

**THE CHRISTIAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE LIFE  
OF PRAYER IN THE CHURCH OF ASIA**

by

Ichiro Okumura, O.C.D.

**INTRODUCTION**

When I was asked to address myself to the theme "Christian contribution to the life of prayer in the Asian Church," I must honestly confess that, despite the initial explanations, I could not grasp precisely what was being sought under the guise of this title.

This seems to be due to an idea that I am very much taken up with these days, namely not what contribution Christianity can make to the East, but rather what we Christians can learn from the East and how we can deepen our faith and love through this learning. As a consequence, I wondered if it wouldn't be better to understand the theme as "the Asian contribution to the life of Christian prayer." Though it may be a rude way of putting it, we can say in all truth that the only thing that Christianity can give to Asia is Christ Himself.

At any rate, when thinking about today's topic, namely, the encounter of the spirituality of the East with Christianity, a first step must involve a correct comparison of the two. There is also the preparatory work of clarifying the differences. Next, after the unfolding process of accepting Eastern spirituality, being receptive to it, digesting it, and finally assimilating it, comes the second step, that of inculturation.

---

The Second Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference convened at Morning Star College, Barrackpore, India, 19th-25th November 1978, with the theme: "Prayer - the Life of the Church of Asia." This paper, presented by Father Ichiro Okumura of Kyoto, Japan, was one of the two position papers.

The present interest among European Christians in Indian meditation and Japanese Zen has not yet come to the end of this first step. In regard to this, in India and Japan we have already started on the second step, although we are still at a very elementary level. We have entered into this second step with Christians in India living in ashrams and following the ascetic practice of Yogic meditation, while in the Japanese Church there are Zendo, or Zen halls, for the practice of "Ignatian Zen." As might be expected, both in India and in Japan, there is a lot of harsh criticism and resistance to those Christians who are in the vanguard. The reason often put forth is that, even though step one is not yet finished, some have unreasonably rushed too quickly into step two. Eventually, so they say, the differences in the spirituality of Christianity and that of the Eastern religions will not be seen clearly and will wind up in a mixture, with one being regarded as the other.

When we overemphasize the differences we never come to the point of walking together. We learn from one another, but there are no opportunities for enriching one's own "home ground" or for cooperation. On the other hand, if only likenesses emerge, a religious or spiritual syncretism may endanger the essence of Christianity. In this respect there is a greater danger (for the Christian) that faith will be weakened or lost altogether.

While dealing with the above-mentioned points, I would like to develop this paper by dividing the contents into two parts:

- I. The differences between Christian prayer and prayer based on Eastern spirituality, and the problems that arise from these differences.
- II. Centering on the differences of love, or agape, as the essence of Christian prayer, and of mercy, or maitri, in Buddhism, to look as clearly as possible at the unique character of Christian salvation, which is different from that of other religions.

The central part of this discussion is Part I, "Prayer." However, without clarifying love, agape, we cannot understand the essence of Christian prayer, which is the self-expression of God's love and of brotherly love. For that reason, Part II includes a rather long discussion on this point. I will be most happy if you come to an understanding, even a little, of what I am trying to say.

This discussion is really insufficient in dealing with the problem of prayer, which is one of the biggest problems in the Church of the Asia of Tomorrow. If this contributes anything to you, the responsible Bishops of the Church in Asia, I will have been rewarded.

## I. PRAYER OF THE EAST AND PRAYER OF THE WEST

### 1. "No God" and "No Prayer"

I can still remember the time thirty years ago when I visited "N Roshi," the Zen master, under whom I had been studying, to inform him of my decision to become a Christian.<sup>1</sup> We went very early in the morning, after the religious services and a frugal breakfast, to our favorite engawa (corridor, or place for sitting) in the garden, and sat facing each other in Zazen for about two hours. Very slowly and deliberately the Master began to speak, and even now I occasionally recall his words.

"When practicing Zazen, there is no God, there is no Buddha. The concept of prayer does not even arise. There is no Zen; there is no Christ. All is nothingness (mu). No! There isn't even nothing."

This mental attitude is handed down in the Zen meditations of the Teachings of Buddha in the word "Emptiness" (Sunyattā).<sup>2</sup>

No God ... no Buddha. The concept of prayer does not even rise to consciousness. It is a certainly in Zen spirituality that "When one meets with the Buddha, he kills the Buddha. When he meets with his ancestor, he kills the ancestor. Such "killing Buddha, killing one's ancestor," is a heroic break-through (Durchbruch)<sup>3</sup> of transcendent thought (*Jishu* 示衆 9: p.69).

In the opening paragraphs of the pamphlet explaining the famous Ryoanji, or Rock Garden, in Kyoto it is written that "Zen is a religion which exalts neither God nor Buddha." Without flinching before the contradiction involved in such a statement, Zen asserts that it is Buddhism that does not exalt Buddha. If this logic is pursued, it will involve speaking of "Christianity without Christ." In such a spirituality there is no margin to think of "conversation with God," "lifting one's heart to God," "petition to God," and such types of prayer. They say it is quite natural that even the idea of prayer doesn't exist in Zen.

It is evident that there is a difference in the grasp of the meaning of prayer between Christianity, which places the essence of religion and spirituality on the dialogical relationship that is based on a clear distinction of the otherness between God and man, on the one hand; and on the other hand, Buddhism, especially in Zen, whose basic concept is identification of the self with the other, the self as itself Buddha, the total identification of the human self with Buddha. Accordingly, to arrive at this point, viz., the ascetism of contemplation, is the pivot or axis of spirituality.



In the case of Christianity, the approach of prayer moves from a dialogue situation between God and the human being to a further stage, that of the unity of the two. In the case of Zen, prayer amounts to a metaphysical self-awareness of what constitutes the fundamental oneness of human existence and all existence, which resolves in an absolute contradiction of the identification of the self with another. Therefore, in Zen spirituality practical prayers leading to this oneness, i.e., meditation practice, plays the central role. According to Paul Tillich, Buddhists have identity, but not community.<sup>4</sup>

In the case of Eastern religions, especially Yoga and Zen, meditation rather than "prayer" is at the crux of spirituality. In Christianity it is the "prayer of petition" that forms the base. In contrast to this teaching of Christ, "Seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened" (Mt 7:8; Lk 11:15), there is a challenge or counter-attack, so to speak, from the Zen viewpoint in "Do not seek; you will find."<sup>5</sup> "Why knock at what is already opened?" The Buddhists merely regard the "prayer of petition" in Christianity as a low type of prayer.

The "Lord's Prayer," the central prayer of Christianity, is literally "request" (Fiat). In contrast, not only in Zen, but in all forms of Mahayana Buddhism (Large-Vehicle Buddhism), the creed which has become the cradle of believers both as read-Sutra or chanted-Sutra is extremely philosophic and filled with metaphysical vision (Prājñā-Paramitā-Hridayam-samāptam). Thus it can be understood that there is an extraordinary difference between the spiritualities of Christianity and Buddhism, with the particular character of their respective forms of prayer.

If we must go so far as to use the Christian word "prayer" to describe the Zen "meditation," then perhaps Paul Tillich's "post-prayer" or "supra-prayer," which belongs to the post-mythological stage, would be the least objectionable.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. "Prayer with Words" and "Prayer without Words" (Verbal Prayer and Prayer of Silence)

It is said that when a bell tolls, the Occidental hears the sound of the bell, while the Oriental hears the echoes of the silence. Although there is some problem with this kind of contrast, nevertheless it is clear that there is a sort of relationship of contrarities, as the reverse of the psychic make-up of the East and West. This, too, may be called the inscrutable plan of God.<sup>7</sup>

Although Christianity, in its origins, belongs to an Eastern rather than a Western culture, when we consider the contrast between "word and silence," we recognize that it has its base in the idea of "word" (logos), "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. The Word was God" (Jn 1:1). No matter what the interpretation, these famous opening words of

John's gospel indicate that "word" is at the center of Christianity. The Christian creed in which this Logos is the second person of the Trinity also reinforces this idea. This concept of word is directly connected with the strong Occidental rational character seen in the evolution of the verbal culture of the West. It is also certain that the content (i.e., of Logos and verbal culture) is not exactly the same.

If we here compare the human word or language with a seed, the "logos" would be the soil of silence which nurtures the seed and gives it life. The Logos is, so to speak, the soil of silence, the word without a word. Human words may be compared to the flowers that grow out of this soil. Even in the tradition of Christian spirituality which has grown up in the verbal culture of the West, the strain of listening to the silence which is hidden in the Logos has not totally disappeared from mystical theology.

