C.S. Lewis and Bede Griffiths:

Chief Companions

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Introduction

Dear Ron,

Bless you in your efforts to bring the good news to many in our day, including Father Bede’s good words. Sr. Pascaline Coff

(email: October 17 2015)

There is a thriving bumper crop industry that has grown up around C.S. Lewis, the Inklings, their friends and predecessors. The primary writings and commentaries on George MacDonald, G.K. Chesterton, J.R.R. Tolkien, Owen Barfield, Dorothy Sayers, Charles Williams and C.S. Lewis

pack and line library shelves and private home collections. In short, the Inklings tribe have many a keen follower that have devoted countless hours of research, writing, lecture series, courses, conferred degrees and published articles to furthering the importance of Lewis, the Inklings and family.

Bede Griffiths is not as well known within the Inklings clan, but he was, probably, the most important Christian contemplative Roman Catholic of the 20th century that engaged in Christian-Hindu dialogue. Griffiths was also committed to pondering the relationship, in a more positive

way, between religion and science. Those who are interested and committed to understanding the centrality of the contemplative path and the affinities between Christian-Indian contemplative ideas and practices have found in the life and writings of Bede Griffiths much wisdom, insight and nourishment. The New Camaldoli Monastery in Big Sur and Berkeley tend to be the repository of most of Griffiths’ writings.

There are few who have researched the close friendship, decades long correspondence and affinities between C.S. Lewis and Bede Griffiths. Lewis dedicated *Surprised by Joy* to Griffiths and he suggested that Griffiths was his chief companion on his journey to Christianity. Griffiths had much to say about Lewis in his initial autobiography, *The Golden String*. The many letters between Lewis and Griffiths have not been discussed in much depth and detail and the pure gold in the many letters by Griffiths to *The Canadian C.S. Journal* have not been mined.

What are some the reasons that Griffiths, for the most part, has been left out of serious research on Lewis? Lewis certainly held Griffiths in high regard as did Griffiths of Lewis. Lewis did have an interest in writers such as Kathleen Raine, Martin Lings, Evelyn Underhill, R. C. Zaehner and Thomas Merton. Each of these writers, in their different ways, raised the issue of Christianity and other religions---Bede Griffiths did much the same thing in a most sensitive way and manner. Most studies of Lewis have never, in any depth or detail, probed the relationship between Christianity and other religions. The friendship between Lewis and Griffiths opens portals for us into the contemplative interfaith direction as does Lewis’ friendships with Raine, Lings, Underhill and Merton.

Lewis and Griffiths were close in age. Lewis was born in 1898, Griffiths in 1906. When Lewis was a tutor to Griffiths in Oxford in the 1920s, there was only an eight year difference between them. Lewis died in 1963, Griffiths in 1993---Griffiths lived more than thirty years after Lewis died. Lewis and Griffiths journeyed from 1929-1932 to Christianity together---Lewis called Griffiths my “chief companion” on the trail to Christianity, hence the subtitle of this missive.

I was fortunate, in the late 1980s, to correspond with Bede Griffiths. I have included, in this book, his letters from his ashram in India to me and my reflections and commentary on them. These letters are now in the Griffiths archives in Berkeley California.

This booklet, for the most part, will explore an area that both Lewis and Griffiths keeners have ignored and missed---a long road friendship between two of the most innovative thinkers and writers of the 20th century. The hope, of course, by tale’s end, is that those interested in Lewis will have learned more about Lewis and those committed to the life and writings of Griffiths will know more about a guide that can be trusted in more ways than they might expect.

Amor Vincit Omnia

Ron Dart

Lent 2016

C.S. Lewis and Dom Bede Griffiths:

Chief Companions

Have you read anything by an American Trappist called

Thomas Merton? I’m at present on his *No Man is an*

*Island.* It is the best new spiritual reading I’ve met for a

long time. C.S. Lewis to Bede Griffiths

(December 20 1961)

I

Faith Affinities

My chief companion on this stage of the road was

Griffiths, with whom I kept up a copious correspondence.

Both now believed in God, and were ready to hear

more of Him from any source, Pagan or Christian.

C.S. Lewis

*Surprised by Joy* (chapter XV)

During this period, from 1929 when I left Oxford till

1932, when we were both undergoing a conversion to

Christian faith, I was probably nearer to Lewis than anyone

else. Bede Griffiths

“The Adventure of Faith”

I have had an interest in C.S. Lewis and Bede Griffiths for decades, and I have noticed, in a rather consistent way, that those who have written about Lewis and Griffiths rarely mention the friendship that existed between them. In fact, rare is the biography of Lewis (and there are many) that even mentions Griffiths and most who write about Griffiths simply ignore Lewis. There can be no doubt that Lewis and Griffiths had a lengthy and at times vexed friendship, but both men treasured their friendship that began when Griffiths studied with Lewis at Oxford in the late 1920s and continued until the death of Lewis in the autumn of 1963.

C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) dedicated *Surprised by Joy* to Dom Bede Griffiths (1906-1993), and in this evocative autobiography that was published in 1954, Lewis called Griffiths a “chief companion” on his road to Christianity. Bede Griffiths, in his equally compelling autobiography, *The Golden String* (1954), paid homage to Lewis as his teacher and mentor on his faith journey. Griffiths matriculated at Magdalen (Oxford) in 1929 and Lewis was his tutor. Griffiths became a Roman Catholic in 1931 and in 1936 became a Benedictine monk—when Lewis

turned to Christianity, Anglicanism became his home—this led to some tensions between Lewis and Griffiths in the early years of their ecclesial faith journeys. Needless to say, as both men aged and matured, they came to see that there were larger and more demanding issues to face than ecclesial quibbling.

Both Lewis and Griffiths, for different reasons, played significant roles on the stage of 20th century Christianity----Griffiths probed ever deeper the contemplative-wisdom paths and went the extra mile to integrate, when possible, Hindu and Christian thought, religion and science, contemplation and compassion. Lewis is, probably, much better known than Griffiths (given his diverse genres of writing), but very little has been written about the relationship between Lewis and Griffiths even though their friendship lasted until the death of Lewis in 1963. Griffiths was also a regular yet controversial letter contributor to *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* from 1982-1990 (some of the letters are quite lengthy). This booklet will draw from the many letters of Lewis about and to Griffiths, articles by Griffiths about Lewis, Griffiths’

nine letters to *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* and my two letter correspondence with Griffiths in the late 1980s. Hopefully, by missive’s end, much will come to light and be revealed about the friendship of Lewis and Griffiths as it mellowed and became like fine wine.

2

Lewis, Greeves and Griffiths:

Letters

In my mind (I cannot now answer for his, and he has told

his own story admirably in *The Golden String*) the perplexing

multiplicity of “religions” began to sort itself out.

C.S. Lewis

*Surprised by Joy* (chapter 15)

I think it was through him (Lewis) that I really discovered the

meaning of friendship….When we last met, a month before his

death, he reminded me that we had been friends for nearly forty

years. There are not many things in my life more precious to me

than that friendship. Bede Griffiths

“The Adventure of Faith”

There are more than 40 letters that Lewis sent to Griffiths (or letters in which Lewis mentions Griffiths) that can be found in *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis* (three volumes covering the years 1905-1963). I will briefly light down on 40 of the letters to highlight the points of convergence between Lewis and Griffiths and the places of tension in their decades long relationship. There are four letters by Lewis to his close friend, Arthur Greeves, that mention Griffiths, and to these I will briefly turn.

3

Lewis, Greeves

and Griffiths

Letter 1: October 17 1929

Lewis mentioned that he and Griffiths had done a walk “thro’ the grove” under the “brilliant moonlight”. It seems Griffiths had spent the night at Magdalen College and Lewis and Griffiths did another walk in the morning after breakfast. Griffiths then “set out to bicycle home to Newbury at 10”. Both men were very much feeling their way to Christianity at the time.

Letter 2: January 3 1930

Griffiths had sent Lewis a letter with a variety of questions and Lewis had, finally, completed a long reply on “philosophical subjects”. Lewis calls Griffiths his “friend and former pupil”. It seems Lewis had been slow in replying to the queries by Griffiths. There is a sense that at this period of time Griffiths (who was 24) and Lewis (who was 32) were still living in the teacher-student relationship even though Griffiths had graduated from Magdalen College.

Letter 3: February 10 1930

Lewis mentioned he had had a “splendid talk and splendid evening” with Owen Barfield, and Griffiths had spent the night at Magdalen “last week”. Lewis suggested that Griffiths “was all mucked up with naturalism, D. H. Lawrence, and so on, but has come right and is I do believe really one of us now”---The “one of us” does beg for further explanation. It seems at this period of time Griffiths was very much feeling his ascetic way and Lewis mentions this reality---Tobacco and meat were rarely used---hot baths had to go---“He is a magnificent looking creature—a dark Celt, but very big.” It is obvious at this point in the journey of Griffiths that he is trying to apply and put into practice ways and means of living a more authentic life. Lewis did not go down such a pathway when it came to the details of Griffiths’ asceticism.

Letter 4: June 22 1930

Lewis mentioned again that Griffiths had spent the night at Magdalen. Both men were keen on Barfield’s *Poetic Diction* (Griffiths having read it many times). Griffiths was, by this time, living in a communal cottage in the Cotswold area with Hugh Waterman and Martyn Skinner. Lewis was impressed by the fact that Griffiths, Waterman and Skinner were keen and eager to financially assist Barfield in the possible publication of a book on Coleridge—this quite impressed Lewis given the limited resources of the Cotswold three. Lewis, in his letter to Greeves, pondered both the appeal of the communal back to the land experiment and the liability of it. There can be no doubt, though, Griffiths was attempting (still being 24) to integrate thought and life in an organic rural manner---many have been such experiments but the Cotswold phase of Griffiths’ life did not last long (see Chapter 4 in *The Golden String---*The correspondence between Griffiths, Waterman and Skinner can be found in the Bodleian Library). There is a definite sense that Griffiths at this period of time is very much attempting to live a life

that embodies and reflects the romantic vision of Coleridge, Wordsworth and Southey in their more youthful “panisocratic” season.

Letters 5-6: October 1 1931 & October 18 1931

Although these two letters by Lewis to Greeves do not mention Griffiths, they are essential reading to understand Lewis’ decision to enter the Christian fold. Lewis did, much later (December 21 1941), in a letter to Griffiths, mention how Dyson and Tolkien were “the immediate human carriers” of his entrance into the Christian fold. Griffiths was already, at this time, on his Roman Catholic way, and it was his commitment to Roman Catholicism that led to some of the earliest tensions between Lewis and Griffiths.

