops different models of truth

³ I have discussed some basic methodological points concerning a cross-cultural debate on "truth" in: M. v. Brück, "Wahrheit und Toleranz im Dialog der Religionen," in: *Dialog der Religionen* 1/1993, pp. 3ff.

⁴ Cf. M. v. Brück & W. Lai, *Buddhismus und Christentum* (München 1998), pp. 621ff.

in the course of its history. So “truth”, i.e. the construction and methodology of truth is also subject to historical change.

Let us look briefly into the European tradition in order to substantiate the point.

As has already been noted, both the notion of truth and the methodology to find truth are historically conditioned. What European history is concerned, I shall distinguish three models which differ from the models of other cultures as I have just mentioned:

- an *onto-theological* model which lasted from the pre-Socratics until the Realists in the Middle Ages;
- a model centered on *subjectivity* which lasted from Nominalism until German idealism;
- *language analysis* ever since.

Most thinkers of Greek Antiquity and the Christian tradition until Nominalism believed in an ontology which could express general notions about reality. Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle held the view of identity, continuity or at least of correspondence between being and thinking in the concept of *logos* or *nous*. Unchanging and „true“ structures as well as things could be known in their suchness. How? By participating in these eternal structures. That is to say: to attain the proper knowledge of reality is the basis of ethical quest and the foundation of certainty. A statement which has been proved true once was true for ever. Aristotle⁵ holds that the relation of each being towards truth is the same as its relation to being as such. Therefore, the congruence of being and knowing makes possible the *theoria* of philosophy, i.e. the possibility of talking truth. In this line of thinking Thomas Aquinas⁶ defines truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei*. This theory of correspondence has been developed and refined in different ways, but in any case it presupposes that, without doubt, the „thing“ or the matter can appear to reason as it is. Christian theology added, that the basis for the correspondence of the knowing and the known is nothing else than God. Would not the divine *logos* be present in

⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 993 a 30.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 1,1,1; *Summa theol.* q.16,2 ad 2.

human thinking, nothing could be known as true. Participation in truth is participation in the Divine. Hence, what became known as true was divine, beyond any doubt. However, in human history this participation in the Divine was made difficult (or nearly impossible) due to human freedom and striving for independence from God (the *hybris* of the Greeks) which Christianity called sin. The paradox is, that man in using his freedom given by God unavoidably deviates from God at the same time. And this is why human history is the struggle and fight for truth, for positions, claims and values. The paradox could be solved only by an act of highest freedom of God himself: his self-sacrifice.

This structure of thinking was convincing as long as its foundations were generally accepted: the correspondence of divine and human *logos*, or the ontic order and the order of thinking. However, at the peak of the Middle Ages and especially during the Renaissance the eternal divine order got a competing realm to deal with: the reality of matter, which was held to be „objective“, that what could be known through senses and experiment. But even here we still have the basic structure of the old view: Things change temporally, but in space they exist eternally, they change in time, but this change follows a course which is predictable as long as all the initial conditions would be known. Now it was the world that was limitless in time and space and thus „the world“ (or matter and nature) inherited what before were the characteristic marks of God. Therefore, even in this model the traditional ontological structure remains the same: Truth once known remains constant in a given system.

These ideas and ways of thinking were shattered by nominalism, by later sceptical theories and, in our century, by modern physics and recently by neurosciences. Now, all notions, ideas and concepts which we are using are not any more grounded in a superhuman realm of ideas, but in the human mind. All we can think is a construction made by our own mind. That is, ideas do not refer to God or some immovable order beyond but to the human being itself. Therefore, the foundation of truth can be sought only in human subjectivity—*cogito ergo sum*. Finally, there is not

any more an assumption about a correspondence of being and thinking, but only the self-affirmation of the human subject.

To shorten a long philosophical development we can summarize and comment on the consequences of this view: *Truth does not become subjective, but it rests on an intersubjective process of communication.*

Whatever this may mean for other fields of experience and thinking, here it suffices to note that this development led to the relativity of truth and the relativity of all criteria for truth, the relativity of values and the lack of an „ordering centre“⁷. This had and has consequences for the search of identity—not only for the individual and its „meaning of life“, but also for the coherence of societies. In other words, relativity means also plurality of truths and values, of ethical principles and ideas.

I cannot go here into a discussion of truth in different Asian traditions. In Asia we do observe processes of pluralization, too, both in India and in China. But the consequences have not been the same.

