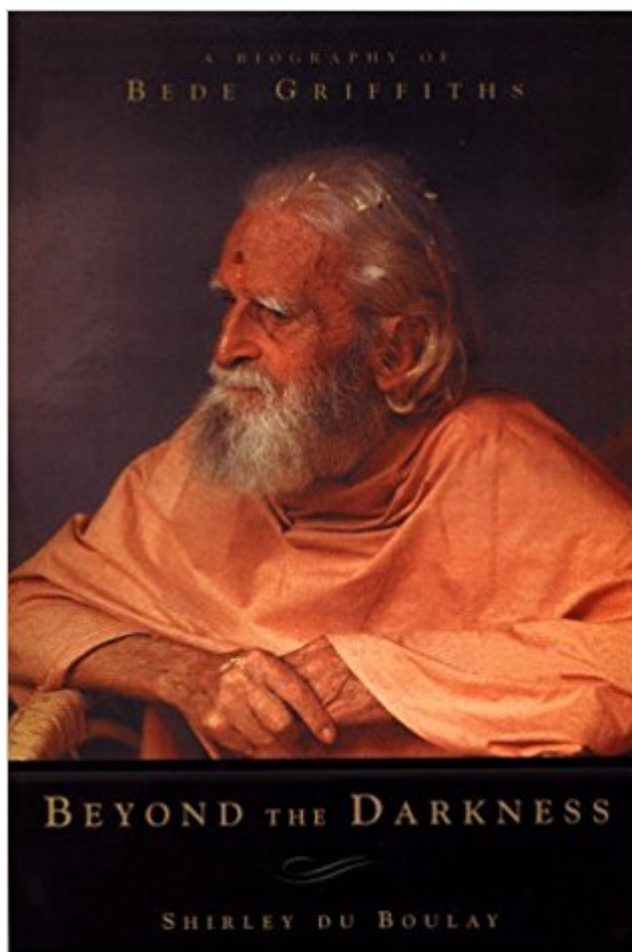


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# Beyond The Darkness: A Biography Of Bede Griffiths



## Synopsis

Even though the English Benedictine monk Bede Griffiths was well known during his lifetime (1906-1993) for his efforts to harmonize the spiritual practices of East and of the West, the full range of his influence is only just becoming widely appreciated. Now, from respected journalist and biographer Shirley du Boulay, comes the first major biography of Griffiths's life, *Beyond the Darkness*. Du Boulay shows the transformation of Griffiths from an idealistic, highly intelligent, serious, and sometimes irritable schoolboy into a man of profound wisdom who emanated unconditional love and who was often revered as a holy man and a living saint. During his life of intellectual and spiritual discovery, he became an associate of the Inklings, a close friend of C.S. Lewis, and eventually a leader of an ashram in India. His long and eventful journey was often filled with controversy, pain, and anguish. Yet, Griffiths attained a spiritual wholeness granted to few, enabling him to express in simple and direct terms the underlying unity of religions. In *Beyond the Darkness*, readers experience a life as exciting as space travel and as passionate as a great romance. They will realize for themselves the culmination of Griffiths's knowledge: *Beyond the opposites, beyond the darkness, is "that Great Person, of the brightness of the sun."*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

To hear about a Catholic monk who meditates and seeks nondual union with Christ doesn't seem so astonishing anymore. That's because Bede Griffiths began blazing a trail to the East as far back as 1955. You might call Bede the Thomas Merton of England, except that Bede delved further into

Eastern spirituality than Merton ever dreamed of doing. In *Beyond the Darkness*, Shirley Du Boulay traces Bede's ascetic tendencies back to early experiments in communal living after graduating from Oxford. A staunch atheist, Bede, like his professor and friend C.S. Lewis, then rediscovered the spiritual profundity of the Christian tradition. After entering the monkhood, a certain unarticulated pantheism led Bede to pursue the wide-open spiritual landscapes of the East, and to "discover the other half of my soul." In the 1950s, when the rest of the West turned to science and materialism for salvation, he donned the saffron robes of a Hindu monk and started a Catholic ashram in southern India. Left to his own devices by Rome, Bede, through his implacable kindness and theological writings, drew an increasingly large following, right through 1992 when he was drawing thousands of people to talks all over the world. *Beyond the Darkness* reveals a man who was called a saint while he lived but who achieved that status only through sustained curiosity and sincerity in his search for the truth behind all religions. --Brian Bruya