The October 1929 --June 1930 letters by Lewis to Greeves (when Griffiths is mentioned) are important primers for the longer correspondence between Lewis and Griffiths. Sadly so, the many letters by Griffiths to Lewis are not as extant and available as the Lewis letters to Griffiths. I now turn to the 40 letters from Lewis to Griffiths.

4

C.S. Lewis and Bede Griffiths:

Letters by Lewis

Letter 1: April 4 1934

Griffiths had written a letter to Lewis and Lewis was replying to the questions Griffiths had sent his way. Griffiths was a Roman Catholic by 1934 and very much committed to the monastic way of life. The reply by Lewis makes it abundantly clear that Griffiths had asked Lewis some rather trying and delicate questions that could, if handled insensitively,

test their relationship. Lewis was 36 years of age at the time, Griffiths was 28. Lewis, in the letter, makes it clear that both he and Griffiths share a catholic taste for the best of natural theology: the notion that pantheism, paganism and idealism were signposts for their pilgrimages is held high. Lewis does make it clear that he finds the Neo-Scholasticism in the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions (as embodied in the thinking of Maritain and T.S. Eliot) rather troubling. Lewis confesses that he thinks both the Anglican and Roman Catholic way, at their modern worst, have much in common, although both share a classical heritage that Lewis applauds. Griffiths had asked Lewis about prayer and a few suggestions were offered by Lewis---Lewis then discussed, from a classical catholic position, his stance on those who have had no exposure to Christianity in this life----a most generous view that he draws from Dante and Aquinas.

It seems from the earlier letter of Griffiths to Lewis that he had pushed Lewis on the Anglican-Roman Catholic issue. Lewis made it clear he had no intention of entering an ecclesial debate with Griffiths about whose version of the church is truest and best. The letter concludes with potential ways of reading the New Testament and St. Paul. Lewis also sent Griffiths a poem he had written on prayer. Letter #1 is definitely one of Lewis’ longer letters to Griffiths, and, in many ways, the student has taken a different path than his teacher and a challenge and a trying weaning process is obviously afoot.

Letter # 2: December 26 1934

The obvious tensions that existed between Lewis and Griffiths are made more explicit in this much shorter letter. Lewis does not want their differences to be stumbling blocks for an ongoing friendship. Lewis takes the position that contentious and troubling questions do need to recede if they become points of consistent conflict in a relationship. It seems Lewis had made a visit to the monastery, hence he was both replying to disputed differences between himself and Griffiths and a note of gratefulness for the hospitality offered by the monastery.

Letter #3: January 8 1936

The publication of Lewis’s *The Pilgrim’s Regress* had left the press and Griffiths had done a review of it (*Pax: The Monthly Review of the Benedictines of Prinknash, Glos.*, no. 172 (February 1936). The review went after Lewis’ use of “Mother Kirk” as the guide and teacher of Lewis. Griffiths objected to the way Lewis used the term in a very un-Roman Catholic way. Obviously, Griffiths was continuing to push the Roman Catholic-Anglican differences—Lewis refused to take the bait. Both Griffiths and Lewis shared a certain affinity contra scholasticism (a way of doing theology and philosophy that lacked a deeper contemplative bent). The issue of Aristotle-Aquinas remained a contested issue. Again, Lewis asked Griffiths to “Remember me to the Prior”. There is, in many ways, a nimble graciousness to Lewis that Griffiths (in a pit bullish sort of way) is certainly lacking in these letters. Griffiths is only in his 30th year, though.

Letter # 4: February 20 1936

Lewis thanked Griffiths, in an ironic sort of way, for his review of *The Pilgrim’s Regress* but took Griffiths to task for his, yet again, Roman Catholic triumphalism. Lewis tends to be much firmer with Griffiths in this letter than in other letters---both the RC commitment to Thomas Aquinas and, more problematic, Griffiths’ head butting with Lewis on the Anglican-Roman Catholic differences (the latter being true, the former derivative and a compromise). The fact that Griffiths had been guided to the Roman Catholic tradition via Newman helps explain much, also, Newman contra Keble-Pusey taking the RC rather than the Anglican way.

The dominance of Neo-Scholasticism at Oxford and certain ways of reading Aristotle and Aquinas do need to be noted at this point in the correspondence.

Letter # 5: April 24 1936

This longer letter begins with a mea culpa by Lewis to Griffiths regarding the tone of his previous letter. Lewis could, at times, be rather excessively logical and miss the deeper intent of a probing question. This letter is quite valuable for a variety of intriguing reasons.

Lewis makes it clear he finds the *philosophia perennis* tradition of Steuch and Liebniz problematic----Griffiths, in time, would become a chief apologist for such a position. Lewis rejects the position for the simple reason that he is convinced the human mind cannot give a definitive answer to such ultimate questions. It seems that Griffiths had a tendency to pit the rational against the mystical (the latter being better than the former). Lewis makes it clear that “Again, we must believe that there is no real conflict between the Rational and the Mystical”. Both the rational and mystical are means used by Divine Grace to bring the eager and honest to deeper places on the faith journey. We can see at this point how Griffiths is inching in a direction that elevates one way of knowing (mystical) above a lower way of knowing (rational) in opposition to the modern scientific way of knowing that used the rational to trump the mystical. Lewis merely sees each way of knowing as legitimate and complimentary. There is much more said in this letter, but some real differences between Lewis and Griffiths are becoming obvious---this might have a great deal to do with both different temperaments and the fact Lewis taught in an academic context and Griffiths was in a monastery (with their different ways of knowing and being, although Lewis did challenge, in the academic context, the one dimensional rationalism of logical positivism).

Letter # 6: May 23 1936

This letter is quite telling. The RC-Anglican tension seems to have receded into the background, but the issue that has come to the fore is the way different ways of knowing are elevated. Lewis begins the letter with, “I am very surprised that your old anti-intellectualism should be so active”. It seems that Griffiths, the romantic, has lifted high the mystical and poetic way of knowing against the more logical and rational way of knowing---he has then suggested that this was how Jesus understood the faith journey. Lewis suggested to Griffiths that in Jesus we transcend the poet-philosopher dualism---such “types of mind” have their place but only that. This letter goes a long way in explaining how Lewis understood the role of reason, imagination, heart, affections and will in the unfolding of the human journey—much more subtle than Griffiths’ tendency to elevate one form of knowing against another, then bring Jesus, Christianity and religion into justify his poetic-mystical approach. We also see in Griffiths contra Lewis a tendency to denigrate the Greek way of knowing while elevating the Hebrew way of knowing----Lewis argues contra Griffiths that this is a serious misread of St. Paul and a distortion of the best of the Christian intellectual tradition. This letter is well worth the reading for a more detailed understanding of Lewis and Griffiths approach to the faith pilgrimage.

Letter # 7: July 28 1936

This is a fine letter in which Lewis ponders the role of poetry and religion, Griffiths’ varying attitudes to religion and poetry and, more to the apt and telling point, the role of mysticism and religion. Needless to say, Griffiths was moving further down the mystical pathway, but Lewis (although not opposed to mysticism) had questions to ask of Griffiths if and when mysticism came to define and dominate the faith journey---Lewis found this much too reactionary and reductionistic. There are obvious differences making themselves poignantly felt and expressed in these letters between Lewis and Griffiths. The older teacher-student relationship is giving way to two adults attempting to process and interpret a mature way of understanding and living their faith.

Letter # 8: June 1937

A year had passed in the correspondence between Lewis and Griffiths and this letter seems to indicate other tensions were afoot. Lewis begins the letter with “Your reply about the body leaves all my questions unanswered”. It seems a discussion between Lewis and Griffiths had emerged that focussed on the nature of the resurrected body that Griffiths did not articulate to Lewis’ satisfaction. Also, some reference, it seems, to the meaning of Divine Presence in the Eucharist took front stage. There are some interesting accusations by Griffiths contra Lewis in this letter that Lewis does not quite understand.

Letter #9: April 29 1938

Griffiths had published an initial autobiography of sorts of his journey to the RC tradition in *Pax* (nos. 198-199: April/May 1938)---he wondered if Lewis had read the articles and what he thought of them. Lewis dared to raise some troubling questions about omissions in the autobiography (Lewis was there as Griffiths was going through such phases) and misreads of certain philosophers and theologians. The fact that Lewis knew Griffiths in his transition season meant that Lewis remembered many a significant conversation that did not find their way into the written text—Lewis wondered why----Lewis knew the oral tradition that never made it into the text. Needless to say, by 1938, WWII seemed imminent and Lewis commented on the role peace played in shaping a more predictable life and his memories of WW I. The letter concludes with “About our differences”. The obvious ecclesial, temperamental and vocational pathways were widening between the two men and Lewis, yet again, urged a sort of charitable restraint about going to places that yielded little or no fruit.

Letter # 10: October 5 1938

The conversation, initially, dealt with the role of reason in proving the existence of God and immortality. Lewis made it clear that reason, like other faculties, points but cannot, in a scientific sense, prove conclusively, such realities. The larger issues, in the letter, deal with war, pacifism and church reunion. Lewis makes it clear that he thinks the Bible, Augustine and Church Tradition can justify, under certain conditions, going to war---Lewis was no pacifist. In fact, his lecture to the Oxford Pacifist Society in 1940, “Why I Am Not a Pacifist”, spelled out his position in a clear manner. Lewis also, somewhat later, wrote a short paper on “Christian Reunion”----both essays can be found in *Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces* (2000).

Letter # 11: May 8 1939

The shift in the thinking of Griffiths towards the RC-Anglican tensions seems to have given way towards, by 1939, of thoughts about re-union. Lewis made it clear, as he had in other ways, he thought re-union was quite possible at interpersonal levels but at a formal and material level (even though he was convinced the idea was good and needful) he doubted the reality. Lewis did state, though, “But it is not, I feel sure, my vocation to discuss reunion”. There can be no doubt, though, he thought the unity of the church needful and necessary---Griffiths and Lewis, by 1939, seem to have been passed the RC-Anglican horn butting phase and were thinking more about ecclesial union----war can bring certain issues to the fore in a way peace does not. The rest of the letter Lewis discussed George Eliot (who Griffiths was drawn to) and, even more so, the mystical poetry of Coventry Patmore (who Lewis had the highest regard for). The fact WWII was nearing meant Lewis pondered yet further such a reality----but “I haven’t joined the Territorials”.