At the apex of the movement of *theologia negativa* (negative theology), which harks back to Pseudo-Dionysius (ca. 500), is the Carmelite John of the Cross (1542-1591) who has also been called "Doctor de Noche Oscura" (Doctor of the Dark Night), and "Doctor de Nada" (Doctor of the Nothing). For him, filled as he was with the spirit of God, the beloved was "la musica callada" (the melody of silence) and "la soldad sonora" (the echoings of solitude) (cf. *Cantico Espiritual*, 14, 15).<sup>8</sup>

The meeting point of the Christian spiritual tradition of negative theology, which finds its climax in John of the Cross, and of Eastern spirituality, it should be noted, lies in the above concept of the deepening of prayer from "prayer with words" into "prayer without words," or "contemplation." To use the words of John of the Cross, this is the understanding of prayer as a movement from "meditation" to "contemplation."<sup>9</sup>

Especially in the practice of spiritual direction in Christianity, this kind of mysticism rooted in negative theology has traditionally been confused with heretical quietism,<sup>10</sup> and therefore has been the object of suspicion and something to be wary of. This is due to the fact that the spirituality of Occidental Christianity is strongly rooted in the verbal nature of Western culture.

As opposed to this, a characteristic of Oriental spirituality has been the strong emphasis on the "prayer without words," as opposed to the "prayer with words." Oriental spirituality moves not from words into silence, but rather from silence into Word. In this sense it is also different from the movement to contemplation whose apex John of the Cross places as an outgrowth of meditation. In this sense the viewpoint of Oriental contemplation has a fundamentally different orientation from the negative theology of John of the Cross.<sup>11</sup> Thus the essence and foundation of prayer



becomes silence before God as opposed to conversation with God. From the beginning to the end of prayer, from its first stages to satori or enlightenment, its highest point — indeed transcending even satori or enlightenment — Zazen becomes the sole penetrating seat of silence. Far from the dualist structure of meditation (“prayer of words”) to contemplation (“prayer without words”), this wordless prayer, the prayer of silence, runs through the whole. Put in Zen terminology, the Buddhist law, ritual, chanting of the Sutras are all included within Zazen, sitting in prayer. “In Zazen it is not possible that you do not realise either Buddhist teaching, or merit,” says Dogen. The essence of Dogen Zen is the singleminded, themeless sitting, in that absolutely everything is included.<sup>12</sup>

In Zen temples today, even though there are a variety of liturgies (actually in Japan the majority of temples have become places of ritualized Buddhism), even though this is true, nevertheless, Zazen, the practice of contemplation, is still at the root of all ceremony and ritual. The “prayer of words” which can be seen there is nothing more than a self-expression of “wordless prayer.” This understanding and practice of the “prayer without words” is essentially different from John of the Cross’s understanding of infused contemplation.

The approach to transcendental meditation, especially to Zen contemplation, takes its starting point in “prayer without words” as the “practice of silence,” because it aims at the absolute transparency of existence which is found in silence. The Koan is seen as a means of purification for this.<sup>13</sup> The practice of Koan takes on value only when it is understood as something later to be abandoned. For Dogen, Zazen is something which is conceived of as a substitute for the Koan. That spirituality which advocates “non-satori” (not seeking), “no ulterior motive,” simple, single-hearted sitting as a means to restore all things to their essentials may be said to be the classic form of Zen contemplation, that is “wordless prayer.”

The crux of the matter here is the understanding of “word,” not so much as the external word, but rather as the internal word of intellection and concept. The methodology which has carried through the practice of preparing the ground for the psychological area of the interior word of intellection and concept has been refined very much in the verbal culture of the West in Christianity. The spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius (1491-1556) is its classical product.

As opposed to this, the orientation toward the further shore of Absolute Being, which does away with all process of intellection and concept, is the practice of Oriental contemplation and Zazen. From this point of view, for the person who practices Zen, the Christian understanding of meditation is infantile, stultifying, something which by multiplication of words even

prevents the deepening of prayer. Daisetz Suzuki, who is famous for his introduction of Zen into the West, writes as follows:

Ordinary critics consider Zen as the Buddhist version of the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola.<sup>14</sup> Those who have some idea of Zen would immediately notice that this comparison completely misses the point. Even on the surface, there is no similarity at all between the practice of Zen and that proposed by the founder of the Jesuits. From the viewpoint of Zen, the meditation and contemplation of St. Ignatius are just some fabric of many imaginations woven together carefully for pious people. In fact, it is something like roof tiles piled upon the head, and it doesn't give any merit to spiritual life at all.<sup>15</sup>

Undoubtedly, the straightforward statement of Suzuki, who is known as an expert scholar, could be unpleasant to Catholics who follow Ignatian spirituality; but the fact that, on the other hand, the type of Western thought which has been shaped by Christianity is felt by the practitioner of Zen as an utterly alien thing is worthy of note. Today in Japan, Father Kadowaki, a Japanese member of the Society of Jesus, has welded together Ignatian spirituality and Zen and advocates an "Ignatian Zen." This has borne fruit among priests and religious of Japan. Further, Father Lassalle, a German member of the same Society of Jesus, has for the last ten years been operating a Zen Retreat House. How is this reality to be interpreted? Is it that by experiencing Zen and Ignatian spirituality as one thing, even though they have been thought to be as incompatible as water and oil, the strength of Catholic or Ignatian spirituality has already transcended Suzuki's concept? Or does it mean that we have been laboring to produce a syncretistic freak of spirituality which has penetrated neither Zen nor Ignatian spirituality in their true depths? This area will certainly be an important point of discussion in the world of spirituality.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. "Prayer with Form" and "Prayer without Form"

The idea of "word," whether we speak of the concept of the internal word or the concept of the external word, is itself a symbol. Accordingly in the case of either, we are dealing with "prayer with form" or "prayer without form." With respect to this, the so-called "prayer without words" can be considered "prayer without form," or "formless prayer."

In this context I like to use the metaphor of a tree, with the traditional concepts which express Christian understanding of prayer: "conversation with God,"<sup>17</sup> "lifting up one's heart to God,"<sup>18</sup> "an intimate friendship in which one loves and is loved by God,"<sup>19</sup> being the "leaves and the branches," or, on a deeper level, the "trunk of the tree." However, in order for the trunk, leaves, and branches to flower and to bear fruit, the tree must bury its roots



deeper under the ground. These roots can be considered as "prayer without words," "prayer without form." Nourishment is taken in and the life sap sent from the trunk into the branches and leaves, not by the branches and leaves themselves, which grow and turn towards the sky, but by virtue of the roots which are invisible and sink themselves into the earth, which is God. This invisible sap, the so-called "prayer of the heart," is the very life of prayer. Just as the flowing sap gives life to the tree, so the prayer of the heart gives life to the various forms of prayer. That which produces the vitality of prayer, the prayer of the heart; that which functions as the root of the prayer is the "prayer without words," the "prayer without form." Things like the beautiful words of the psalms, which form the liturgy, scripture readings, music, liturgical forms, and even the candles and flowers which adorn the altar — all these are "prayer with form." This is true of other religions as well; However, that which gives life, nurtures, and supports; that which the eye can see and the ear can hear, i.e., this "prayer with form," must be the "prayer without form," that which the eye cannot see nor the ear hear. Just as roots do not extend themselves visibly on the surface of the ground but thrust themselves deeply into the earth, the roots of prayer also thrust themselves deeply into the earth, which is God.

If we compare the "leaves" of "prayer with form" to vocal prayer, the "flowers" which turn towards the sky to "prayer of petition," the "trunk" to "meditation," then that which Oriental contemplation labors to produce is, so to speak, the kind of prayer which, like roots, thrusts itself down beneath the earth. We have already mentioned that this contemplation is basically different from that contemplation of John of the Cross which appears at the further shore of meditation.<sup>20</sup> It is the world of Oriental contemplation which sets its sights on "prayer without form," i.e., at the roots of "prayer with form," whether interior or exterior prayer, whether meditation or contemplation. It is the prayer which Daisetz Suzuki favors and describes as "with God before the creation of the world," (with God before God said "let there be light").<sup>21</sup> In Oriental spirituality prayer is the self-expression of that contemplative world which forms the roots of both meditation and contemplation, of both oral and mental prayer.

However, this spirituality is not only prayer as such. The whole of life, indeed even life and death themselves, are nothing other than the self-expression of the supra-cosmic existence — in Christian terminology, God — into which the "prayer without form" thrusts its roots. This is the reason why Buddhism is said to be pantheistic or panentheistic. This is what Zen refers to as both life and death as phenomena of the whole; that is, this life and death is, in other words, the all-pervading life of the Buddha.<sup>22</sup> "These little lives and deaths that we see are manifestations of the Life of the Buddha."<sup>23</sup> This means that the locus of the practice of Zen is the discipline



of the intense practice of daily living and encompasses the whole, the totality of life, as shown in expressions like: "Every form of living, whether lying or sitting, is Zazen"; "master one line at a time"; "drink when you're drinking; eat when you're eating." This attitude of Zazen is the aspect of the self-expression of perfect freedom and the naked *suchness* of the heart — that which precedes all forms. From this is born the attitude of sitting without being attached to sitting and without being attached to the detachment.