4.2. *Truth and Language*

Summarizing what has been discussed so far we can say:

Any concept of truth depends on language. All human language is metaphorical, i.e. the concepts of space, time, causality, matter, being, consciousness, truth and so on are metaphors which are mutually dependent and related to each other. They are not just descriptive but imply reflections which depend on the social construction of a trans-individual communication of consciousness and contexts. Language (and concepts) does not only communicate information about something given, but evokes images and motivations. Those motivations are communicated in structures of communication which form the matrix of a social pattern. This pattern is not a pre-stabilized harmony, but it is historically contingent and needs to be called a product of cultural processes.

⁷ W. Heisenberg, *Wandlungen in den Grundlagen der Naturwissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Hirzel 1959), p. 139.

Therefore, there is nothing like „the“ Indian identity or „the“ Christian European tradition, but there are complex *historical* processes which construct precisely those concepts for the coherence of a given society. Expressed in a different way: *Tradition is not something given in the past, but a process of construction in the present.*

5. *Christian Truth claims and the Problem of Multiple Religious Identity*

The possibility of an inclusive religious identity which might include impulses from different traditions depends on intellectual, emotional, social and institutional concerns and decisions. *Intellectually* the consistency of different views on God, humankind and the world needs to be attained, at least in principle, because it would be difficult to combine totally contradicting views without losing intellectual integrity. *Emotionally* it is most difficult to combine different religious identities because religious emotions are being formed uniquely during childhood. If during this period of life different emotional religious identities are combined it may be possible to belong emotionally to different traditions, but in most cases there is one religious formation during childhood and the other ones are being added later during adolescence and/or adulthood. This implies an emotional difference towards the different traditions which cannot be bridged later in life. It is similar to having acquired a mother tongue and added knowledge of different languages in later life. Like languages, religions are being learned differently during different periods in life. Thus, one may develop later in life multiple religious identities, but the emotional belonging is not in the same way and the relationship to the respective traditions is different in each case. *Socially* it is certainly possible to belong to different religious groups at the same time, though, as history shows, in most cases by combining allegiance to different religious groups individuals in exchange and cooperation with other individuals forms a new group identity which may emerge as a new religion. *Institutionally* the prob-

lem depends entirely on the regulations of the institutions which may allow belonging to other religious institutions or not. In case of Christianity, Islam and Orthodox Judaism this is hardly imaginable, in parts of Christianity (Quakers), Liberal Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism this is possible or might become possible. It depends on the ideological structure which legitimizes the institution, in most cases this is the question of *theology*. I want to share some reflections only on a possible Christian answer:

1. Different identities do not necessarily exclude each other but can complement each other. Therefore, local, regional and global identities can be related to each other. This holds true for political identities as well as languages, i.e. dialects, regional languages, communication in a „world language“ etc. In similar ways religious identities can be related to each other. Different identities influence each other through processes of amalgamation and exclusion. Identities are shaped in ever changing contexts and they are always a process.

2. Economic and cultural globalization requires a networking of political and mental processes which transcend individual as well as national structures; even the difference between nature and culture (technology) is being challenged. This process implies a dramatic evolution of consciousness which changes traditional identities. Traditionally religions have been central sources for identity, and that is why they are challenged by those processes in their very structure as traditions. Under the condition of modern pluralism the formation of identity is different than in the past, i.e. more than ever a simultaneous participation in different identities is not only possible but more and more the rule. This implies simultaneous participation in communities of tradition and values which have been different or even separated before. This has consequences for the claims and reclamation of tradition by institutions which form their identity in clinging to and constructing traditions. Such institutions are churches, theological communities etc.

3. Human history is the struggle for truths under the condition of contradicting truth claims. This implies that each perception

and the following knowledge necessarily remains relative and particular. Cultures and religions which have reached beyond regional boundaries have established their identities in competition to each other and stabilized themselves in excluding the claims of the other—constructing the other as the strange or the enemy. Truth is conditioned by language, and language is metaphorical, i.e. notions as space, time, causality, matter, being, consciousness, truth etc. are metaphors related to each other and conditionally interdependent. Those notions are not merely descriptive but they imply a contextual reflection which is dependent on processes of consciousness formation. Language does not only communicate information about given facts, but it evokes images, motivations etc. The result is that when we talk about truth the problem is that we are not talking only about the possible congruence of thinking and facts (*adaequatio intellectus et rei*), but about a communication of experiences.

The claim to have the truth more adequately than other traditions has led to violence in the past, because truth claims were established by force so as to achieve not only political dominance but also psychological stability of the subject who absolutizes relative truth claims.

The pluralism of truth claims in the present day world is the result of the history of reason and sciences, but it is also the consequence of social modernization and the experience of cross-cultural relations and interaction.