Letter # 12: January 17 1940

Bede had, it seems, written to Lewis about various thinkers who have used Plato as a means of denigrating the body and elevating the spirit. Lewis makes the distinction in the Greek between “sarx” (which can mean the unregenerate part of the physical world) and “soma” (which St. Paul usually means the physical and material part of life in a positive sense). It is not, therefore, a case of matter being evil and spirit good, but much more about world and matter as having two aspects to it. Lewis unpacks, in further detail, the nuanced and complex way the Greeks understood matter in a way that it cannot be reduced to something negative. Lewis then mentions he has read Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection* (which Griffiths had asked about). More works of literature are discussed and a brief discussion of fascism and communism. Lewis mentioned that it is the good in them that attracts, but once the bait is taken, the deeper negative and destructive aspects of these ideologies emerge----or, as Lewis, rightly states, *Diabolus simius Dei* (the devil is the ape of God).

Letter # 13: April 16 1940

Lewis begins the letter by congratulating Bede on becoming a priest (he was ordained March 9 1940). The letter continues with a commentary on Melchisedech (and his symbolic significance), a fuller discussion of art and literature, the reasons Lewis has problems with the use of the

language of “spiritual” as used by Arnold and Croce, then a pondering of how to pray, in wartime, for the enemy, recognizing that, in certain conditions, each and all of us could be tempted to go down such a path. ”You and I are not, at bottom, so different from these ghastly creatures” (referring to Hitler and Stalin). The letter mentioned that Lewis had been reading Julian of Norwich (“A dangerous book, clearly…”). Lewis, needless to say, was quite delighted by Julian and her

*Revelations of Divine Love.* The letter is brought to an end by Lewis letting Griffiths know he is sending him his newest book, *The Problem of Pain*.

Letter # 14: July 16 1940

This letter is, yet again a reply by Lewis to a letter sent from Griffiths in response to an article Lewis did on Aristotle, contemplation and leisure.

Lewis pointed out in his article, “Our English Syllabus”, that Milton had been right in many of his notions of the purpose of education, but he was lacking in the classical notion of education as fitting the educated for contemplation. Lewis recognized, though, that the Greek notion of contemplation as the end of education was built on the backs of slaves and, equally worrisome, it could become a narcissistic justification for laziness. What, Lewis asked, is the balance between work and contemplation, the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*? Such questions would have had utmost significance for Griffiths as a priest and monk. The war, needless to say, is in the background of these letters---some interesting comments of the perennial relevance of the

Psalms and Lewis’ enjoyment of them.

Letter # 15: December 21 1941

Griffiths had been reading Charles Williams and Lewis was delighted by this. Lewis suggested other (and better books Williams had written) and a series of lectures Williams had given on Milton at Oxford. Lewis held Williams in the highest esteem. Lewis mentioned that the Inklings were a combination of Anglicans and Roman Catholics (your church) and they met regularly to talk literature and much else. The oft quoted Lewis comment about friendship can be found in this letter: “Is any pleasure on earth as great as a circle of Christian friends by a good fire?” The letter then ponders various notions of the atonement, and Lewis makes it clear there are various reads and interpretations of the atonement—he, obviously, was no Calvinist. The letter is brought to an end with a few comments on *In Memoriam*. Lewis had been asked by BBC to give a series of public lectures, and he mentioned the times/dates of the lectures. There can be no doubt that at this period of English history Lewis was emerging as a prominent public intellectual---not only was he a distinguished Oxford don, he was also given national attention by his BBC wartime lectures. It should be noted, also, that through the work of Stella Aldwinckle at Oxford, Lewis had taken a significant leadership role in the newly founded “Socratic Club”.

Letter # 16: October 13 1942

A year had almost passed since the previous letter of Lewis to Griffiths. Lewis made it clear that he was rather surprised that there was “a consensus of theologians in favour of the Anselmic theory” of the atonement. Lewis did not think such a position could be found, in any consistent way, in the New Testament or the Fathers. Obviously, Lewis is tracking a different path in his read of the atonement in both the New Testament and the Fathers of the Church---Anselm is not his guide. Lewis then suggests that “*War & Peace* is in my opinion the best novel---the only one which makes a novel really comparable to epic”. The fact that Lewis had become a significant public intellectual by the autumn of 1942 meant the public-private tension was something he had to live through---Griffiths seems to have suggested he “retire into private life”—perhaps a monastic way, but not for Lewis.

Letter # 17: May 26 1943

This short letter, to Griffiths, has much packed into it as does, for the most part, most of the letters of Lewis to Griffiths. Griffiths had had published a review of Hutton’s *Catholicism and English Literature* (*Pax*:

Spring 1943) and Lewis was more than impressed by the review which suggested that literature need not be judged by how it conforms to Roman Catholic thought—Lewis even suggested Griffiths enlarge his review into an article. There followed a discussion of Shakespeare, Lewis’ *Perelandra* and *Preface to Paradise Lost*—there is an obvious sense in which Lewis is urging Griffiths to approach the reading of literature in a more nimble and flexible manner (not always reducing it to some theological or philosophical themes). I was rather surprised that Griffiths had introduced Lewis to Aelrid of Rievaulx and his classic text on friendship, *On Spiritual Friendship*.

The fact that Lewis had published *The Allegory of Love* in 1936, *The Problem of Pain* in 1940, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* and *The Screwtape Letters* in 1942, *Perelandra* in 1943 and, in the midst of the war, done a series of BBC lectures meant he had become quite busy---Griffiths’ former teacher had become, in some ways, the teacher and mentor to the English people by the 1940s. Griffiths certainly did not have the same public profile, but Lewis was always there to support and encourage Griffiths in his ongoing journey and a broadening out of his understanding of catholicity in the areas of theology, exegesis, philosophy, literature, public responsibility, culture and the larger faith journey---the broader world was, in some sense, becoming Lewis’ parish and, in time, Griffiths would follow such an expansive lead. But, in 1943, Griffiths was still rather insulated and enclosed.

Letter # 18: May 25 1944

The letters throughout the war between Lewis and Griffiths tended to be more of an annual event. Lewis and Griffiths had met and Lewis said, “I too was delighted with our meeting”. Griffiths, increasingly so, had problems with the lack of literary discipline in the writings of Charles Williams—Lewis agreed with Griffiths’ assessment of Williams, but Lewis did think that Williams understanding of love of which “he radiates more than any man I know” covered, in some ways, a multitude of theological gaffs in his novels. Lewis was writing *The Great Divorce* at this time and he quoted amply from, his master, George MacDonald in his letter to Griffiths.

Letter # 19: May 10 1945

V-Day had been announced May 8 1945----most were in an elated mood—most were abundantly grateful---the letter by Lewis is no different. Lewis mentioned he had been reading Soloviev (weighing judiciously his writings as he did most literature). The topic soon turned to nature and the new creation. Griffiths and Lewis seemed to be on the same page in terms of what a resurrected and heighted view of reality might look like----Lewis was thinking through all this in *The Great Divorce*. The issue was, of course, the New Creation and Lewis urged Griffiths to go forward with his ideas. “I hope you will go on with your own idea of a book on the New Creation”. We can see that by 1945 Griffiths is very much pondering the ultimate end towards which our penultimate decisions lead us to or away from.

Charles Williams took seriously ill May 10 and died on May 15---this was a shock and blow to Lewis (who had immense admiration for Williams). It was Williams that brought Lewis and T.S. Eliot together shortly before his death (Lewis/Inklings had sparred with Eliot for more than two decades)—gratefully so, the final decade plus of their lives they became close friends.

Letter # 20: December 20 1946

Griffiths had written a letter to Lewis about feeling “disillusioned” and he wondered if Lewis felt the same way. Lewis, in reply, mentioned that his more personal historic realist position (mother dying young, difficulties at school, WWII) made him less apt to begin from an idealist position (from which, when reality, disappointments and tragedy strikes) that often leads to cynicism and disappointment. Lewis quoted from Lucretius and mentioned that “I still think the argument from design the weakest possible ground for Theism”. The euphoria of the war was over, but more demanding challenges lay ahead. Griffiths season of life at Prinknash Abbey (a short distance from Oxford as the bird flies) was nearing an end (1931-1947). Lewis concluded the letter with these words: “As about the distant, so about the future. It is very dark: but there’s usually light enough for the next step or so”.

Letter # 21: April 14 1947

Griffiths had been appointed the new prior of St. Michael’s Abbey in Farnborough and installed April 29 1947---Lewis wrote to congratulate him on his new position. This letter is, in many ways, a parting of the paths manifesto by Lewis. Lewis and Griffiths had both agreed, as they moved from a secular to religious perspective in the late 1920s that there were only two options: Christianity and Hinduism. This letter by Lewis makes it clear why he prefers classical thought and myth to Hinduism (how deeply has he really delved into the more complicated world of Hinduism?). There is no doubt that Griffiths, much more than Lewis, is about to embark on the Indian-Hindu trail and be a leading Christian contemplative in Christian-Hindu dialogue from a practical and sophisticated level. Griffiths will, in time, go to places Lewis never did in probing the points of concord and discord between Christianity and Hinduism. Lewis brought the letter to a close by saying, “I no longer want to read Eastern books: except good non-religious philosophers like Confucius”. This statement is, in an important sense, a flaw and shortcoming in Lewis’ thinking—he certainly, if he was truly interested in a more sophisticated understanding of Hinduism could have, at Oxford, heeded the many mature insights of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford from 1936-1952). Radhakrishnan was to become, after leaving Oxford in 1952, the first Vice President of India from 1952-1962 and the second President of India from 1962-1967. Needless to say, Radhakrishnan’s multilayered read of Hinduism could have taught Lewis much and, equally so, his public vision of Hinduism and Indian thought and culture could have broadened Griffiths’ more contemplative bent and read of Hinduism. There is no doubt, though, Letter #21 is a must read in the emerging differences and priorities between Lewis and Bede Griffiths.

The fact that Lewis had published so many books and booklets from a variety of perspectives, had been on BBC regularly and become, in many ways, the point person for the Oxford Socratic Club meant he had very much become a leading Christian public intellectual in a context in which Christianity was being questioned, doubted and undermined. Lewis had earned his stripes and *Time: The Weekly Newsmagazine*

did a special article on him called “Oxford’s C.S. Lewis: His heresy: Christianity (September 9 1947)---Lewis’ face (with some telling graphics) was on the front cover of *Time.* There is no doubt with *Time* doing their lead article on Lewis, the entry of Lewis into the United States had begun.

Letter # 22: March 25 1948

This letter touches on the differences between “Magic” and “Miracle”, the former being more about formulas, techniques and control, the latter about mystery and uncertainty. It is obvious that Griffiths had been nudging Lewis more about the Orient beyond his rather curt dismissal of the previous letter. A much more thoughtful response steps forth in this letter. “About the East, and the need for the East in Christendom (to make a full man, the middle wall of the partition being cast down) I agree. Only I would make a trichotomy not a dichotomy for I take the Chinese ethos to be as least as different from the Indian as either is from the Western”. Griffiths is, obviously, at this phase of his life, coming into a vocational pathway in India, but Lewis is less inclined to reduce the comparative religion dialogue to Christianity-Hinduism. Griffiths seems to be very much unpacking earlier seed thoughts: Christianity and Hinduism—which and why?