About ten years ago an American Quaker scholar, Professor Douglas Steers, and the group he founded for the mutual understanding and friendship between Christianity and Zen Buddhism, held its first meeting.<sup>24</sup> At this meeting several people met for breakfast one morning with Master Zenkei Shibayama, of happy memory, and Professor Steers. I asked, in a light vein, this question which I was afraid might be impertinent: "It is said in Zen that Zazen is the sole method of gaining satori. Is it true that these are so closely connected that unless one folds his legs in the lotus position he will never gain satori?" In response, the Master replied with an air of mischief: "If we don't say that, Zazen will never become fashionable in America." Everyone laughed at this unexpected and humorous reply, and it's still very much alive in my memory. If a person who wasn't so immersed in Zazen had answered in this half-playful, half-serious manner, this would have been neither interesting nor credible.<sup>25</sup>

This kind of light, irrepressible attitude of Zen is not to be found in Indian Buddhism, but was developed in the Chinese Zen tradition, and is a further refined sensibility found in the candid nature of the Japanese. This way of thinking is very important in order for Christian prayer to become incarnated in the Asian spiritual climate.

#### 4. "Prayer of Seeing" and "Prayer of Listening." "Original Ignorance" and "Original Sin"

The idea of salvation from sin is at the foundation or roots of Christianity. On the other hand, at the roots of Buddhism is the concept of "liberation from ignorance." From the very beginning, illusion comes from ignorance of Buddhist truth. This well-spring of ignorance in Buddhism is called *mumyo* (*Avidyā* in Sanskrit), or original ignorance. Of the twelve *Karmas* which are given as the fundamental doctrine of Buddhism, the first is this original ignorance which prevents one from penetrating the actual reality of human life.<sup>26</sup> It is this "original ignorance" (*Avidyā*) which is the root evil of the past, present, and future of the human person. This fundamental or radical ignorance, primordial ignorance, original ignorance, etc., forms a radical contrast with the concept of original sin in Christianity.

In the Christian explanation of original sin, the darkening of the human

intellect also appears. However, this is grasped not as the original evil itself, but as a result or effect of sin.<sup>27</sup> The root evil in Christianity is sin, which is rebellion against God. In other words, sin is rooted in the free will of man and is a hardness of heart, a pride, which is called the "mother of sin." In Buddhism, "original ignorance" (Avidyā) is the fundamental cause of sin and is called the "fathering ignorance" of the "long night of ignorance."<sup>28</sup>

This interesting fundamental contrast between Christianity and Buddhism appears in the area of spirituality as well in an outstanding way. In Buddhism, "to know," that is, "to see reality as it is," is at the wellspring of salvation.<sup>29</sup> The ultimate purpose of Zen is connected with enlightenment; "seeing" into the truth of reality<sup>30</sup> and the prayer which concentrates on insight into actual reality is Zen contemplation. Similarly, this means that the characteristic of prayer in this tradition is that it is the "prayer of seeing." As opposed to this, at the core of Christianity, the central attitude is "listening to God," and "to listen" means "to be obedient to his voice" (Jn 10:1-5, 7, 26, 27).<sup>31</sup>

Great importance, though, is attached to listening in both religious traditions. A phrase which occurs very frequently in the Buddhist scripture is 如是我聞 — "as such I have heard" — which resembles the phrase "Listen, O Israel" (Shema) of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, in spite of this, in Buddhism, "to listen" to the Founder is nothing other than to open one's eyes to truth. The name Buddha derives from the Sanskrit, Bud, meaning to know, to understand, to become conscious. Buddha, therefore, is one who has understood, or one who has been awakened to truth. "To become Buddha" in Mahayana Buddhism means salvation in Buddhist terms. The essence of this salvation is thought to "be awakened," to "have arrived at truth."

This outstanding emphasis on the spirituality of seeing, or contemplation as "prayer of seeing," in Buddhism is characteristic, not only of it, but in a broader sense of the spiritual climate of "the whole Orient."<sup>32</sup> In Indian transcendental meditation, which has recently become popular in Christian countries, there is also an attempt to discover the self by an opening up and deepening of man's spiritual functions. The philosophical and metaphysical essence of this is to open the eyes to "Being" (Existence). Seeing, in this sense, or discovering, can be given as the special characteristic of Eastern contemplation. We are taught to discover that truth "which eye has not seen nor ear heard"; which has always been present, but because of the clouding of human vision has been lost sight of. This truth is different from hearing what you've never heard and seeing what you've never seen (cf. Mt 13:16-17). It is also different from hearing what has never been heard. To remove the veil from ignorance is salvation, which in Zen is called satori. While Eastern spirituality places this seeing at its core, Christianity places the



center in hearing. Therefore, naturally, the emphasis is placed on "word." That which sees is the eye; that which hears is the ear. What is heard is, then, "word."

Revelation as word of God or as God's addressing himself to man is what has characterized Christianity from its origins as a revealed religion, or as a supernatural religion, and has distinguished it from the others, that is, natural religions. No matter what we think of this simplistic theological categorization, the understanding of prayer in the Christian spiritual tradition of a listening spirituality, as, for example, prayer considered as "listening to God" or "conversation with God," is certainly alien to the focal point of Zen contemplation which speaks of "seeing your original face which you have before your parents gave birth to you."

In any case, truth is one; and if the basic truth of human existence is universal, we should grasp these totally differing phenomena not as irreconcilable contradictions, but rather as the mystery which is hidden in the depths of prayer and which is revealed by these two faces of prayer, and use them to discover an understanding of the final reality of prayer.

However, even if Christianity is a "religion of listening," and its definition of prayer is "listening to God," nevertheless, in Christ that "invisible God became visible." This is indicated by the fact that in the New Testament, words meaning "to see" have a more frequent occurrence than those meaning "to hear." As opposed to the Old Testament in which the word "hear" or "listen" occurs more than 1100 times,<sup>33</sup> the emphasis in the New Testament is on "seeing" that which people wanted to see but couldn't (cf. Mt 13:17).

It goes without saying that the point in question here is the mystery of Christ's incarnation (*mysterium Incarnationis*). In spite of the predominantly frequent occurrence of "seeing" in the New Testament, the fact that Christianity's principal understanding of prayer has been as "prayer of listening," "prayer of understanding," or in other words, "prayer with words," derives not from the essence of Christianity itself so much as from the intellectual tradition and spiritual climate of the Occident which has had a strong thrust to "word," "concept," "expression."

If there exists at the core of Christianity a strain that recognizes the mystical experience of silence which stands on the total failure of words before the infinite, eternal God Who cannot be reached by verbal expression, then that strain is a negative theology. In it the whole question of transcendence of words becomes urgent.<sup>34</sup> Here, human language shrinks into the dark night and becomes as stars shining in the silence. Here, for the first time the prayer of listening changes to the prayer of "seeing." This evolution or change is that which John of the Cross speaks of as moving from

meditation to contemplation. According to John of the Cross, contemplation is nothing other than to "gaze at the God of Love with eyes filled with love."<sup>35</sup>

In the technical language of Christian theology, Oriental contemplation has been given the unnatural labels of "natural mysticism" or "acquired contemplation" (*contemplatio acquisita*). Nevertheless, the essence of Oriental contemplation is the spontaneous awakening to the capacity for God or "the seed of God" (*semen Dei*) which is hidden in human nature. Of course, the awakening to God in the human heart cannot be accomplished by human effort alone. This is what Christianity refers to as "infused contemplation" (*contemplatio infusa*) in which God gives Himself to whom He wills, when He wills, and how He wills. Still the seeds of contemplation have been given to everyone. The problem is whether or not effort has been made to make these seeds germinate. In this understanding of the "seed of God" or "the seeds of contemplation" as dwelling in all people, contemplation is natural to the human being. However, in contrast to the work of God which germinates and cultivates this precious seed, it is the work of man to water it (I Cor 3:6). This work means our effort, our wisdom, that which things like Yoga and Zen, in the long tradition of Oriental contemplation, have labored to produce.

Obviously there is a danger here of falling into the illusion that it is man's effort of itself that has caused the seed to germinate, a danger of pride and excessive confidence in the methods that man has devised. If there is any danger in the methodology of Oriental meditation, it would lie in this area of overemphasis on human endeavor in mythologizing the method, in divinizing the kind of director who has attained perfection in the method. Of course, it goes without saying that methodology is of importance and that the experience of the director and trust in him is a *sine qua non* of growth in the spiritual life. In order to make Zen spirituality one's own, it is impossible to overlook the practice of Zazen; in order to learn the transcendental meditation of Yoga, a Guru is necessary.

Ultimately, however, "only the Buddha can give Buddha." The only one who can give God is God Himself. In the giving of Himself, God is bound by no human condition, by no human talent or ability. Just as we don't know where the wind comes from or where it goes, the spirit of God blows where it wills (Jn 3:8). We must use methods without being totally dependent on them, learn from a teacher but not always follow the teacher — rather, to follow only God. In the case of a Christian, this means to know that Christ is the only director, the only genuine teacher (Mt 23:8-10).