4. *Religious* sentences are true in as much as an *unconditioned* reality is expressed or represented. Finally it is the certainty that things are as they are and that this suchness is finally good. This is what we can call the religious dimension of truth, as the Hebrew word '*emeth* signifies truthfulness and reliability of God, and this is his truth which humans participate in, in so far as they dwell in God's '*emeth* (Ps 26,3; 86, 11 etc.). Thus, "truth of God" is not a definition or expression about God, but—as subjective genitive—a self-expression of God to be in truthfulness what he always has been in spite of all our experiences and reasons of relativity. In spite of all our relative knowledge and expressions such or simi-

lar absolute expressions form the identity of religions. Those expressions, however, need to be experienced, they cannot be transmitted any more by authoritative communication. Therefore, the contemplative dimension of religion plays an ever growing role precisely under the conditions of religious plurality, and this is precisely the point of Bede Griffiths' inclusive devotion.

5. Truth, however, is not only a matter of cognition nor is it identical with understanding, but it is finally ungraspable. This is the existential or religious dimension of truth which can be enacted and realized in rituals, in ethical decisions but also in the realization of structures of thinking, such as in that which has to be assumed with necessity. But its main area of realization is meditative experience. Each one of these realizations is dependent on culturally conditioned perceptions and interpretations, i.e. on cognition which is relativized by language. However, this does not mean that those realizations would be arbitrary. Because we have to maintain the principle which is also to be acknowledged in cross-cultural discourses so as to enable rational exchange: the *principle of coherence*. Accordingly, a sentence can at least temporarily assumed as being true, if it is coherent. A sentence is coherent, if it can be integrated into a system of meaning without contradiction. However, the principle of coherence is only a necessary but not a sufficient condition of truth, because it cannot explain what a system of sentences finally is, i.e. the whole or the one is being presupposed but not explained. It remains a relative assumption. Furthermore, the principle of coherence is insufficient for obviously immoral acts such as killing on the basis of religious and ideological reasons can be argued for quite consistently and without contradiction.

Hence, more criteria are required so that truth can be ascertained and distinguished from untruth. I would like to mention one important criterion, and this is the *principle of integration*. Integration means that sentences and modes of behaviour must in a rational way be integrated into the relative system of values of a specific religion or society. However, in principle a relative system is open. In Christian parlance: knowledge of truth is a matter

of the eschatological future, i.e. in the present we have truth in the mode of search for it. But now we do have the criterion of love which becomes conscious and knowable in relational patterns of cognition, feeling and action, but it can lead only to relative decisions. This is precisely the place for a productive argument in interreligious controversy.

7. The basic attitude and motivation which follows from these explanations is esteem for the otherness of others and a tolerance which does not exclude the search for truth or the dialogical discourse which is to establish more coherence in the search for truth. However, a dialogical discourse cannot be built any more on the attempt to gain one's own identity by disgracing the other or at the expense of the other. In analogy to the field of the political notions of security in partnership I have suggested to introduce the term of identity in partnership (*Identitätspartnerschaft*). Tolerance then is not a careless "letting be" but the openness for the other and the own so as to work out the creativity of possibilities in the otherness of the partners in discourse and encounter. Tolerance requires mutual criticism, because this is a sign of loving solidarity. Otherwise religion would become irrelevant.

Let me give an example and try to formulate what this could actually mean under a Christian perspective: When St. Paul encourages people to critically investigate everything and retain the good (1Thess 5, 21) there is the need for a criterion for the good. He mentions three of them (1 Thess 5,16-18):

a) *joy and happiness* which dwells in persons who are able to transcend themselves in prayer and thus live in the spirit, not in the ego,

b) *contemplation* or continuous prayer, which is the very nature of self-transcendence, because it gives freedom from fear to lose one's identity and thus is the precondition for dialogical openness and tolerance, for to possibly give up one's concepts and other ego-stabilizers is the prerequisite for growth and mutuality.

c) finally *thankfulness* which allows to accept the other or even the strange and unknown in an attitude of respect and even awe.

8. Truth is one, but under the conditions of space and time it can appear only in different and relative expressions. Christian faith depends on the claim that God has revealed himself for the whole of humankind in Jesus Christ. But as the revealed one (*revelatus*) he is at the same time and always the hidden one (*absconditus*). God becomes man, but man is not God. This sentence implies that the human cannot grasp fully the divine. God discloses himself in loving kindness, but not in grasped knowledge. This is to say that even in his revelation God remains a secret and mystery. He is and will always be the greater one.

9. Religions are not true by themselves, i.e. by their own claims. There are sound reasons internal to the Christian experience that truth may not be limited to one tradition but rather could or would appear everywhere: a) because God reveals himself also in creation and in a universal history of salvation, b) because many who do not call Christ by his name (they do not say „Lord, lord“) obviously do fulfil his will in many different ways according to the standards set forth by the gospel (cf. Mt 25). Whether this is the case or not can be ascertained case by case empirically on the basis of a proper historical hermeneutics.