Letter # 23: September 29 1948

This letter returns again to Indian contemplative thought. Griffiths seems to be having doubts about certain forms of Indian philosophical thought in their understanding of unity—Lewis concurs with him. The lover-loved metaphor which is so central to Christian mysticism tends to become eclipsed within Vedantic Hinduism----this was both a problem for Lewis and Griffiths. The issue of the role of matter and the new creation was also central to such a correspondence. Lewis states once again that he finds the Chinese position more compelling, particularly the thinking of Confucius---he highlights some interesting pointers from Confucius to St. Paul. Again, it is rather clear that Griffiths is inching towards a more serious commitment to the Indian-Hindu way, whereas this is a direction that does not really hold or interest Lewis—the Chinese Confucian way tends to interest him much more.

It is worth noting that Thomas Merton’s bumper crop autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain,* was published in 1948---there was a definite RC triumphalism in *The Seven Storey Mountain*. Griffiths had serious questions about the autobiography and its triumphalism—he had certainly moved a long way from his much younger RC triumphalism in his tensions and clashes with Lewis. Both Lewis and Griffiths both realized, post WW II, there were much larger issues to face than which form of the mother church tradition was the truest, best and wisest. Merton, in time, would move into pondering the larger interfaith contemplative issues.

Letter # 24: June 27 1949

It seems that Lewis and Griffiths in their early years of the faith journey thought they were part of an emerging Christian Renaissance---the times have made it clear that there were greater forces at work opposing Christianity than anticipated or expected---a Christian Renaissance was but a youthful illusion. Yes, Lewis mentions, there are conversions occurring (letters reveal this to him), but Lewis warns against the often superficial mass conversion mentality (in the Middle Ages past and, by implication, the revival meetings of his time). Lewis mentioned that Barfield had been baptized the previous week.

Letter # 25: July 5 1949

This letter briefly touches on background worldviews (past and present that have an impact on faith interpretations) and, equally important, a visit by Gabriel Marcel to the Oxford Socratic Club (when he spoke to the Club on February 18 1948). Lewis had this to say about Marcel:

”I heard Marcel lecture in Oxford, talked to him, and was much more impressed with his goodness than with his intelligence. It is definitely not my philosophy”.

Letter # 26: April 9 1950

Griffiths had published an article, “Catholicism Today” in *Pax* (Spring 1950) which Lewis, for the most part, gave a positive nod to, although he did question Griffiths’ too generous view of natural law. The dialogue was never one of grace infusing natural law---it was always much more about the complex nature of the human condition and human nature. Lewis was more inclined to take the position that natural law illuminated in the human soul what we long to be but often, by decisions made, undermine our deepest longings. WE could say that Griffiths had a more sunny view of natural law and human longings, whereas Lewis saw clouds and sun mottled and mixed. Lewis had, of course touched on the perennial significance of natural law in his earlier publications, *Mere Christianity* and *The Abolition of Man.* Lewis was, in many ways, attempting to articulate a middle way between a more positive view of natural law (that Griffiths seemed to be leaning towards) and a more Lutheran-Calvinist notion in which natural law was viewed in a less admirable way and manner.

The remainder of the letter touches on Lewis’ reading of Sartre, a lecture he did on Sartre for the Socratic Club (November 3 1947) and some of his questions about existentialism. Lewis raises some pertinent points about the problems raised when certain thinkers attempt to claim Augustine and Aquinas as existentialists. Again, Marcel is mentioned, and placed in a similar tribe as Heraclitus and Martin Buber, the dilemma being a reducing of thought to the realm of existential encounter and experience.

Letter # 27: June 24 1950

This is a brief letter----Griffiths was visiting Oxford and the two men arranged to do a lunch together. The Korean War began June 25 1950.

Letter # 28: November 13 1950

There is a brief discussion about how authentic and inauthentic moral fruit can seem the same, but time reveals the differences. Lewis then raises questions about the liability of Luther and the difficulties of reunion between the Anglican tradition and German Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism given the fact most on the Continent simply do not understand the Anglican way. The short letter ends with Lewis holding *The Imitation of Christ* higher than *The Scale of Perfection*, but he is quick to admit he often reverses such leanings.

Letter # 29: April 23 1951

Griffiths time at Farnborough Abbey (south of Oxford) was nearing an end---he was about to head to Pluscarden Abbey in northern Scotland (near Inverness) in 1951.

Griffiths had sent Lewis a copy of one of De Lubac’s tomes, and Lewis mentioned he had not yet had time to take a deeper dive. He did mention, though, that Wordsworth’s *Prelude* and Virgil’s *Aenid* were close to his soul. Griffiths, it seems, had been massaging the natural-supernatural dilemma further. Lewis had this to say: The tension you speak of (if it is a tension) between doing full and generous justice to the Natural while also paying unconditional and humble obedience to the Supernatural is to me an absolute key position”. Lewis makes it clear he is suspicious of those who overplay the one side or the other---he further discusses why the natural is subordinate to the supernatural and the implications of absolutizing the natural. Griffiths was, at the time, thinking about evolution and Lewis concluded the letter by saying, “As to Man being in evolution, I agree, though I would rather say in process of being created”.

Letter # 30: May 28 1952

Griffiths became novice master at Pluscarden Abbey in Scotland (far from the genteel monastic life near Oxford and environs) on December 21 1951—Lewis was now 54 years of age and Griffiths 46—both men were immersed in their unfolding vocations, Lewis at Oxford, Griffiths now in his third Benedictine Abbey.

Lewis mentions the many letters he receives from women, then points out some of Pascal’s clashes with the Bible, the problems with the Cosmological argument and his appreciative reading of Lorenz’s *King Solomon’s Ring: New Light on Animal Ways*---Lorenz on birds and wolves quite interested Lewis. There was some mention of Griffiths’ old friend Skinner and their agreement about J. Austen as “a sound moralist”.

Letter # 31: January 16 1954

More than a year had elapsed and passed since Lewis and Griffiths had been in touch. Griffiths had recently published an article, “The Incarnation and the East” in *Commonweal* (December 25 1953)---Lewis was fully on board with the content of the article and the conclusions that Griffiths had reached. The article does, also, make it clear that Griffiths was, increasingly so, leaning eastward and to India---his time as novice master at Pluscarden Abbey was nearing an end, India was now before him. This letter reveals a Lewis much more attuned to and alert to the complex nature of the East: “Of course we must beware of thinking of the East as if it were homogenous. I suppose the Indian and the Chinese ethos are as alien to each other as either is to us”. Lewis was on the verge in January 1954 of leaving Oxford for Cambridge—a special chair in Medieval and Renaissance Studies had been created at Cambridge and Lewis was soon to be the fine fit for the position.

Letter # 32: January 30 1954

This letter touches on some important characters in novels of Dickens and a critique of the way Thackeray portrays goodness—obviously Griffiths and Lewis had been pondering how certain authors portray the notion of goodness----some poignant insights on the Renaissance, Machiavelli, Middles Ages and their understanding of Herod as evil---much is said in this short letter about good and evil as worked out in a variety of texts.

Letter # 33: April 22 1954

Lewis was still at Magdalen College Oxford at the time but a few letters by Lewis to Griffiths were strung together in 1954. Lewis suggests that modern American poetry tends to be better than English poetry. “Lee Masters, Frost and Robinson Jeffers all really have something to say and some real art”. Lewis then mentions that the menace of Logical Positivism is not spent and that Christian apologetics is in a dire state. “At the Socratic (Club) the enemy often wipe the floor with us”. 1954 was a significant year for Bede Griffiths: *The Golden String* was about to be published and Lewis had this to say by way of ending the letter: “Of course I look forward very much to your Confession and will take all that’s coming to me about myself”.

Letter #34: November 5 1954

Lewis mentions that each novel he reads by Dickens he finds the best, but *Bleak House* tends to top the list for him—a brief discussion on the differences between joy, pleasure and amusement clarifies how joy, when understood aright, leads the soul to the proper end and destination.

Letter # 35: February 8 1956

This was a period of literary bounty for both Lewis and Griffiths. Lewis was about to send Griffiths his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy,* which he had dedicated to Griffiths. The letters reflect on their years at Magdalen in Oxford—Lewis was, at the time, at Magdalene in Cambridge and Griffiths had left for India in 1955 (after publishing his autobiography) in search of the other half of his soul. Griffiths was, with Father Benedict Alapatt in Kengeri Bangalore from 1955-1958, but he found the form of Christian monastic life much too western.

The letter is a longer one and much is pondered in it about the journey of life, Griffiths’ newest book in seedling form, *Christian Ashram: Essays towards a Christian-Hindu Dialogue* or *Christ in India* when published in the USA. Lewis thought it better if Griffiths emerging and in early draft form book would be better served by being published by Penguin (“they reach a larger audience”), and he suggested “it is just the things for you to do”. Lewis is quite encouraging of the “dangerous ground” Griffiths is on, and he suggests that “One often wonders how different the content of our faith will look when we see it in the total context”. Needless to say, Lewis and Griffiths have come a long way from the 1930s when horns were being butted about which ecclesial form of Christianity was the best. The letter by Lewis to Griffiths is quite revealing about Lewis’ more expansive catholicity and insights about the revealed truths of other religions when seen from the perspective of the infinite. This is a letter worth many a reread. Lewis still had questions about Hinduism, and the letter ended with Lewis commenting on how the crusades (he was reading books about them) destroyed “the old civilisation of the Eastern Mediterranean by the Turkish barbarians from the East and the Frankish barbarians from the West”---Islamic and Christian barbarianism had the same results---civilization and culture were destroyed—as mentioned above, this is one of Lewis’ finer letters to Griffiths.

Letter # 36: September 24 1957

Lewis was married to Joy Davidman at the time (who had briefly recovered from another bout of cancer)—Lewis comments on the complex dilemma of the lived reality in the letter and his journey through various phases of understanding the deeper meaning of love

(agape, philia, eros). It seems Lewis was also going through various health problems, also. Lewis brought the brief letter to a close by saying, “I can say that you (Griffiths) are a man of sense and honesty. Some at Magdalene have pleasant memories of your one visit here”.

Griffiths joined a Belgian monk, Father Francis Acharya, after 1958, to start a more indigenous form of Christian contemplative and ascetic life in India. Mountain of the Cross Ashram in Kerala became their home, a Syriac Rite liturgy their form of worship, and both men wore saffron robes, the sign and mark of an Indian sannyasi. There is no doubt that by 1958 and after, Griffiths was very much living into his Christian-Indian road vocation. It was after 1958 that Griffiths made a trip to the USA to lecture on his experiences and reflections on them. The fuller unfolding of Griffiths faith and contemplative journey would occur after Lewis’s death in the late autumn of 1963.