One of the principal tenets of Oriental spirituality is the rightness and necessity of the legitimacy of the Master, to the extent that it has been said



that "if one cannot find a genuine teacher, it's better not to learn at all."<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, there is also the exceedingly strong emphasis within Oriental spirituality on the necessity of the Master's facing himself and standing humble before the truth. "I must decrease; he must increase" (Jn 3:30). At the same time that we acknowledge human equality as expressed in "The heavens have not made some human beings above others, some below," the question of what it means to be a director is extremely important in a spiritual tradition like that of the East which stresses the role of the director so strongly. This is because for one person to be a genuine teacher to another, he must make himself transparent, must be fully alive, and something greater must be manifest in him or her. The only real "genuine teacher" is God, is Christ. With regard to all others, no matter how great they are, if their greatness does anything to obscure God, the Buddha, or Christ, then that greatness is something which is to be cursed. True human greatness is not that which is great of itself, but that which having emptied itself shows forth the greatness of God. Even Christ, who is true God and true man, assumed this attitude towards his Father (Mt 19:17; Mk 10:18; Lk 18:19). If the greatness of Christ consisted in revealing not himself but the Father, then the greatness of the Christian must lie in effacing himself, and living only unto Christ. "I have been crucified with Christ: the life I now live is not my life, but the life which Christ lives in me; and my present bodily life is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and sacrificed himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Only the one who can say this is the true disciple of Christ, and is and can be a master or director who leads others to Christ.

In a "prayer of seeing" and a "spirituality of seeing," it is easy for "awareness of self as Buddha" to come into the foreground. To be cleaned from this kind of clinging to self requires unflogging interior discipline. According to Dogen, "to have great illusions about enlightenment is to be a sentient being. Further, some are continually enlightened beyond enlightenment, but some add more and more illusion."

The "prayer of listening," on the other hand, presupposes another. It means not "looking into" (Anschauen), it means not seeing into life or the world or oneself, but inclining one's ear to the voice of the one who calls out, and following that one (Jn 10:4, 16, 27). Etymologically, the word "to follow" (obedientia) derives from the word "to listen" (audire). The "prayer of listening," far from meaning to build up the self, or to assert the self, is a prayer which learns to forget self, to throw away self, to abandon self, to give oneself totally to the other. What is operative here is not the compassion of a master, which by understanding self first helps one understand the others; but rather, brotherly love which lays down one's life for a friend (Jn 15:13). The love which discerns the voice of the "Thou" saying, "Leave all things and follow," and which says that all things are dung in comparison with knowing

the love of Christ — this love is the “prayer of listening” in Christianity (Mt 10:39; 16:24-25 and parallels).

The Christian commitment is totally included in the phrase “to lay down my life for you.” This does not even mean “to discover oneself by losing oneself for Christ.” If it did mean “to discover oneself by losing oneself,” then the loss of oneself is not in reality giving up all things. To “lose myself for you” means to leave behind not even a single fragment of self. This means not only not leaving all things for you in order to discover the self, but even the absolute self-surrender without any regret or holding back. To choose hell with Christ rather than heaven without Christ<sup>38</sup> — this prayer to be buried in Christ and with Christ and to be brought to life again in him is the “prayer of listening.”

## II. THE MYSTERY OF PRAYER AND LOVE

So far, I have been comparing Christian prayer and the uniqueness of the prayer found in Eastern spirituality. But as I have noted before, in order to clarify their essential differences, we have to probe more deeply into the spirituality behind each prayer, and further still, to the essentials of each religion itself, which form their base.

I would now like to look at the basic aspects of each of the spiritualities and their corresponding prayer form by comparing the fundamentals of Christianity and Buddhism, one of the representative religions in the East.

In special contrast with love (agape), the essence of Christianity, maitri (mercy) is considered to be an important idea, particularly in Mahayana Buddhism. To compare the two, one must be concerned not only with an essential understanding of both religions, but also with the mystery of human love.

Let us now take up a theme which may be of help in the understanding of the fundamental characteristics of both Christianity and Buddhism at the same time.

### 1. “A Wealthy Man and His Prodigal Son”

In the Lotus-Sutra (Saddharmapundarīka-sūtra) is found the following famous story, a parable of “A Wealthy Man and His Prodigal Son.”<sup>39</sup> It is the story of a son who underwent the sufferings of poverty, though his father was a man of wealth. I will summarize it because the original is colored with the gorgeous flavour of Indian literature, and because some parts are overlapping and repetitious.

Once a foolish son was deceived by a stupid person and left his father. After many years, he fell into low repute and wandered around for food and clothing. His father worried so much that he, too, began



to wander around looking for his runaway son, until finally growing weary of the search he settled down in a big city. The rich father built a huge mansion, gathered a tremendous amount of money and lots of slaves, was specially loved by the king and respected by the townspeople. However, in spite of his luxury, he could not forget his son, with the result that his life was most unhappy.

"It is already fifty years since my foolish son left home. Although I have amassed a great fortune, I will soon die. What on earth can I do without a son to inherit my wealth?", he pondered.

One day the runaway son appeared in front of his father's mansion, astonished and frightened by the wealth before him — the entrance with its colorful curtains; the floor covered with flower petals; and in the inner court surrounded by many priests, noblemen, and merchants, a rich man was seated on a gorgeous chair decorated with gold, silver, and other jewelry, trading millions of gold pieces. The son hadn't the slightest idea that the man was his own father but wondered what kind of place he had come to. "This man must be a king or a minister. There couldn't possibly be sort of job for me to do here. It would be better for me to go to the slums. If I stay around here, I will surely be arrested and consigned to heavy labor. Or else some other kind of trouble would befall me." With these thoughts, he turned to run away.

However, the father recognized his son at first glance and was overcome with joy. "What a strange thing! The very one who will inherit all my gold, treasures, and money has returned! I am now an aged man. How often have I thought about this son of mine, and now he has come back to me on his own."

Because of his great love for his son, the father, who had suffered for a long time, immediately ordered someone to bring the son to him. However, the frightened son cried aloud and hastened to flee. The father fully understood the situation, told his servants not to treat him cruelly, and without saying a word, poured some cold water on the son who had fainted through fright. Because their social statuses were so completely different, the father refrained from revealing his identity. He ordered the servants not to bring the son by force, to allow him to do whatever he wished. Again, the son was surprised by the words and attitude of the servants, but he left and went back to the slums. Then the rich father wondered if there weren't some good way to keep the son near him. He hired two pale-looking men, saying: "Find the man who was here the other day and bring him to work here for twice the ordinary salary. If he asks what kind of job it is, tell him that it is cleaning toilets."

The son felt at ease and moved into a hut near his rich father's mansion, doing the lowly work with no realization that it was his own father for whom he was working. The father sometimes removed his beautiful robes, put on dirty clothes, soiled his hands and feet, and carrying a basket, approached his son, all the while keeping his position a secret. He offered advice and counsel as "Don't idle away your time ... clean the toilets ... don't work for anyone else. Stay and work here. I will give you a special salary ... tell me whatever you want, whether food, clothing, pay for water, firewood, or salt. I will do anything for you. I am old, but you are still young. You have served me so much by cleaning the toilets. Besides, you have never been dishonest, unfaithful, or arrogant. From now on, you will be just like my own son."

Because of such patient education on the part of his father, the son began to love this master as if he were truly his father, not at all suspecting the truth.

Twenty years passed. The father knew his death was near because of his senility, and so he called the son who had worked for so long a time as his servant.

"My servant, come here. I am seriously ill, and I am looking for a person to whom I can leave my vast fortune. I would like you to receive all of it. I have been the owner of all this wealth, but from now on I want you to take my place."

The son, however, who considered himself only a servant, was disinterested in the fortune after he had received it and did not use even one penny for himself. He thought of himself as a poor man, and continued living in the hut.

The father saw this noble-minded and humble son, and finally when his death was very near at hand, he revealed their father-son relationship to the king, ministers, and townspeople for the first time. "Listen, everyone. Actually, this is my own son; I am his real father. For fifty years since he ran away I have searched for him. This is my son; I am his father. And so, I will leave all of my fortune to him."

The Sutra says that such is the mercy of Buddha. Just as this wealthy father dealt with his poor son, so Buddha uses every means to help people through his valuable teachings, to raise them up, to save them.

The reason why I have used such a long quotation is that I wanted to clarify some points of the story, which is not very familiar to Christians.

It goes without saying that the similarity of this story of "A Wealthy Man and His Prodigal Son" and the parable of the prodigal son in Luke has been noted by scholars for a long time.<sup>40</sup>



In his book, *A Comparative Study of Buddhism and Christianity*, Fumio Masutani, a former professor of Tokyo University's religion department, deals with these two stories and concludes as follows:

These two allegories have common material. In either case, an impudent, prodigal son, living in want, is the hero of the story. Without reproaching his misconduct, the father received him with boundless love. The former is an allegory of God's measureless love, and the latter is that of Buddha's profound mercy. The remarkable resemblance in material and conception suggests something more than a mere coincidence. Nevertheless, there is one important difference between the two, that is the difference in the treatment of the prodigal son.