10. The criterion for Christian theological insights is the revealed God who presents himself in Jesus Christ as unconditional love. This love sheds light on the hidden aspect of God or God as a mystery. Even if God remains greater, other and unknowable in his being he would not contradict himself—at least it is obvious that this is the Christian hope and faith. That is to say that his otherness does not and cannot contradict his love. In this way God is the *non-aliud*, the non-other (Nicolas of Cusa). This is the basis for the Christian trust that relative human knowledge can correspond at least in principle with the final truth even if this truth remains hidden and ungraspable.

11. We need to make a clear distinction between a rational and relative dimension of truth on the one hand, and a trans-rational and existential dimension of truth on the other hand. A rational truth falsifies its opposite, at least in as much as it is a contradictory contradiction. Existential truths however can refer to a deep-

er level where the opposite may be true as well and yet remain true, because God as coincidence of opposites is the truth himself. Such a seeming contradiction are the two opposed sentences that God on the one hand is historically completely revealed in Christ (the relative historical truth), yet on the other hand he is the one universal love which is not yet fully understood, recognized and experienced under any historical conditions (the necessary truth of reason).

12. This has consequences for the theological interpretation of the truth claims of other religions. Religions (including Christianity) are not true by themselves (or because they identify themselves as „religions“) but only in as much as God is present in them. What does that mean? It is, of course, metaphorical parlance. If God is present or not can be ascertained only by the consensus of a community which needs to test and give proof of respective claims. Any such claim is a claim under a specific, i.e. relative perspective view. That is to say it is dependent on a standpoint under historical conditions which expresses the claim of certainty in uncertain language and experience. In dialogue of such different and differing perspectives happens what we call the actual history of religions. Religious identification as process happens in these discourses, thus any religious identity shaped in cross-cultural contexts is in-formed by multiple sources coming historically from different traditions. It is a matter of conscious recognition to be aware of this fact. How this multiplicity is expressed psychologically and in terms of social organization may differ. Some may feel they are Hindu and Christian, some may feel they are Hindu as Christian, some may exclude the other option and say they are “only” this or that, but in referring to the other and representing their identity over against the other they have logically included the other already into their identity formation.

Here, we could speak of different degrees of identification. Since we said in the beginning identity as identification depends on time, we must be careful not to neglect this factor in interpreting the psychological aspect of identity formation: I have a mother tongue, and probably also a “mother-religion”. What is

added later is learned and cognized in different ways than the primary formation. It is added, interpreting, deepening, correcting etc. something which is already given. Even if I as a born Christian would convert to Hinduism (whatever conversion might mean) I would still be primarily shaped in this specific Christian form. The same holds true the other way round, of course. Thus, identities overlap, but they are not on the same level. This is why I do not claim to be a Christian *and* a Hindu, but a Christian who is formed, changed, hopefully deepened etc. by Hindu identity. But even if I would want to—I do not cease to be shaped by Christian identity primarily. Christianity is my religious mother-tongue, though I may want to express my experiences and beliefs much more clearly in Hindu language and symbols.

These different levels have a direct bearing on the question of identity and emotional aspects of religious identification. It is easier to build up multiple religious identity in intellectual and even social regards, it is much more difficult if not impossible to do so in emotional regard. What I have experienced in childhood once and for ever has shaped me in unique ways that cannot be erased in later adult life. In Bede Griffiths' case this was most touchingly expressed in his talk about God as the Mother. Here, at the end of his life, his experience of reality as "Mother" was a symbolic expression of his experience of tenderness and all-encompassing love precisely in the aftermath of the pain of the stroke. The Divine Mother expressed itself as the human mother and vice versa, and Bede relived an experience of "utter dependency" (Schleiermacher) in the realization of this mutually dependent love. To him, like for so many mystics, love is this mutuality of active and passive flow we experience in total surrender, expressed in the primary experience of motherly love.

13. The question of truth and the quest for salvation have to be distinguished. God's salvation does not depend on my religious identity or multiple construction of identities, for it cannot be conditioned by the human search for truth. In his house are many mansions, an insight which surpasses any possible religious cartography and identification processes. If in principle human

beings in other religions could never be in the realm of salvation they would need to be won over into one's own camp, i.e. one would need to proselytize them for ethical reasons because otherwise one would contribute to deprive them of the highest possible goal of life. And there would be no place for dialogue, but for a conversion to one's own system of cognition and life. That is to say the whole world would need to be converted to Christianity (or Islam or Hinduism or Buddhism) respectively, and this would lead to intolerance and bloodshed as history shows. This, however, cannot be the will of a loving God (not to mention the problem of fulfilment of people and peoples who have lived before the alleged oneness of humankind under one religious flag).