Letter # 37: April 30 1959

Joy Davidman has “gone on from strength to strength”---she limps and walks with a stick but there is no doubt she has become near and dear to Lewis---Lewis continues to suffer from his bone trouble. Griffiths had sent Lewis *Christian Ashram* (his book in progress). Lewis commented on the differences, at root and core, between modern materialism-empiricism-logical positivism and various forms of pagan religiosity (including Indian and Hindu thought)---the latter is closer to Christianity than the former. The fact that Joy Davidman was a Jewess took Lewis into a discussion of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

Davidman suggested that many who read the Hebrew canon miss much of the humour in it---a further reflection by Lewis on the Unjust Steward completes the longer brief.

Letter #38: December 3 1961

Lewis and Griffiths had not corresponded for more than two years. Joy Davidman had died in July of 1961 and Lewis mentioned this to Griffiths—Lewis’s health continues to wane. Lewis ponders with Griffiths the ongoing journey of how, as a Christian, the interaction with the “higher Paganisms” should take place. There is a sense in which Lewis’ parochial Britishness comes through when he asks Griffiths, “what is an ashram or astram?” Lewis urged Griffiths, if possible, not to write at Christmas as his correspondence is voluminous. Then, a few thoughts on Lewis and mourning: “I am learning a great deal. Grief is not, as I thought, a state but a process: like a walk in a winding valley which gives you a new landscape every few miles”.

Letter # 39: December 20 1961

Lewis ponders the complex and subtle nature sin much of the letter, the significance and meaning for him of the death of Joy (and, interestingly enough, a reflection of sexual desire at his age). The deeper discussion is about “Romantic Pantheism (a sort of regarding Nature as Divine)”. It seems Lewis and Griffiths tend to see Nature in a vastly different way as Griffiths is in the early process of attempting to make sense of the relationship between Nature and Science, Nature and Humanity. Lewis makes it abundantly clear that the act of romanticizing Nature ignores the fact it is both creaturely and fallen (just like humanity), hence to elevate it to too high a level is to misread Nature.

There is a further discussion of the crusades and Christian violence (beginning with tendencies in the early disciples). Such a discussion leads to the subtle nature of those committed to the faith journey and their use of religion to serve evil and destructive ends---some poignant and pressing insights in this letter. There is a further reflection on the “pearls before swine” and “Unjust Steward” parables.

Lewis stares that “I am rather seriously ill”---his growing prostrate problem had damaged his kidneys, blood and heart. The letter ends with laudatory pointers to Thomas Merton: “Have you read anything by an American Trappist called Thomas Merton? I’m at present on his *No Man is an Island*. It’s the best new spiritual reading I’ve met for a long time”.

Letter # 40: August 4 1962

Lewis’ health has continued to deteriorate and his energy has waned. Griffiths at the time was quite involved, being in India and attempting to be sensitive to the Indian tradition, in living into a Syriac liturgical tradition and rite. Although Lewis mentions how he appreciates Griffiths wide ranging interests, he admits, he has never been overly concerned with the cult or liturgical life—the amount of time Griffiths was putting into cult-liturgy-Syriac was simply not something that held or interested Lewis. “Indeed, for the laity I sometimes wonder if an interest in liturgiology is not rather a snare. Some people talk as if it were itself the Christian faith”---the same, I suspect, could be said of certain clerics.

The letter was brought to a close with a further consideration of Christian-Hindu dialogue, rival conceptions of God and, obviously, Griffiths’ ever deeper probes into an approach to indigenize Christianity into India. There seemed to be some possibility that Griffiths might visit England and Lewis’ final words to Griffiths were, “I am delighted to hear that there is some chance of seeing you in England again”----needless to say, the two men met again a few weeks before Lewis’ death . Lewis died on November 22 1963, the same day J.F. Kennedy was assassinated and, ironically enough, the same day Aldous Huxley died. Griffiths walked, in many ways, a middle path between Lewis and Huxley.

Lewis never did live to see and read the publication of Griffiths’ *Christian Ashram: Essays towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue* (1966), although he warmly supported the insights, questions and quest that Griffiths was on. The men, by the end of Lewis’ life, had a deep respect and affinity for one another that could not be broken by differences of perspective or vocation. Lewis would probably have found Griffiths’ earlier book, *India and the Sacrament* (1964) of some interest, but the book was published in India and there is no record of Griffiths corresponding with Lewis as this book was in the process of being published.

Lewis was 65 years of age when he died in 1963 and Griffiths was 57 years old. Lewis had more than made his mark in a variety of ways (and still does) and Griffiths (now in India) was about to wax and embark on his more mature vocation. If Lewis had lived longer, the correspondence between the two men would have been most fruitful and valuable. Lewis certainly would have learned much about Hinduism and Indian thought and life at a deeper and more substantive level, and Griffiths’ interaction with Lewis would have entered a new phase. But, such a dialogue was not to be. We can, though, speculate on what such dialogue might have transformed into, but such is not the purpose of this booklet.

5

Griffiths and Lewis:

Two Articles

Griffiths wrote two articles Lewis (one longer and the other much shorter). The longer article was published in *C.S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table and other Reminiscences* (edited by James Como and published in 1979). The article by Griffiths is called “The Adventure of Faith”. The much shorter article was published in *We Remember C.S. Lewis: Essays and Memories* (edited by David Graham and published in 2001). The essay by Griffiths was called “Forty Years’ Perspective”. “The Adventure of Faith” is a much fuller and nuanced article in comparison to “Forty Years’ Perspective”.

“The Adventure of Faith” is a richly nuanced article in which Griffiths tracks his early journey with Lewis, their points of affinity and difference, then an affirmative conclusion about the significant role Lewis played in his life as a friend. Griffiths states that “from 1929 when I left Oxford till 1932, when we were both undergoing a conversion to Christian faith, I was probably nearer to Lewis than anyone else. He has described in *Surprised by Joy* how he ‘kept up a copious correspondence’ with me at this time, and for these three years we were both following the same path”. The break between Lewis and Griffiths came in 1932 when Griffiths became a Roman Catholic. It seems that Griffiths kept pushing Lewis to make the transition with him, but Lewis resisted such a decision. The tug and pull between Lewis and Griffiths on the Anglican-Roman Catholic ecclesial pathway lead to, initially, some tensions, then, in time, other topics discussed.

Griffiths mentioned, again and again, in the article, how the romantic (mythic-imaginative) and rationalist (abstract-logical) aspects of Lewis dwelt in tension—for the most part, Griffiths only knew the rationalist part of Lewis, and it was not until Lewis had died that Griffiths came to understand a more complex and sophisticated Lewis. It is significant, though, to note that Lewis, in the 1920s, gave Griffiths copies of both *Dymer* (a decidedly romantic poem in which Lewis used the pen name, Clive Hamilton) and Lewis’ critique of Barfield-Steiner, *Summa Metaphysica contra Anthroposophos*. The Lewis-Barfield friendship and

‘great war’ certainly had an impact on Griffiths, and when Griffiths read Barfield’s *Poetic Diction*, his understanding of language took a definte turn. Griffiths further commented in his essay how he thought Lewis, perhaps, veered too far from the personal in his read of poetry, hence the position he took in the Lewis-Tillyard debate---Griffiths thought Tillyard was more sensitive and alert to the relationship between poet and poetry.

There are substantive parts of the essay in which Griffiths begged to differ with Lewis, and, to a significant degree, Griffiths is most insightful in his probes. Griffiths suggested that Lewis had a limited and problematic notion of the church (quite protestant, he thought), liturgy, a limited understanding of the Fathers, excessively reacted to the Neo-Thomism of the time and the time tried Christian mystical way. There is some truth in Griffiths’ legitimate questions about Lewis, but this never dimmed his high regard and respect for Lewis. In fact, Griffiths brought to an end “The Adventure of Faith” with these touching, tender and telling words: ‘When we last met, a month before his death, he reminded me that we had been friends for nearly forty years. There are not many things in my life more precious to me than that friendship’.

“Forty Years’ Perspective” in *We Remember C.S. Lewis: Essays and Memories* (2001) is a much shorter article by Griffiths on Lewis, and the missive was drawn from an earlier article that had been published in *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal.* Both Lewis and Griffiths had gone into the west by 2001, but their friendship lingered through many letters and articles by Griffiths about Lewis. “Forty Years’ Perspective” is only a few pages and it covers five points: 1) Would Lewis have appreciated all the interest in his personal life that had come to occupy the attention of many? Griffiths agreed with Muriel Jones that he probably would have found the excessive interest in his private and personal life pointless. But, Griffiths added, that though Lewis might have shunned such tendencies, the writers life can and does shed light on the written text. Griffiths does nod to Tillyard once again in his notion of the life of the writer and the artistic vision of the writer. 2) There were those like Norman Bradshaw that found Lewis aloof as a tutor, but this was not the case with Griffiths---Griffiths mentioned that many a moment and day Lewis and he talked long into the night---perhaps, Griffiths suggested, the issue might be more a problem of Bradshaw than Lewis.

3) There were those who accussed Lewis as having a “dark imagination” and “obsessed with devils and hell”. Griffiths suggested that Lewis had an expansive imagination and those who think deep, broad and high cannot avoid the darker aspects of the lived journey. There was, obviously, much more to Lewis than he was accused of---Griffiths did think Lewis was limited by his more Biblical Christianity (not sure Griffiths truly understands Lewis on this point) and he agreed with Muriel Jones that Lewis (and there is some truth to this) was too attached to a ‘conservative, individualist Protestant tradition”. 4) There were others who suggested Lewis’ approach to Christianity and faith “hems us in” and “corners us”---Griffiths merely pointed out that, in a sense, our ego does need being hemmed in and cornered so that something deeper will emerge and arise from the ashes. Much hinges, of course, on what part of us is being hemmed in and cornered. 5) Griffiths thought that in Lewis’ Narnia stories a more complex read of Lewis’ theology could be better felt and known and to these those interested in Lewis should turn.

“Forty Years’ Perspective”, as noted above, was published in *The Canadian C.S. Journal* and, as such, Griffiths was responding to a variety of writers who he thought were misreading Lewis. Most of the many letters that Griffiths contributed to *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* were written from Griffiths’ ashram in India. The connection between Lewis and Griffiths, Lewis-Griffiths-India and *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* is an area of study that, at this point, none have seriously researched on Lewis and Griffiths. There can be no doubt that Stephen Schofield (1915-1993), as founder of the *Journal*,did much fine sleuth work in bringing Griffiths, in an updated way, into a more mature dialogue with Lewis (and friends). Both Schofield and Griffiths died in 1993, and *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* was passed onto Roger Stronstad. The final issue (N. 100) of *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal: The Inklings, Their Friends and Their Predecessors* was published in the Autumn of 2001, and the *Journal* is now part of history, but packed into the *Journal* are many letters by Griffiths about Lewis that speak much about Griffiths affection for Lewis, his defence of Lewis yet needful questions about Lewis.