Both fathers longed for their sons' return. Nothing is greater than these fathers' joy when their sons came home. But they received their sons in a conspicuously contrasted manner. At the sight of his son, one father rushed out to fall on his neck and kiss him. He immediately gave the best robe and food and entertained the son so much that his elder brother was made angry. It is different with the other. This father waited for his son to develop a better human nature step by step, giving him some humble and suitable work. The father treated his son according to the stage he had reached. Indeed, either case is an expression of fatherly love, but with the former paternal feelings are dominant, with the latter reason is ruling.<sup>41</sup>

This book is good on the whole because, as the author intended, it does compare Buddhism and Christianity from objective and scholarly viewpoints, in a very scholarly way. Also, it avoids the prejudice due to ignorance of other religions so often found in religious books.<sup>42</sup> However, the following conclusion of the comparison of these two parables does not hold too much weight: "... with the former, paternal feelings are dominant; with the latter, reason is ruling."<sup>43</sup> On the surface, the author's judgment seems reasonable enough, namely, that the paternal love shown in joyfully accepting the prodigal son without reserve is sentimental love; whereas the love shown in educating the poor son till he is fit for a wealthy father before whom even a king bows, and all the while concealing one's identity, is rational love. In reality the meanings of these two parables are much deeper.

## 2. "Theology of Substance" and "Theology of Relationship"

As Masutani pointed out, the story of "A Wealthy Man and His Prodigal Son" in the Lotus-Sutra beautifully expresses the themes of salvation and maitri in Buddhism, and its quality is quite different from the prodigal son in Luke, in spite of the similarity in content. However, their difference is not one of "feeling" and "reason" as he indicates. In the parable of the prodigal son in Luke, agape, or Christian love, is set forth. What should be

noted here is the "unconditional character of love," as well as the "father-son relationship." The only important thing is that the prodigal son "came back to his father," although he was in such a poor state. The joy of "his son having been dead but now alive, and having been lost but now found" fills this father's whole being. The brother who was with the father and lived honestly would become a good heir (Lk 15:13). But what overjoyed the father was the sudden return of the son who was thought to be dead. This is the central idea of Christianity, and it finds echo in the parable of the shepherd who goes out in search of one lost sheep, leaving the other ninety-nine (Mt 18:12-14; Lk 15:4-7).

In the teaching of the Lotus-Sutra, the father-son relationship is revealed only after the prodigal son has made progress as a human being and has grown fit to be the wealthy man's son. It is a typical parable found in Buddhism, which shows that human growth and self-formation are the real salvation of human beings.

Not accepting one as one is, poor and lowly, the maitri of Buddha makes the poor in body and spirit rich, the lowly to be lofty. This is salvation in Buddhism. The passage — "the foolish son having been deceived by a stupid person left home" — is explained by the fact that he was deceived by some false teaching other than Buddhism.

Salvation, then, in Buddhism is to lead people from such false teachings that disillusion them and raise them up to become real sons of Buddha. That is maitri, The love taught by Christ, agape, does not aim primarily at such self-formation or human growth. The living relationship of father and son shown in "the son came back to the father" is the fundamental idea of the parable of the prodigal son, prior to the son's growth in becoming a fine man. As for a good heir, the brother who complained would fill the role. Such a brother is not the hero of the story; but the son who could not look up and face his father, who said that he was no longer fit to be called a son, and the unconditional love of the father toward the son are the points of the story. What is taught in the Gospel is not the maitri of Buddha, which calls forth human self-perfection, but the job of re-establishing the broken relationship of father and son.

If I use a strictly philosophical term here, one's own perfection is taught in the case of the story of the Lotus-Sutra, because it focuses on each individual human perfection. But in Christ's parable of the prodigal son, a "theology of relationship," based on the personal relationship of father and son, is expressed. Besides, the relationship of father and son illustrated here would be understood as finally leading to the "mystery of relationship," to "Trinity."

In comparison with this Christian "theology of relationship," salvation



in Buddhism could be called a "theology of substance."<sup>43</sup> These two parables beautifully express the fundamental difference between Buddhism and Christianity as a difference in spiritualities. In Buddhism, it is a search for self-growth, an ascertainment of one's substance, or original nature. In Christianity, salvation comes from an "I-Thou" relationship.

It is quite natural, then, that the prayer based on these fundamental differences should have different characteristics.

In Buddhism, "prayer as practice" leading to enlightenment by self-training is valued; in Christianity, prayer as the association of love based on faith in God or Christ is of importance. In the former, strict meditation which leads to a kind of metaphysical, religious experience, sometimes referred to as natural mysticism, is practiced; in the latter, the "Eucharist," which centers on the communication between Christ and his Father, is the nucleus.

Christian, especially Catholic, prayer has "Eucharist," or the Mass, as its center. The "Liturgia horarum," as a community prayer of the Church, enriches the Mass. In addition to these liturgical prayers are meditation and contemplation, which cause the life-giving "sap" to flow through them. If we could deepen these forms of prayer, i.e., prayer which sends "sap" to the "roots," as in Eastern meditation, then Christian prayer would become more fruitful. If every prayer could be rooted not in "prayer with words" but in "prayer without words"; not in "prayer with form" but in "prayer without form," then "Liturgia Verbi," which is "prayer with words," and the Mass and "Liturgia horarum," both "prayer with form," would become much more living and life-giving.

### 3. Maitri (Buddhist Mercy) and Agape (Christian Love)

It is often said that Christianity is a "religion of love," while Buddhism is a "religion of wisdom." In Buddhism, there is the teaching of Amitabha's mercy, (maitri) which liberates mankind completely so that in the end even hell will be abolished. In Christianity, we find the great wisdom literature in the Old Testament; and in the New Testament, the thought that "to know," Christ is great wisdom. St. Paul furthermore declares the supreme advantage of knowing Christ in whom all knowledge and wisdom are are concealed (Phil 3:8; Eph 1:17; Col 1:9; etc.).

The consideration of Christianity as a "religion of love" is usually based on the following two reasons: first, Christ said that the greatest commandment of law is love for God and neighbor (Mt 22:35-40; Mk 12:28-31; Lk 10:25-37); and secondly, Christ taught us to expand the law of love in the Old Testament to include even our enemies (Mt 5:43-48; Lk 6:27-36; cf. Rom 12:17-21).

Unconditional love for enemy, however, is not something peculiar only to Christianity. Buddhist mercy is certainly identical with it. Many Buddhist scholars even say that Buddhist mercy, which liberates all creatures from hell and finally wipes out hell itself, is superior to a love of God as found in Christianity, that cannot deny the existence of hell.

It is a fact that there are a lot of admirable teachings on mercy in the ancient Sutras of Buddhism. Let me introduce only a few of the more typical ones. "Have mercy on your own enemies and treat all men with a merciful heart. This is the teaching of all the enlightened."<sup>44</sup> In "The Teaching of Sīṅgāḷaka," we find this: "It is a true friend that lays down his life for his friend," a reminder of Christ's saying: "A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friend," in the Gospel according to St. John (Jn 15:13).

Although it is rather long, I would like to introduce here the "Parable of Purna" from the Sarvastivada of Theravada Buddhism. As a help in avoiding rudimentary errors when comparing Buddhism with Christianity, it is necessary to see how much Buddhist mercy insists on love for enemy.

Purna, a merchant, travelled to various places while conducting his business, and after a while, became very rich. But after listening to the teaching of Buddha, he gave up all his wealth to charity, entered the priesthood, and decided to go to live in the district of Aparāntaka. Then Buddha said to him, "Purna, the people of Aparāntaka are violent and quick-tempered, cruel and abusive, irritable and arrogant. If they get angry with you, say spiteful things about you and abuse you, what will you think of them?" "Master, if the people of Aparāntaka get angry with me, say spiteful things about me and abuse me, I shall think of them as 'kind and gentle.' For though they may get angry with me, say spiteful things about me, they will not box me with their hands or hurl stones at me."

"Purna," said Buddha, "the people of the district are violent and quick-tempered. If they box you with their hands and hurl stones at you, what, then, will you think of them?" "Master, even if they box me with their hands and hurl stones at me, I shall think of them as 'kind and gentle.' For they will not wound me with a stick and a sword."

"But, Purna," continued Buddha. "The people of the district are violent and quick-tempered. If they wound you with a stick and a sword, what will you think of them?" "Master, even if they wound me with a stick and a sword, I shall think of them as 'kind and gentle.' For they are not likely to kill me."

Buddha went on: "Purna, the people of the district are violent and quick-tempered. If they kill you, what, then, will you think of



them?" "Master, even if they kill me, I shall think of them as 'kind and gentle.' For they deliver me from this foul body with but slight pain."

"Very well, Purna. You are gifted by nature with patience and gentleness, so suited for living in the Aparāntaka district," Buddha said. "Go, then, Purna!"<sup>45</sup>

Anyone who believes that Christianity has a monopoly on love for enemy and unconditional love for neighbor will be surprised to find out that Buddhism teaches boundless mercy in the same way. The Buddhist teaching on mercy is not a bit different from that of Christ's on love! "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, as your Father in Heaven causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike" (Mt 5:44-45). Rather, we could even say that Buddhist mercy, as cited in the above story of Purna, is described as something even more intense.