Very few people, including theologians, remember Brother Bede Griffiths (1906-93), yet his life remains an example of the amazing pathways one can take toward spiritual fulfillment. Born Alan Griffiths, he was a studious, idealistic youth who was introduced to religious thinking by C.S. Lewis, his mentor at Oxford. Seeking a more substantial root for his existence, he became a Benedictine monk and took the name "Bede." He moved on to India, embraced many aspects of Hinduism, and spent the rest of his life trying to fathom the underlying unity and spiritual wholeness lifting all faiths beyond the superficialities of religion's rites and rhetoric. Du Boulay (Teresa of Avila, Servant, 1995) wonderfully portrays Griffith's passionate and sometimes anguished questing. This, the first major biography of this remarkable man, will not disappoint. Recommended for all libraries. ?Glenn Masuchika, Chaminade Univ. Lib., Honolulu Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Shirley du Boulay has given us a beautifully crafted biography of one of the most interesting Christians of our time. In many ways, Bede anticipated and served as a center of gravity for the new winds that blew through Christianity in the last third of the twentieth century. He advocated a decentralized, collegiate authority in the Roman Catholic church, and worried about doctrinal intolerance and insularity. Most importantly, he recognized that the world's faith traditions can indeed enter into a conversation with one another in which each enriches the other. By the end of his life, after having spent 30 odd years in Christian ashrams in India, he'd become a proponent of nondualism or advaita, accepting a radical panentheism that tried to honor the both/and of intuition as opposed to the either/or of rationality. Du Boulay's biography discusses Bede's personal life, but

wonderfully summarizes the successive stages of his journey toward God. Ordinarily biographies are best read only after some familiarity with their subjects' writings. But this one is an excellent introduction to the thought of Bede. Bede Griffiths was a luminary in the interfaith dialogue, and during his lifetime he helped many Christians to come to a new appreciation of the contemplative roots of their own faith by inviting them to explore the spiritualities of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Unfortunately, the interest in interfaith dialogue and exchange that he encouraged seems to have waned in recent years, and particularly after 9/11.

While vastly inferior to Bede's own writings about his life ("The Golden String" especially), this book gives a great account of Bede's development from his formative years at Eastington, where he engaged in a Waldenesque experiment in "simple living" (which left a lasting mark upon him) to his nearly forty years in his ashram in India. Bede shows himself to be a genuinely ecumenical man, taking a wealth of ideas and concepts from all religious traditions that he comes into contact with (but especially the Hindoo faiths). A man years ahead of his time, he would most probably have been excommunicated if many of his ideas had received more attention in the Roman church. He was in favour of radical reform of the Catholic Church, which he had begun to think was outdated and did not speak to people in the way that it once did -- and that if it did not change its approach to speak to people in this modern day, that it would eventually cease to be of relevance altogether. He was in favour of a married clergy and denied that the pope should be the head of the whole church, but that this was a corruption of the original church which had the pope of Rome as merely the "first among equals" -- a position that he was supposed to share equally with various other bishops throughout Christendom. His theology tended to be on the mystical side, which, to me, makes much more sense than the Biblical literalism that is sweeping the world today. He was also of the opinion that Jesus' message was at odds with the Old Testament, but that it agreed in all its essentials with the teachings of the Gita. His embracing of the similarities of Christianity and Hinduism was particularly impressive, especially in this day of finger-wagging evangelistic denominationalists who assure us that only they can be right. Bede always kept an open mind and was a seeker until the very end. He never stopped growing and learning -- something that would have been impossible if he had closed his mind to any other opinions other than his own. He is an example of a very, very rare type of individual. A wonderful look at an amazing human being.

Father Bede Griffiths (1906-1993) was an English Benedictine monk who resided in India for nearly four decades. Ms. du Boulay's book is the first major biography written about him since his death,

and I, for one, bought it as soon as I could. Her meticulous, though not overwhelming, attention to the many facets of his life provides a fascinating and incredibly balanced perspective of this man of many roles: monk, mystic, writer, lecturer, and leader in Hindu-Christian interreligious dialogue. For all that I admired his embracing warmth and sheer wisdom, it helped to know just how much he had to live through; i.e. she does not shy away from describing with excruciating clarity some of the vicious verbal and written attacks from both Hindu and Christian fundamentalists he endured. My hope is that this very well crafted biography brings the importance of Father Bede's vision and life into the consciousness of many seekers. Highly recommended (along, of course, with his own writings--most of which remain in print).

Admirers of C. S. Lewis often like to read about his life and to become vicariously acquainted with his friends, too. If you want to know about Lewis as Griffiths' friend, read Griffiths' own autobiography (The Golden String), his contribution to C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table, and The Letters of C. S. Lewis. (It is much to be hoped that all of their correspondence that survives will be published.) However, admirers of Lewis may be advised that these two men profoundly diverged in their religious thinking. While Lewis was an apologist for orthodox Christianity, Griffiths eventually said he could understand Christ only by means of the Vedanta; that Jesus rejected the God of the Old Testament; that only a bit of St. John's Gospel attained to the insight of Hindu "advaitic" mysticism, etc. For readers whose faith is close to that of Lewis -- who said he was as dualistic as possible within Christian theology, meaning preoccupied with good and evil, and aware of God's warfare with the devil -- this book might have been better titled "Into the Darkness" of spiritual error. The book is readable and informative, presented by a biographer who wishes to promote Griffiths' "deep ecumenism."

Wonderful powerful , life changing

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