6

Griffiths and *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal*

Stephen Scofield started *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* in 1979, and it was not long afterwards that Bede Griffiths entered the fray in the Journal. The publication of Christopher Derrick’s *C.S. Lewis and the Church of Rome* in 1981 was heralded as a major breakthrough work by many Roman Catholics as to the varied limitations of Lewis as a result of his not going to Rome. Derrick had been a pupil of Lewis, seemed to have inside information of Lewis’ hesitations about Rome, so he seemed to write with some authority----George Sayer, Sheldon Vanauken and Maclin Horton were all keeners on Derrick’s book and offered ample endorsements---Lewis seemed so close to Rome, he was a catholic Anglican—why the hesitation about taking the next step? Griffiths had confronted Lewis about this very issue a few decades earlier. Did Griffiths come to Derrick’s defence and offer an endorsement of the book?

The Winter 1982 edition of *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* highlighted Derrick’s book with much aplomb. There were six pages that dealt with Lewis and Rome, including advertisements for Derrick’s book, an article by George Sayer (another former RC student of Lewis on the same issue) and pointers by three emerging Roman Catholics on Lewis: Sheldon Vanauken, Thomas Howard and Peter Kreeft. Did Griffiths align himself with the emerging Roman Catholic conservatives such as Derrick, Sayer, Howard, Kreeft and Vanauken in their questions about the failure of Lewis to take the next step to Rome? The Summer 1982 edition of *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* has two letters in it that, initially, respond to Derrick’s book, then reply to criticisms of Derrick

and Vanauken by Griffiths. What is the nature and core of Griffiths’ two letters in the Summer 1982 edition of *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal*?

Griffiths must have had a sense of déjà vu when responding to Derrick’s book—he had indulged in the same sort of Rome versus Canterbury with Lewis decades earlier----Merton had done much the same thing in his 1948 best swelling autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain.* Lewis and Merton were now dead, Griffiths had a history with Lewis that antedated Derrick and Sayer, he had faced Lewis with the same issues, hence he felt he had some credibility in wading into the fray and differing with Derrick. The four pages that cover the Griffiths-Derrick-Vanauken tensions and differences illuminate much about varied forms of Roman Catholic thinking and ways and means of interpreting Lewis, Rome and Canterbury. Let us now turn to the correspondence.

Griffiths wrote a rather long letter (January 28 1982) for the Summer 1982 edition of *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal.* He thanked Stephen Scofield for sending a copy of Derrick’s book on Lewis and Rome. After offering Derrick a few kudos, he then came to Lewis’ defense, highlighting the fact that the form Roman Catholicism, for the most part, took in Lewis’ time was pre-Vatican II, hence understandable why Lewis had problems with Tridentine Catholicism. But, would Lewis have been more amenable to the Roman Catholic Church after Vatican II? Griffiths suggested in his letter that Lewis would, probably, have warmed up to Rome much more in a post-Vatican II context. Griffiths makes it clear that with Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church has taken a different position in regards to other forms of Christianity, other religions and secularism, and Griffiths suggested that this new openness is a good that should be welcomed and embraced. Griffiths, then, raised some serious questions about Derrick’s notion of Roman Catholicism—such a reactionary conservative stance was something that Griffiths found seriously problematic. Griffiths saw himself as taking a middle way in this dilemma. “But apart from the extremes of Conservatism (of which Derrick embodied) and Progressivism in the Church, there is a solid Catholic Centre, which Lewis would certainly have found much more sympathetic than the pre-Vatican Council Church”---he then mentioned the importance of *Mere Christianity* in tis regards.

Griffiths went much further in his letter contra Derrick pro-Lewis by suggesting that Lewis, if he had lived longer, might have been open to the better forms of Biblical criticism, particularly in the New Testament. The insights of New Testament Biblical criticism have tended to explore the process and development of Church thought and life that illuminates the more complex nature of the growth of the early church. Griffiths also suggested that Lewis might be drawn to a fuller notion of Catholic theology that was not only “scholastic”----Dr. Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009) is held high by Griffiths in this regard. And, Griffiths suggested, that Lewis might find all the work in depth psychology of some worth and note. So, Griffiths in this long letter makes four important points that must be noted: 1) Lewis would have been drawn to post-Vatican II Catholicism (which was not his historic context) if it had existed (which it did not when Lewis was alive), 2) Lewis might have been willing to learn much from the finds in Biblical criticism as related to the New Testament, 3) Lewis would have found Catholic non-scholastic theology of much worth and note, and 4) the insights of depth psychology would have enriched Lewis. It is more than obvious that all of the points Griffiths raised about Lewis would raise the ire and dander of Derrick’s Tridentine Catholicism.

Both Derrick and Sheldon Vanauken, in concert, replied to Griffiths. Both found the notion, put forth by Griffiths, that Lewis would be at home in the liberalizing and modernizing tendencies in the Roman Catholic Church questionable. In fact, Derrick is quite blunt in his opposition to Griffiths’ read of Lewis. Vanauken is even more forceful in challenging Griffiths. Vanauken suggested that Griffiths read Lewis’ “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism” as a primer on why Lewis would not follow the lead of Griffiths and Vatican II. Needless to say, the Griffiths, Derrick, Vanauken read and interpretation of Lewis speaks much about how those keen on Lewis might interpret him in a different and at odds way and manner.

Griffiths replied to Derrick and Vanauken (April 20 1982). This letter was published in the Summer 1982 edition of *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal*—the letter is much shorter. Griffiths mentioned that “though we are all disciples of Lewis in different ways, we disagree about him rather strongly among ourselves”. Griffiths attempted to make it clear he is less concerned about “modernism” and “liberalism” than he is about the actual teachings and documents of the church, particularly

The “decree on Ecumenism, the Declaration on Non-Christian Religions, and the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”----Griffiths than questioned Vanauken’s notion that Lewis would still affirm the position he took in “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism” in the light of so much more nuanced work being done by Roman Catholic exegetes and theologians. Griffiths brought his letter to a close by stating, “I am convinced that if he (Lewis) had come to understand the fundamental principles of New Testament criticism as understood today, he would not have hesitated to accept them. But that, of course, is my opinion and no more”. Needless to say, Derrick, Vanauken and tribe would not accept such a read of Lewis without some sort of reply.

Sheldon Vanauken wrote and a long letter to Stephen Scofield (editor of *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal)* that was published in the Autumn 1982 edition of the *Journal*---1982 was certainly a busy Lewis-Griffiths-Derrick-Vanauken year. Vanauken raised five telling points that seemed to undermine Griffiths more updated read of Lewis within Vatican II terms. First, Vanauken takes Griffiths to the wall about suggesting Lewis would have changed his mind about the drift and direction of Biblical criticism----he cited, again, Lewis’ “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism” and how, when Lewis delivered the lecture in Cambridge about 1960, Austin Farrer (a much respected English theologian) suggested it was the best lecture-article “Lewis ever wrote”. Vanauken went further in his approach to the way Griffiths attempted to update Lewis----“Lewis himself in his magisterial *De Descriptione Temporum* has some memorable things to say about the modern faith that the latest or newest is always the best”. Second, Vanauken argued that Lewis, as literary critic, certainly understood various genres of literature, hence when he dared to critique modern Biblical exegetes, he knew of what he spoke. Third, many modern exegetes took the position that the early disciples did not truly understood what Jesus was saying, or, worse yet, added to the text---Vanauken pointed out that his form of modern paternalism is the very thing Lewis opposed---only we moderns truly understand what was going on in the 1st century---we in fact, so the tale goes, know better than those who wrote the text what the reality of Jesus-disciples-early church was about. This is a case of what Lewis called “chronological snobbery”. Fourth, where modern critics attempt to dismiss accounts of miracles and the miraculous in the Bible (such things not being scientific and verifiable), Lewis and Vanauken take the position that such an approach has many a premiss and presupposition that can be rightly challenged.

Fifth, Lewis had argued that most of the contemporary literary critics who were attempting the same thing as Biblical critics were often proved wrong in their approach to English texts---the question, then, becomes, who is really dated in their approaches?—the trendy literary and Biblical exegetes or a more complex, nuanced and time tried historic approach to both the Bible and literature.

I think the Vanauken-Griffiths clashes and tensions on how to read Lewis and the classical-modern approach to the Bible and literature does illuminate much. Was Griffiths or Vanauken right in their read and defense of Lewis? It would, I suggest, be somewhat remiss to uncritically nod and bow before either Griffiths and Vanauken. We could, legitimately ask ourselves, what are the insights offered by both men and what might be their skewed reads of Lewis?

The Winter 1983 edition of *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* featured Griffiths’ *The Marriage of East and West* (alongside *The Dorothy Day Book*—a fine contrast to Lewis)and another article (“My Encounter with Lewis”) by a prominent Japanese scholar of Lewis, Naoyuki Yagyu---Yagyu would, in time, come to the defence of Vanauken, Derrick contra Griffiths.

The Spring 1983 edition of *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* included Griffiths reply to Vanauken (written December 13 1982) and Naoyuki Yagyu (Chancellor and Professor of English at Kanto Gakuin University in Yokohama Japan) pro-Vanauken contra-Griffiths read of Lewis. There could certainly be no doubt that *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* was providing a forum for different reads of Lewis.

The content of Griffiths’ reply to Vanauken continues to probe further and deeper the nub of the differences---would Lewis have accepted the inroads of a responsible and orthodox approach to Biblical higher and lower criticism? Griffiths offers a solid and hearty Yes to such a question and Vanauken a firm No. Griffiths pointed out the Biblical criticism need not lead to heterodoxy (as it had for some), but, in fact, it can deepen and enrich the orthodox journey. Griffiths listed two more Biblical critics he had found most helpful on his journey: Father Raymond Brown (1928-1998) and his comprehensive work on *John* and

Dr. Dennis Nineham (b. 1921) and his in depth probes on *Mark*. Griffiths makes it clear contra Vanauken and Derrick that Biblical criticism need not undermine the faith journey when it is done in a moderate and thoughtful, collegial and informed manner---Schillebeeckx, Brown and Nineham are but three examples of such an approach.