Although both Christianity and Buddhism teach love for all men and enemies alike, as illustrated in the story of Purna and in the above quote from Matthew, differences also exist, as they do in two parables of the prodigal sons. The story of Purna ends as follows: "Free yourself first from passion and delusion, and then lead others to freedom. Enlighten yourself and then lead others to enlightenment. Gain for yourself peace of mind, and then lead others to it. Attain for yourself a higher perfection, and then lead others to its attainment."<sup>46</sup> Here we see the teaching of Buddha, that through self-attainment of perfection one can lead others to the same state. In other words, a "theology of substance." Buddhist mercy does not mean to love others as they are, regardless of their inherent goodness or badness, but to lead them to self-perfection in the Buddhist sense. We need only to recall the story of the prodigal son in the Lotus-Sutra who is transformed into an excellent man through a long life of ascetism.

Since the Scriptures thus command: "You must, therefore, be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48), it seems that Christianity also requires the same sort of self-perfection. But, in fact, the command is founded on a "theology of relationship" which enables us to interpret it as: "If you are a son, be as such." What is important is that the Scriptures not only teach unconditional love for neighbor, which is identical with Buddhist mercy, but also reveal that "in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven." The seemingly impossible command to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" is laid before us, but it becomes possible of fulfillment only if we establish a father-son relationship with God.

As the father and his son have the same nature, and as there can be no father without a son, nor a son without a father, the perfection of the father is that of the son as well. Christ, therefore, did not mean to say be perfect "like

God in the highest," which is utterly impossible. The core of the Gospel lies not in self-perfection of self-formation, but in "being sons of our Father in heaven." "To all who did accept Christ, who believe in his name, he gives the power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12).

Herein lies the essential differences between Buddhist mercy and Christian love for neighbor, though both may be unconditional and absolute. Buddhism, one might say, is based on a "theology of substance," whereby all men will be led to an enlightened state. Christianity is based on a "theology of relationship," whereby all men will be made sons of God the Father.<sup>47</sup>

Naturally each spirituality, and the prayer nourished by it, differs, one from the other, since each is founded on its own religious essence. Buddhism teaches "making oneself" and dharma, the light to show the way to satori or the enlightened state. Hence, asceticism to overcome oneself and meditation to open one's eyes to "reality as such" are valued in prayer. On the other hand, Christian prayer is the offering of a son's love based on boundless trust in God, to whom he cries out "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15-17; Gal 4:6-7). "For me, prayer is the lifting up of my heart, a very simple look toward heaven, a cry of love and thanks in the midst of trials as well as in joy."<sup>48</sup> "The proof that we are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (Gal 4:6). Christian prayer is asking the Father for anything in the name of Christ, living in the Spirit of God, entrusting everything to Him. "The Father will give you anything you ask Him in my name" (Jn 15:16). "I do not say that I shall pray to the Father for you, because the Father Himself loves you for loving me and believing that I came from God" (Jn 16:26-27).

The "prayer of petition" in Christianity is a cry of overwhelming joy brought on by communion with the Father in love and trust. "There is no need to worry; but if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving; and the peace of God, which is so much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus" (Ph 4:6-7; 1 Pet 5:7; cf. Ps 55:22). The basis or the root of the "prayer of petition" in Christianity is an expression of love for God the Father and of trust in Him in Christ. There, the mystery of the immanence of the Holy Trinity is present as profound reality (Jn 14:23).

The "peace of God," which is so much greater than we can understand, that will guard our "hearts" and our "thoughts," is the very thing that gives Christ's life to the "peace of mind through meditation" of Eastern spirituality.

Thus, it should be evident that the "prayer of petition" which underlines so much of Christian prayer is not necessarily inferior to the meditation of Eastern spirituality, as is thought by some.



#### 4. "Love for Neighbor" and "Love for One Another"

It is often said that the greatest commandment taught by Christ is that of love, namely, love for God and love for neighbor (Mt 22:35-40; Mk 12:28-31; Lk 10:25-37). But are these really His new commandments? It is certain that Christ solemnly declares: "On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets also" (Mt 22:40). He, however, calls them neither "new commandments" nor "my commandments." Rather, He simply points out that the Scribes should know these things (Lk 10:26-29). The commandments that the Scribes should know are those of the Old Testament, that is, the old commandments. Therefore, "a new commandment" that Jesus "gives you" is something else. St. John records Christ's "new commandment," after describing the episode of Jesus washing His disciples' feet. "I give you a new commandment: love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another" (Jn 13:34-35; 15:12,17).

The new commandment given by Christ is not the "love your neighbor as yourself" of the Old Testament (Lev 13:35). It is possible to find elements of the Old Testament "love for neighbor" carried over into the New Testament "love for one another," as well as certain elements that are discontinued. Christ's saying that He has come not to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them can apply here also (Mt 5:17).

The Old Testament commandment of love for neighbor must now be extended further. "If anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; if a man takes you to court and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:39-44). This seems identical with Buddhist mercy (*maitri*). Moreover, the Gospel reveals the fact that to become a son of God the Father means to establish a "son's relationship" to the Father, Who possesses a universal love. In this respect, as I have already explained, the teaching of "love for neighbor" in the New Testament, which should be understood in the light of "theology of relationship," is different from Buddhist mercy, which has the character of "theology of substance." The vertical relation of a son's love for his father is now assured and strengthened by another vertical relation between Christ and us, which is indicated in the words "as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34). Furthermore, because of the mystery of incarnation, in that Jesus is true God and true man as well, the vertical relation between Christ and us develops into a horizontal relation of brotherly love in the commandment "love one another."

Thus we see the qualitative difference between Christ's "love for one another" and the Old Testament "love for neighbor." Christ's commandment is new not only in the sense that the community formed by Christ is new, but also in that the commandment itself is utterly new, compared with "love for

neighbor," which precludes mutuality. Since St. Paul uses the words without making a clear distinction between "love for neighbor" and for "one another" or "brotherly love" in his epistles (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14), the differences are not immediately recognizable as they are in the Gospels. Nevertheless, not a few passages do show clearly the mutuality of love and forgiveness (Rom 12:10, 15; 1 Tim 4:9; 1 Eph 4:2; 3:2; Col 3:13; etc.).

To love one's neighbor, in a sense, means to be a saint oneself, or to be a person of love, like God or Buddha. Of course, it is very difficult; yet it is essential for loving one's neighbor. Speaking in Buddhist terms, it is to have mercy even on your merciless enemies. Mutual love is more than that. It is to build up a relation of loving and being loved. Aristotle may be right when he says that the essence of love is not in being loved, but in loving.<sup>49</sup> As far as the relationship between God and man is concerned, we are loved and forgiven first (1 Jn 4:10; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13), and by that fact we are able to love God. In other words, mutual love between God and man should come first. When Thomas Aquinas defines caritas as "a certain friendship with God," he means by it "mutual love" as interpreted in the term "theology of relationship."<sup>50</sup>

Christ has given us only one new commandment. It is mutual love that enables us to form horizontal relationships among ourselves. These are supported by the mutual love between Christ and us, between God and us. Furthermore, the mutual love between the Father and the Son makes these relationships even more profound.

In conclusion, since we consider "love for neighbor" as unconditional love that embraces even one's enemy, we may think of it as the same as Buddhist "mercy." Men are enabled to be united in Christ by love for one another, the root of which love is the vertical love that the Holy Trinity has poured out over men through Christ. Speculating on all these ideas, we see more clearly the fact that we and Christ are one (Mt 25:40,45),<sup>51</sup> and that we can be united in Christ and be one body (1 Cor 12:12-13; Eph 4:4-6).

Naturally, Christian prayer that springs from a theology based on a relationship of love, as explained above, must differ from Buddhist prayer, which is founded on the Buddhist concept of mercy. Even the everyday greetings exchanged by Christians, such as, "Please pray for me," show a mutuality of prayer based on a mutuality of love. Similar to this are other greetings like, "I wish you good health," or, "I wish you 'bon voyage'," which all men, regardless of their religious beliefs, use. These differ from the first greeting cited, in that they stress prayer "for others," and are hence different in quality from the first, which asks another to pray "for me." The words "for me" are not an egoistic or embarrassing expression, but one that shows the communitarian characteristic of Christian prayer, itself derived from the communitarian characteristic of salvation, the essence of Christianity.<sup>52</sup>



Such communitarian prayer rises neither from the Buddhist "mercy" concept nor from "love for neighbor," both of which are based on "theology of substance." Personal enlightenment should come first in such a theology, and then come the efforts to lead others to enlightenment. In other words, it is mass salvation by adopting and assimilating the enlightened state achieved by another individual. The method of direct transmission of Buddhist spirituality from master to pupil points out the "substantial" individuality of Buddhist spirituality.

To sum up, the essence and spirituality of Buddhism and the characteristics of Buddhist prayer, therefore, should be understood within the scope of "theology of substance"; while the characteristics of Christian prayer, which are an expression of the essence of Christian salvation and its spirituality, should be seen in the scope of "theology of relationship."

The Rev. Augustine Ichiro Okumura, O.C.D.  
Seiko Gakiun.  
I, Taya, Fukakusa  
Fushimi-ku, Kyoto (812)  
Japan.

Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Nakagawa Soen Roshi (Master). Master Nakagawa often visits the West in order to promote the understanding of Zen. He especially spends time in New York, where recently he established a Zendo and personally gives guidance in Zen.

<sup>2</sup> "Emptiness" (ku); in Sanskrit, Sunyatta. This word is fundamental to the teaching of Mahayana Buddhism. It originates in the root SVI, which does not mean "empty," "void" (marappo) or "nothingness" (mu), but rather "plenitude" (juman). Cf. E. Conze, *Le Bouddhisme dans son essence et son développement*, (Paris: Payot, 1952).

<sup>3</sup> *The Record of Lin-chi*, trans by Ruth F. Sasaki (Kyoto: Institute For Zen Studies, 1975), Discourses XVIII, p.25.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1964), Ch. 111-4, p.74-75.

<sup>5</sup> *The Record of Lin-chi*, *op.cit.*, p.29.

<sup>6</sup> Tillich, *op.cit.*, Ch. 1-2, p.4.

<sup>7</sup> Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936):

In *Kim* we find the famous poem, "East and West," which has these lines:

"Oh! East is East, and West is West, And never the twain shall meet; ...  
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed nor Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of  
the earth!"

The first line is quoted by R. Otto, *Die West Östliche Mystik*, p.29 of Introduction.

<sup>8</sup> John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticles*, XIV-XV.

<sup>9</sup> In John of the Cross' "Mystical Theology," it is said that one passes from "meditation" to "contemplation" in the following three stages:

First, although one wants to meditate, one cannot; second, there is no desire to meditate; third, one finds joy in God's peace. Because the signs of the first two steps cannot with certainty be called supernatural phenomena, they must be accompanied by the third (cf. *Subida del monte Carmelo*, Lib. II, C.13). In "The Dark Night" (Bk I C.9)), instead of the sign of the third step, that of rejoicing in God's peace, there is anxiety as to whether one is separated from God. When this "peace" and "anxiety" are understood as two sides of the same coin, one understands the meaning of the depth of the signs in step three, which is the most important of the three.

<sup>10</sup> Quietism: The heresy of quietism spread throughout Spain, France, Belgium, etc., from the 16th to the 17th centuries. In the West it can be traced back to Greece; in the East to the Yoga of ancient India and to the origin of Buddhism. But the quietism prevalent during the time of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila reached the point of saying that *only in prayer* was salvation, denying moral actions and the value of the Sacraments. Thus it was declared heretical by the Church. We cannot say there is absolutely no such tendency in Eastern meditation, but Eastern morality keeps it in check.

<sup>11</sup> John of the Cross, *ut supra*, footnote n.9. The spirituality of "nothingness" (*nada*) of John of the Cross and Dogen's Zen can be said to have exceedingly similar points, but if we approach from this understanding, both can be said to be utterly different.

<sup>12</sup> 祇管打座 — shikantaza  
只管打座 — singleminded, themeless sitting



13 Koan: Ever since the rise of Zen in China from the 11th to the 12th centuries, the practical methods of Zen have taken two forms. One is mokushozen, or enlightenment through meditation; the other is kannazen, or talking. The former was handed down in Japan through Dogen, who preached shikantaza, Zazen. The latter became the Rinzaï sect, whose intent is "seeing," mainly through the Koan. There was an age when both were extremely critical of the other, but the value of the Koan as a medium should be recognized. It corresponds to the Catholic meditation called punkta, but the way of association is very different. The Koan is a "word used as means," leading to enlightenment in Zen, which does not depend on the words but on intuition or mental telepathy. The saying in Zen, "the finger pointing to the moon," properly illustrates this. Words are like "the finger pointing to the moon." If you look at your finger, you cannot see the moon. To see the moon you must look in the direction of the finger pointing to it. Thus, the meaning is that one does not gaze at "words," but at the reality "indicated by the words." According to Thomas Aquinas, faith is *res et non enuntiabilia*; in other words, not "words" but "reality." In still other words, it approaches matter. And so we have the appropriateness of the example of the "finger" and the "moon."

14 Arthur Lloyd, *Wheat Among the Tares*, p.53.

15 Daisetz T. Suzuki: *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, translated in the body of this paper from the Japanese, as the English version is now out of print, (Kyoto: Hozokan, 1949), pp.18-19.

16 An Indonesian Carmelite (O. Carm) priest has been spending the last eight months in a Japanese Zendo, undergoing ascetical practices and training. According to him it is not Ignatian spirituality that resembles Zen, but the long contemplative tradition encouraged in Carmelite spirituality. He added that it is through this spirituality that Christianity can be incarnated in his native Indonesia.

17 Saint Augustine, "Conversation with God", *Ennaratio in Psalmis*, 85, P.L., 37, Col. 1086.

18 St. John Damascene, "Elevatio mentis ad Deum," *De Fide Orthodoxa*, III. 24, P. G 94, Col.1089.

19 St. Teresa of Avila, *Libra de Vida*, 8; "que no es otra cosa oracion mental, a mi parecer, sino tratar de amistad, estando muchas veces tratando a solas con quien sabemos nos ama." Santa Teresa de Jesus *Obras Completas*, (B.A.C., p.50, 1977)

20 Cf. footnote no. 9 above.

21 Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Living by Zen*, p.83.

22 Dogen, *op.cit.*, "Shoji," Vol.I, Ch.5, p.21, translated into English.

22 Dogen Shobogenzo Zenki: 正法眼藏「全機」, Vol. I, Ch. 18, p.81. (translated into English).

24 From the report of this first meeting, as quoted by Heinrich Dumoulin: *Christianity Meets Buddhism*, (Open Court Publishing Company, 1974), ch.2.

25 The relationship between satori and zazen (Enlightenment and Sitting) is very different in the Rinzaï and Soto sects of Buddhism. Dogen, the founder of Japan's Soto sect, preached "sitting" (shikan taza), and emphasized the breakthrough that comes only through sitting. But in the Rinzaï sect, sitting as such is not insisted on to such a degree. In passing, I would like to add here that Shibayama Roshi belongs to the Rinzaï sect.

26 The Twelve Karmas (Pratitvasamut-Pada) When Buddha reached enlightenment, he considered the transience of human life, pointed out the causes of suffering and perplexity, and showed the twelve stages in human growth.

1. avidya – ignorance (fundamental ignorance)
2. samskara – deed (mistaken activities of a mind in ignorance)
3. vijñana – consciousness (first consciousness while still in the mother's womb)
4. nama-rupa – name and form (growth of mind and body while still in mother's womb)
5. sad-ayatana – six sense organs (development of the "six roots": eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, desire)
6. sparsa – contact (at about 2-3 years of age, no discrimination between pain and pleasure, only direct contact with things)
7. vedana – sense perception (about 6-7 years of age, discrimination between pain and pleasure)
8. trishna – desire (14-15 years of age, all kinds of desires)
9. upadana – attachment (attachment to things of one's desire)
10. bhava – being (to decide the future effects of stage 8 (love, desire) and stage 9 (attachment))
11. jati – birth
12. jara-marana – old age and death
  - 1 – 2 ... causes of the past
  - 3 – 7 ... effects of the present
  - 8 – 10 ... causes of the present
  - 11 – 12 ... effects of the future

To see the form or figure of the transmigration of the soul that progresses from steps 1-12 is the way of affirmation. To deny this progression – without step 1 there is no step 2 – is the way of negation.

27 Original Sin: it is said that man's intellect is darkened and his will weakened by original sin, and because human nature was wounded, original sin is called the sin of nature. Peccatum naturae: the defilement of sin means the effect of sin. It is different from sin itself.

28 "Fathering Ignorance" – the father of all evil is ignorance, the "long night without light." Because of ignorance we must spend a long life in darkness.

29 Those who look on affairs as they are called nyorai or nyoko (tathagata – i.e., one who has attained Buddhahood). The word tathagata has its origin in Sanskrit. If tathagata, the meaning is nyoko, or one who has arrived at an "outlook of reality"; if tatha-agata, the meaning is nyorai, or one who has come from the world of the outlook of reality.

30 Kensho – a Japanese word used in Zen. It means the same as the Nirvana of early Buddhism. Nirvana means "annihilation," but kensho means "regarding nature" (looking at nature). In Zen, kensho is satori. Satori is close to the Japanese chie, or wisdom.

31 The word "to hear" in Latin – audire – is related to the word "to follow" – obedire. Although the root is different, the significant overlapping of the words "listen" and "follow" is noticeable even today.

32 The German words lebens-anschauung (outlook on life) and weltanschauung (outlook on the world) express this meaning. Anschauen, or "to see," means "to look at" or "to contemplate."

33 The Greek word akouo which means "to hear" is used 431 times; horao, "to see," is used 455 times.

34 Today there is much resistance to a Western structure of thinking which has Scholastic ideas as its center. This is evident especially in the area of spirituality where



religious experiences that cannot be expressed by words are treated. There is strong objection to the fact that Scholastic theology has been the main stream of Catholicism since medieval days, and its thinking is based on fine analyses and uses of language. The non-structural (a-structural) character of Eastern thinking could be said to be more fitting here.

<sup>35</sup> Such expressions as Pseudo-Dionysius's "the ray of divine darkness" and John of the Cross' "confidence in darkness" — "un habito del alma cierto y oscuro" (*Spiritual Canticles*, II, 3,1). John of the Cross says of contemplation that it is "ciencia secreta de Dios, sabrose del amor," (*Spiritual Canticles*, 27, 5)

<sup>36</sup> Dogen 學道用心集 *Gakudo yojin shu*, (*Precaution for the Study of the Way*), not in translation.