Naoyuki Yagyu waded into the fray in the Spring 1983 edition of *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal,* making three points and backing the position of Vanauken. Yagyu, like Vanauken, argued the “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism” was, of sorts, Lewis’ manifesto on both modern theology and Biblical criticism. The second point of Yagyu is somewhat more confusing: “I, for one, do not trust any modern theologian or Biblical critic whose heart did not burn within him, when he read the five words—the unforgettable *en de nux”* (drawn from Lewis’ *Christian Reflections*). I’m sure Griffiths would nod a hearty Amen to such a commitment. The third point by Yagyu is more to the telling point: he asked Griffiths to articulate what he thinks are “the fundamental principles of the New Testament criticism as understood today?” Needless to say, Biblical critics were not a homogenous group, but there was a tendency to think there were two tribes in the approach to the Bible: Biblical criticism that undercut the authority of the Bible and a classical approach to the Bible that held high the faith journey and dared not raise questions about the authority of the Bible—such a simplistic attitude both negated the complex and at odds approaches of Biblical criticism and the more complex Patristic-Medieval Biblical exegesis. Griffiths had pointed the way to his understanding of Biblical criticism via Schillebeeckx, Brown and Nineham----Yagyu, Vanauken and Derrick could have followed such a lead—they never did---a real dialogue never really occurred. Lewis became snared in opposing tribes in the modern theology and Biblical criticism debate, the Roman Catholic right almost converting him into a Reformation protestant Biblicist of sorts, the moderate Roman Catholic centre such as Griffiths reduced to a trendy form of liberalism.

I suspect if Griffiths had read “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism” (which he probably did not have access to when in India) and Vanauken, Derrick and Yagyu had taken the time to read and absorb Schillebeeckx, Brown and Nineham, there could have been a thoughtful

and engaged meeting in the middle—sadly so, reactions set in, a mismeeting occurred and fruitful dialogue dissipated. I have read “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism” many times and there is much worth and richness to the essay. Lewis took his broad background in literary criticism (and his personal experiences) and applied both criteria to aspects of Biblical (mostly New Testament) criticism—many valid points are made that I’m sure Griffiths would have readily acknowledged.

Yagyu had become a much welcomed contributor to *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* by the early 1980s---regular and multiple letters plus articles such as “Lewis and MacDonald versus Augustine, Aquinas and Dante: Animals and Heaven” (Spring 1982), “CSL’s Irresistible Voyage”(Autumn 1982) and “My Encounter with Lewis” (Winter 1983) were winning Yagyu a reading public----he had also become, by the 1970s, the leading Japanese translator of many book on Lewis. There could be no doubt, though, that Yagyu, like Vanauken and Derrick, was reading Lewis in a way that Griffiths had serious differences with for a variety of reasons. Griffiths did not want to see Lewis co-opted by reactionary conservatives, hence his constant attempt to reply to their reads of Lewis.

Bede Griffiths waded back into the fray in the Summer 1984 edition of *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal*. The letter, written November 26 1983, is the lead letter-article in the Summer 1984 magazine. A former student of Lewis’, Norman Bradshaw, had written an appreciative yet critical article of Lewis (“The Extraordinary Being”) that had been published in the Spring 1983 edition of *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal*.

The reaction to the article elicited many reactions and responses in the Summer, 83, Autumn 83 and Winter 84 editions of the *Journal* and came to be called “The Unexpected Controversy”.The letter Griffiths wrote (November 26 1983) was, partly, a defence of Lewis contra Bradshaw, but there was much more to the letter.

Griffiths began the letter by siding with Muriel Jones who suggested in previous correspondence to the *Journal* that Lewis would have been somewhat put off by all the attention being given his personal and private life in the *Journal.* Griffiths mentioned that when a student of Lewis’, Lewis reacted strongly to Griffiths when Griffiths mentioned how much he appreciated the sonnets of Sir Philip Sidney because he wrote “from personal experience”. Lewis was much more concerned about the value of poetry rather than probing the poet’s personal life and history. This tendency in Lewis was played out in greater depth and detail in his clashes with Professor Tillyard that became *The Personal Heresy.* Griffiths was much more on the Tillyard side of the dialogue while recognizing that Lewis did have his legitimate point.

Griffiths then went to work on Bradshaw who had suggested that Lewis could be almost bully like in his tutorials and aloof---Griffiths suggested that his experience had been the opposite. He found Lewis engaging, challenging and, when formal time was up, Lewis and Griffiths would often linger for hours and cover much literary terrain. Griffiths very much came to Lewis’ defence contra Bradshaw. Griffiths also questioned those who suggested Lewis had a “dark imagination”. Again, Griffiths came to Lewis’ defence, although he tended to side with Muriel Jones who thought Lewis was excessively attached to a “conservative, individualistic Protestant tradition”---I’m not sure Jones or Griffiths truly understand Lewis at this point.

Griffiths then engaged in some rather valuable support, at a theological level, of Lewis’ nuanced and complex understanding of the mystery of God who is merciful and just, fierce and tender, abundant grace and demanding. In fact, so Griffiths suggests, Lewis’ “understanding of the nature of God was extremely balanced”. It is then that Griffiths turned to Lewis and *Chronicles of Narnia.* “To my mind the Narnia stories reveal Lewis’ personal religion more profoundly than any of his more theological works. He wrote those other works more from his head, but the Narnia stories came from his heart……The figure of Aslan in the Narnia stories tells us more of how Lewis understood the nature of God than anything else he wrote”. The Summer 1984 letter was published, eventually, as “Forty Years’ Perspective” in *We Remember C.S. Lewis: Essays & Memories* (2001).

A Mrs. Janet Wise had written to Stephen Schofield defending, in some ways, a read of Lewis (in an approving way) that bordered on a subtler fundamentalist approach (or so it seemed)----she also sent Schofield a letter Lewis had sent to her. It seems that Griffiths at the time continued to receive the *Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal*, and his response to Mrs. Janet Wise (who, in many ways, he viewed as in the same camp as Derrick, Vanauken and Yagyu). The letter was published in the Winter 1986 edition of the *Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal.* Griffiths argued, yet once again, that Lewis cannot be reduced to a conservative or fundamentalist in his approach to the Bible (both as a source of authority or a literal, historical, grammatical read of the text). Lewis was a literary scholar who approached the Bible in a most nuanced and refined exegetical manner. Lewis would never have been committed to a “literal historic truth”. As a Medieval-Renaissance scholar, Lewis was more than acutely aware of multiple layers of textual reads. Griffiths pointed out, once again, the importance of Raymond Brown (as a Roman Catholic exegete). The question, for Biblical exegetes of the 20th century (and earlier), was how the Bible was put together and what was historic fact versus revelatory addition. There is lovely photo of Bede Griffiths with the Rev’d John Pridmore (a George MacDonald scholar) beneath the letter in the *Journal*). The letter by Lewis to Mrs. Wise, though, which Griffiths does not seem to have read, makes clear and discerning distinctions by Lewis on ways of clarifying different genres in a text. It might have been helpful if Griffiths had been less inclined to hold high post-Vatican II Roman Catholic higher and lower critics and followed Lewis’ more multi-layered level of reading and applying texts---this would, certainly, have made much sense to a contemplative and monastic approach. But, for one reason or another, Griffiths was more fixated on convincing conservatives that Lewis was not one of them and that Lewis would, if he was alive, have accepted a more scientific approach to higher and lower Biblical criticism. There is, in a sense, a misreading of Lewis by Griffiths and some of the conservatives in this sense.

C.S. Lewis had become, for many Christians, a literary *cause celebre* by the 1980s, and his impact tended to be, for the most part, within a conservative constituency. The old western man, the dinosaur of sorts,

was ill at ease with many forms of liberalism and those who had affinities with Lewis saw him as a mentor and guide of sorts. The conservative-liberal approach to Lewis reached a crossroads of sorts in 1990 when the Archbishop of Canterbury (Robert Runcie) suggested in an interview written by Nicholas Tucker (and published in the *New Statesman*: February 1990) that “Lewis’ brand of pop religion is greatly flawed”. The Bishop of Oxford (Richard Harries), in *The Independent,* argued that Lewis’ brand of apologetics “did more harm than good to the Christian cause”. The Spring 1990 edition of *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* covered the debacle and firestorm of sorts. Needless to say, response to the Archbishop of Canterbury and Bishop of Oxford came fast and furious. The Summer 1990 edition of the *Journal* has Bishop Harries article from *The Independent* (March 1990) and a rather long letter by Bede Griffiths (written April 21 1990) defending Lewis against Runcie and Harries. Harries had written a book on Lewis that had been published in 1987 (appreciative yet critical). The 2 page letter by Griffiths begins by highlighting the questionable attitude of Runcie and Harries about Lewis but raising some legitimate questions Griffiths had in his long friendship with Lewis. Griffiths comes across, somewhat, as a mediating position, in this letter, between Roman Catholic conservative and Anglican liberals. Griffiths certainly did not take the position that Lewis’ view of faith was “greatly flawed” or that his form of apologetics “did more harm than good”. Griffiths did, though, clarify some of his points of divergence with Lewis while raising some probing questions about legitimate questions of Lewis’ approach and content of faith.

I think it can be reasonably argued that Griffiths’ final letter to *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* (following a minor stroke) tends to miss some of Lewis’ deeper understanding of both theology and textual criticism. It was not so much a sense that Griffiths thought that he had to defend Lewis from conservatives but more a case that Griffiths felt he had to make Lewis more modern (in a moderate way). The fact that Griffiths was a contemplative monk and Lewis was a Classical-Medieval-Renaissance scholar meant that both would have had much concord and many a convergence on varied ways of reading religious texts in a more meditative and none literalist manner. But, Griffiths had a certain commitment to pointing out how thoughtful religion could keep stride with the best insights of science and Biblical criticism (a form of science applied to the text). This need of Griffiths to synthesize science and religion (and there are many models of both) prevented him, in some ways, from understanding both Lewis and many more thoughtful conservatives.

Griffiths had his first stroke in January 1990, so it is interesting that his final letter to *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* was published after his stroke (which he recovered from in haste). Griffiths was on the road much of the time from 1990-1992, and when he returned to his ashram in India in the autumn of 1992, he spent the next few months being filmed for a biography of sorts. The filming was done in April 1993 and Griffiths had a major stroke shortly thereafter--he died in May 1993.

There were those (and still are) who approach Lewis in a hagiographical manner and there are others who walk the extra mile to debunk and dismiss Lewis. The many letters by Bede Griffiths to *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* embody a way of finding a *via media* between both extremes, although I think it can be argued that Griffiths did, at times, slip into honest caricatures of Lewis that Lewis, if he had lived, would have negated in an honest dialogue.We do need to be most grateful, though, for the many letters by Bede Griffiths to *The Canadian C.S. Journal* that Stephen Schofield included and, in doing so, preserved for those interested in the relationship between C.S. Lewis, Bede Griffiths and the larger ethos that both were immersed in (for good or ill).