<sup>37</sup> Dogen, "Genjokoan," *Shobogenzo*, trans. by Kosen Nishiyama (Tokyo: Daihokkaikaku, 1975), vol.1, ch.1, p.1.

<sup>38</sup> cf. S. Francois de Sales, *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu*, éd. vivès, t. II, liv. IX ch V, p:256. "Il aimerait mieux l'enfer avec la volonté de Dieu que le paradis sans la volonté de Dieu. Qui même il préférerait l'enfer au paradis, s'il savait qu'en celui-là il y a en un peu plus du bon plaisir divin qu'en celui-ci; en sorte que si, par imagination de chose impossible, il savait que sa damnation fût un peu plus agréable à Dieu que sa salvation, il quitterait sa salvation et courrait à sa damnation."

<sup>39</sup> The Lotus-Sutra; ch. IV "Understanding by Faith (Shingebon)", trans. from Chinese by Senchu Urano (Tokyo: Nichiren Shu Headquarters, 1974) p.80-86.

<sup>40</sup> Hajime Nakamura, *Encounter of Thought between India and Greece*. Japanese edition, (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1968), p.191. Such a story as the Prodigal Son in "Lotus-Sutra" really is of exceptional interest in Buddhism. We have in fact only one author who quotes it: Dravida (ca. 550), philosopher of Vedanta. There are some historians who would conclude to its influence in the story of the Prodigal Son in the Gospel of Saint Luke (Lk 15:11-32). However this thesis is rather difficult to confirm. Cf. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, vol.II, p.299. The author denies an interdependence of these two stories.

<sup>41</sup> Fumio Masutani, *A Comparative Study of Buddhism and Christianity*, (Tokyo: Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, 1967), pp.178-181.

<sup>42</sup> Masutani, *op.cit.*, Epilogue for Japanese edition, p.290: "Some linguists say that those who know only one language in fact know no language at all. The same thing could be said about religions. Religions always have a one-directional character. There are many ways, but the way you choose is only one. That is the basic proposition of religion. However, to know what kind of way is the "only way" among many for us is not something to be avoided, but rather something desirable; because then people would understand their chosen way more fully. Also, they would be freed from ignorance, narrow-mindedness, and self-righteousness.

At any rate, what I have done in this paper is to place Buddhism alongside Christianity, and Christianity alongside Buddhism. However those who believe in or know Christianity would know and believe better by seeing Christianity placed before Buddhism. In the same way, those who follow and study Buddhism would understand and follow it better by considering it before Christianity. If this presentation in some way reduces the narrow-mindedness and self-righteousness which have prevailed in the followers of these two great religions for so long a time, my work can be said to have fulfilled the expectations placed in it."

<sup>43</sup> Masutani, *op.cit.*, p.181. In the Japanese version, this passage appears on p.282, but only the word "feeling" (感情 — kanjo) was used. It is not preceded by the word *paternal*, which appears in the English translation.

- 44 Milinda-Pañho, p.394.
- 45 Hiroshi Iwamoto, *Bukkyo Nyumon* ("Introduction to Buddhism"), (Tokyo, Chuo-koron, 1959), p.163-164.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p.164.
- 47 The words used in the consecration of the Mass, "This is my Body (Hoc est enim corpus meum) (Mt 26; 26, Mk 14; 22), represent substantial conversion or "transubstantiation." However, the Canon of the present-day Mass uses the words "This is my body which will be given up for you" (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24). Christ Himself, who says "This is my body," is the substance whose nature is represented in the relation involved in the notion of being "given up for you." In the Credo of the Mass, the words "propter hominem et propter nostram salutem" clearly show this kind of "substance" and "relation" existing together in Christ. The theology of the Sacraments before Vatican II was mainly concerned with "substantial conversion," the substance of the Sacraments. Devotional practices such as Benediction, Corpus Christi processions, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, were based on this "theology of substance." In present day theology, we consider Christ as being for others, and thus have evolved our understanding of the "theology of relationship." I would like to deepen the theology of spirituality by using such new words as "theology of substance" and "theology or relationship."
- 48 St. Thérèse de Lisieux, *Manuscript Autobiographique* (Carmel de Lisieux) p.299-300.
- 49 Aristoteles, *Ethica Nicomachea*, lib. VIII, c.8, 1159a.
- 50 *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q.23, a.1, c.
- 51 The unity between Christ and Christians is apparent in the event of Paul on the road to Damascus, while he was still Saul and was persecuting the Christians. Christ called out to him, "Saul! Saul! Why dost thou persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). Persecution of Christians was the same as persecuting Christ Himself. This unity is striking in Matthew's Gospel (Mt 25:31-46), when Christ says "Whatever you do to the least of these, you do unto me" (Mt 10:42).
- 52 Of grave importance is the special essential of Christianity, the salvific character of community. Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, C.II.9; *Gaudium et Spes*, C.II.32.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

### I. Studies

#### a. Comparative Study

- Cuttat, A. *Rencontre des Religions*, Aubier, 1957.
- Cuttat, A. *Le Dialogue Spirituel Orient-Occident*, collection. Eglise Vivante, 1964.
- De Lubac, H. *La Rencontre du Bouddhisme et de l'Occident*, Aubier, 1952.
- Dumoulin, H. *Ostliche Meditation und Christliche Mystik*, Verlag Karl Alber, 1966.
- Dumoulin, H. *Christianity Meets Buddhism*, Open Court Publishing Company, 1974.
- Masutani, F. *A Comparative Study of Buddhism and Christianity*, Tokyo, Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, 1957.
- Maurus, H. *Katholische Theologie und Asiatisches Denken*, Mainz, Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 1963.
- Otto, R. *Die West-Ostliche Mystik: Vergleich und Uterscheidung zur Wesensdeutung*, Leopold Klotz Verlag, Gotha, 1951.
- Ravier, A. *La Mystique et les mystiques*, (collaboration), Desclée de Brouwer,



1964.

Suzuki, D. *Mysticism Christian and Buddhist*, George Allen & Unwin, 1957.

Tillich, P. *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, N.Y. London, Columbia University Press, 1964.

Van Straelen. *The Catholic Encounter with World Religions*, Burns & Oates, 1965: \*

Hermes. "Le Vide, *Expérience spirituelle en Occident et en Orient*," *Recueils de Recherches sur l'expérience spirituelle*, vol. 6, 1970.

"Preables au dialogue iii. *Bouddhistes et chrétiens*," *Rythmes du Monde*, Bruges, Bevaert. 1968. 42nd année, t.xvi, N.2-3.

b. Particular Study

Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai. *The Teaching of Buddha* (The Buddhist Bible), Tokyo, 1966.

Conze Ed. *Le Bouddhisme dans son essence et son développement*, Paris, Payot, 1952.

De Berval R. (collaboration), *Présence du Bouddhisme*, Saigon, Revue France-Asie, 1959

De Lubac H. *Aspects du Bouddhisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1950.

De Lubac H. *Amida*, Paris, Seuil, 1955.

Frauwallner E. *Geschichte der Indischen Philosophie*, 1953.

Lamotte E. *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien*, Louvain, 1 ed., 1958.

Gardet L. *Expérience Mystique en Terres non-chrétiennes*, Alsatia, 1953.

Secretariatus pro non-Christianis. *Towards the Meeting with Buddhism*, Ancora, Roma, 2 vols, 1970:

Takakusu J. *Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii, 1947.

Thils G. *Les Religions non-chrétiennes*, collection "Prière et Vie," Toulouse, 1965.

Zen:

Beatrix Pierre *Bibliographie du Bouddhisme Zen*, Bruxelles, Institut Belge des Hautes Etudes Bouddhiques, 1 vol. 1969; 1 vol. supplément, 1975

Suzuki D. *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, Kyoto, 1949.

- *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, London, Luzac, Rider, 1949, 3 Vols.

- *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, Kyoto, 1935; London, Rider, 1950.

II. Textes

The Lotus-Sutra,

*The Lotus-Sutra*, translated from Chinese by Senchu Murano Tokyo, Nichiren-shu Headquarters, 1974.

Zen texts:

*The Record of Lin-chi*, trans. by Ruth F. Sasaki, Kyoto, Institute for Zen Studies, 1975.

*Shobogenzo* (Dogens Founder of Soto-Zen in Japan), trans. by Kosen Nishiyama and John Stevens, Tokyo, Diahokkaikaku, 1975, 2 vols.

*Shobogenzo-zuimonki*, trans. by Yuho Yokoi, Tokyo, Sankibo Buddhist Book Store, 1972.

Shibata M. *Les Maître du Zen*, Maisonneuve & Larose, 1970.

III. Varia

Shibayama Z. *A Flower does not talk*, Rutland, Vermont, Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1970.

Cox H. *Turning East, The Promise and Peril of the New Orientalism*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1977.

Raguin Yves. "Specific Character of the christian experience of God," Text prepared for the Monastic Congress of Asia, Bangalore, October, 1973, Taipei.