7

Two Letters

I was quite fortunate to receive two letters from Bede Griffiths in March 1989 and again in April 1989 before his initial stroke in 1990. I was on staff with Amnesty International at the time, had an interest in the relationship between the contemplative life--public responsibility and comparative contemplative--mystical traditions. I had done an MA in Religious Studies at University of British Columbia from 1981-1983, and my graduating essay was on R.C. Zaehner. The fact that no work had been done on Zaehner and Griffiths interested me, so, in my letters to Bede Griffiths in 1988, I asked him about his read and interpretation of Zaehner. There tends to be, sadly so, those who are keeners on Griffiths contra Zaehner and those who pit Zaehner against Griffiths. Such an either-or approach does not lend itself to a more nuanced study of the Hindu mystical tradition and, in a broader sense, further our understanding of comparative contemplative traditions. The finest book to date that has dealt with the Zaehner-Griffiths approaches to Hindu mysticism is *The Hindu Mystical Experience: A Comparative Philosophical Study of the Approaches of R.C. Zaehner and Bede Griffiths* (2004) by Albano Fernandes. I have included the two letters Griffiths sent to me in this book for a variety of obvious reasons. I will, by way of conclusion, reflect on the letters.

March 10 1989

Dear Ron Dart

Thanks you for your letter. I am glad to know how much you appreciate what we are trying to do here. As you say, it has been a gradual growth over many years for which we owe the origin and development to Fr. Monchanin and Fr. Le Saux.

As regards concern for social justice, the problem has been to establish a way of life in the church in India and all our efforts have been focussed on this. But this does not mean that the concern for humans has been neglected. We are always acutely conscious of the sufferings and needs of the people around us and have been involved in efforts to assist them in various ways. We started a co-operative among the weavers in the village and a spinning centre, and are now running a school for tailoring and embroidery for girls. We are also deeply involved in a movement to build up the villages in remote areas, bringing in methods of agriculture and village industries, as well as primary schools and dispensaries. Of course, all this is on a very small scale when one considers the vastness of the problems in India, but I always feel that one should begin with what lies at hand rather than get involved in grandiose schemes which often fail to do any real good.

I agree that Zaehner has a point about Yudhisthira and one must realize the social context of the Gita. But, the teaching itself far transcends any merely social consideration. It has such overwhelming power and relevance to the human situation in general, that I continue to live by its inspiration.

I will send you a leaflet on our ashram, which will give you some idea of our life under separate cover.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

Bede Griffiths

April 5 1989

Dear Ron,

Thank you for your letter of last November and please excuse the delay in writing. I think that it must have come by sea.

As regards contemplation and social concern, personally I feel that a contemplative should be aware of the problems of the world, much as Thomas Merton was, but the degree of his involvement must depend on his personal calling. Some like Gandhi are to be totally involved, others like Sri Aurobindo may be deeply concerned but not actually involved in direct action, others like Ramana Maharishi may not be apparently concerned at all, and yet by their profound humanity and compassion may exercise a very positive influence on the world. In other words, I think that there is great diversity of contemplative vocations, but I would say that the danger for the contemplative is to get too involved, especially, in any kind of political action, and so lose the unique gift which he has to offer the world. As Ramana Maharishi said, “those who become one with God raise the whole world with them”.

Personally, I feel the need for social awareness if contemplative life is to be meaningful and we keep in touch with various people who are involved in social issues and giving assistance to people in need. But I keep away from all political involvement. I feel that one must be faithful to one’s own vocation and offer the world what it most needs—the power to realize the presence of God in everyone and everything.

I feel very much at one with Fr. George Maloney and Matthew Fox. I would be interested to see you book on “Contemplation and the Polis”.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

Bede Griffiths

I had written the letter before your recent letter came. I think that I must have answered your questions about contemplative life before. As regards the Gita, there is something to be said for Yuddhisthira’s view, but I feel that the basic teaching of the Gita is so profound that it goes beyond all questions of caste and politics and takes us to the depths of the human condition. Did you know that I had written a commentary on the Gita called, *River of Compassion*, published by Amity House, Warwick, New York?

With my best wishes and prayers.

Yours sincerely

D. Bede

Reflections and Commentary

I found the two letters I received from Bede Griffiths most valuable for a variety of suggestive reasons. I was, at the time, on staff with Amnesty International, and I had, a couple of years previous to working with Amnesty, completed my PHD comprehensives in the Oriental section of my studies (the Occident being my major) on the *Mahabharata*. I was focused, at the time, on the relationship between the contemplative and the active in both the West (Occident) and the East (Orient). I was, to nudge the dialogue deeper, probing the different ways the West and East understood the varied meanings of contemplation and action. I found, in some ways, Griffiths approach interesting yet not fully convincing.

I agreed with Griffiths that the West needed to reverse centuries of addiction to the active life and revisit the centrality of the contemplative way, although there is certainly a rich contemplative tradition in the West. Needless to say, there were many variations of this in India in their past (epic literature) and their contemporary situation. The *Mahabharata* was a good test case for me. Neither Arjuna (who is, in some senses, a secondary actor in the epic in comparison to his kingly brother, Yudhisthira) nor Yudhisthira retreated from the political fray (after flirting with such a vocation but their dharma moving them from such final decision)—Gandhi, like Tagore, stands within such a tradition. It is revealing that Griffiths mentioned that “I keep away from all political involvement” which he tended to see as “grandiose schemes” that have tendencies to go astray. This was, of course, a way of parsing the contemplative-active, but not the path of Arjuna, Yudhisthira or Gandhi-Tagore for that matter---nor was it the position of Thomas Merton. I had asked Bede about his read of Merton in one of my letters.

The fact that Griffiths was more committed to “small scale” and grass roots projects is, no doubt, most commendable and needful, but to step aside from the political is a problematic and reductionist way of understanding public action. I have the utmost admiration for both Sri Aurobindo and Ramana Maharishi, but such men are not Gandhi or Tagore (who, as mentioned above are closer to Yuhhisthira or Arjuna). It seems to me Gandhi and Tagore threaded the needle of the contemplative and active in a mature and integrated way (as did Yudhisthira and Arjuna) in a way Griffiths, Aurobindo and Maharishi did not. I realize that Griffiths dove deeply into the *Bhagavad-Gita* in his probes on the compassionate Indian way, but I sensed much missing in his read of the *Gita, Mahabharata* and the Indian saints of sorts who he chose to name as guides into the contemplative-active way of thought and life.

The letters I received from Griffiths did much to clarify for me both his appeal but, by day’s end, a path I found to be insightful but lacking a certain comprehensive depth and breadth. The *vita activa* needs both grass roots, bottom up approaches as it does top down political parties doing their needful jobs. It is simply short sighted to elevate one approach and subordinate the other—both are needed in the area of substantive active life. I might add that even Lewis tended to shy away from the political and elevate the social like Griffiths. This can be seen,

in some senses, as a limitation in their perspectives. The political will simply not disappear and decisions made at the political level do have serious consequences for good and ill. It is rather reactionary, for whatever reason, to turn aside from the political. This was not the way in India embodied in their epic literature (*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*) or the modern saints of India such as Gandhi and Tagore. It’s too bad, in some ways, Griffiths did not dip his bucket in such wells, but, in some sense, his monastic vocation meant his affinities were more with those who retreated from the political fray.

There was, though, Merton who was both a monk and entered the larger public issues of his day with much insight and gusto---Griffiths and Lewis could have learned much from Merton in this sense.

I have pondered for many a month and year the letters from Griffiths and am grateful for the obvious gifts. My questions do ever linger and take me on different trails and to different places as a result. I must admit, I also find Zaehner’s more in depth probes of Western and Eastern contemplatives and mystics much more rigorous than Griffiths need for some sort of interfaith synthesis and unity. The dialogue between Griffiths and Zaehner can yet yield much interfaith fruit if pondered in such a way that heeds and hears both men well and wisely.

It is simply unhelpful to idealize the one and demonize the other—such an approach is more ideological (in the worst sense) than open to receive what both Griffiths and Zaehner have to offer (and their limitations). Zaehner had a much more analytical mind than Griffiths, hence his hesitation to articulate a grand and epic synthesis of mystics and contemplatives, religion and science. Such a Hegelian approach tends to omit what does not fit the interpretive model and paradigm.

The fact that contemplative interfaith pioneers tend to weave a unity from certain facts (while ignoring others) does mean that hard empirical facts need to be included in both comparative mysticism and religion-science before reaching conclusions that negate facts that do not fit a preordained model. This is why R.C. Zaehner (though often ignored for questioning the contemplative-primordial-wisdom Sanhedrin) does need to be at the centre of such a dialogue (as does, obviously, Bede Griffiths and tribe). Lewis was less inclined, like Zaehner, to propose some final synthesis for religious unity (even amongst contemplatives and mystics, and both men knew the world of mystics and contemplatives well and wisely).

8

Recovering a Friendship

There has been virtually no work done on the forty year friendship between C.S. Lewis and Bede Griffiths. The friendship began as a teacher-student one, soon became a relationship in which both became consciously aware that they were on the pathway to Christianity together. This second phase of their friendship (1929-1932) was altered

when Griffiths became a Roman Catholic and Lewis refused to trek such an ecclesial trail. This third phase of their friendship had many a turbulent bump and misunderstanding. We must remember that this was the 1930s and a form of Tridentine Catholicism still dominated the day. The friendship between Lewis and Griffiths did mature as both men did—their ecclesial commitments, eventually, were bracketed for the sake of discussing much else. The fourth phase of the Lewis-Griffiths friendship in the 1940s-1950s mellowed and took different routes as Griffiths deepened in his monastic vocation and turned to the contemplative tradition of Christianity and Hinduism. This was an area

that Lewis did not know much about and, in many ways, Griffiths became Lewis’ teacher, although Lewis had his doubts about Griffiths’ approach to Hinduism. Lewis died in 1963, and *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* was founded in 1979—Griffiths contributed many articles to the *Journal* that, in some ways, took an opposite tack to the right of centre Roman Catholic converts of the 1970s-1980s. There is a sense in which Griffiths read and interpretation of Lewis in *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* was a continuation of their friendship—this was, in some ways, the fifth phase of the Lewis-Griffiths decades long journey together as friends.

The best way to bring this book to an end is to quote from Lewis (and Griffiths’ response) as he neared the end of his all too human journey. “When we last met, a month before his death, he reminded me that we had been friends for nearly forty years. There are not many things in my life more precious to me than that friendship” (Griffiths: “The Adventure of Faith”).