

**CONSECRATED RELIGIOUS LIFE
IN THE CHURCH OF CONTEMPORARY ASIA**

- I. The Renewal of Religious Life in the Light of Asian Mentality and Customs, by Yves E. Raguin, S.J.
- II. Formation of Asian Religious, by Sister Vandana, R.S.C.J.

**THE RENEWAL OF RELIGIOUS LIFE
IN THE LIGHT OF ASIAN MENTALITY AND CUSTOMS**
by Yves E. Raguin, S.J.**Introduction**

The aim of this meeting is not only to discuss problems at a theoretical level but also to propose a line of action designed to achieve the proposed objective.

After having discussed the role of religious women in the fields of evangelization, development and youth apostolate, we must now tackle the problem of the renewal of religious life itself in the light of the mentality and customs of Asia.

Religious life of whatever type, whether purely contemplative or active, has two poles: God and mankind. Religious congregations are intended to make circulate as abundantly as possible the current of divine love between these two poles. These congregations must embody in a special way God's love for men and direct man's attention towards God. The religious ought to be a manifestation of God's love to the world and an expression of man's desire for God.

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Each congregation must fulfill this role in its own way; each has its specific characteristics, its personal charism. This is what we call the spirit of the congregation, and this spirit is due to its founder.

The first of the two poles, God Himself, never changes, but the way we realize the gift of ourselves and our existence varies according to time and place, for the other pole of religious life, which is the whole of humanity, is in constant evolution.

When the Vatican Council spoke of the renewal of religious life, it was thinking rather of a renewal within a specific culture. Our problem here, however, is to set norms for a renewal which in certain situations will have to be a deep readaptation to a new cultural world. We have to re-think religious life in order to allow it to fulfill its charism in all the cultures of Asia.

Indeed, the congregations are an actual given, with their specific spirit, traditions, customs forming real micro-cultures. Therefore, our purpose is not simply to reincarnate the founder's spirit in a new context, but to make something very concrete evolve which already exists and is incarnated in very real persons. The agent of this renewal, the congregation itself, is often also the obstacle to renewal, for its spirit has been fixed in norms, rules, customs, and, sometimes, in a narrow interpretation of the founder's spirit. Therefore, where a dynamism is found, a restraining power is often found as well. We must realize this before going any further.

1. Facing the Asian World

The spirit of renewal of religious life is defined in the following terms by the Vatican II Decree *Perfectae caritatis*: "The appropriate renewal of the religious life involves two simultaneous processes: (1) a continuous return to the sources of all Christian life and the original incorporation behind a given community; and (2) an adjustment of the community to the changed conditions of the times."

In our present concern we have not only to adapt ourselves to differences in a given culture but also to re-embody a spirit in another culture which itself is changing. All Asian countries are

undergoing a double evolution, one due to the vital dynamism of their own culture, the other under the pressure of foreign influences. Both unite with each other and counterbalance each other.

So renewal does not mean adapting to something that exists but actively inserting oneself in something that is becoming. For example, some would see Chinese culture as something given and well defined, and would wish to adapt religious life to it. "Thus," they would say, "we should assume as a form of religious life the Chinese family with all its virtues." But this Chinese family itself is changing. The fundamental virtues of the family remain; there is still filial piety but the expressions of this filial piety differ from those of thirty years ago.

The renewal of religious life can only be the dynamic adaptation of a living being to a living being, for we live, and cultures live also.

a) Diversity of Asia

This problematic has already been raised in several of our position papers. It is in fact a topic dealt with by all the delegations. It can be stated in this way: "The renewal of religious life in the light of the mentality and customs of Asia." For each one of the delegations the concern must be with its own country, without isolating this concern from those of the other delegations. The important thing for each group is to try first to understand the diversity of Asia. We must accept the diversity of the cultural personalities, to be able to understand what unites us.

No one can say: "We are Asia." Asia cannot be identified with India, or China, or Indonesia, or Japan, or the Philippines. And yet Asia is all of them.

Of course, this totality that goes from India to Japan is in contrast with the West. It is another world, and this world includes a multiplicity of worlds. These worlds have communicated among each other throughout the ages, through deep cultural and religious exchanges. In the past, Indian culture (with Brahmanism and Buddhism) has deeply influenced Southeast Asia. Buddhism passed from India to China, then to Korea, Japan and Vietnam, creating a new religious mentality which is still very deep. Chinese

culture, before Buddhism arrived there, and even more afterwards, has created a huge cultural area of Chinese influence which still underlies the diversity of modern East Asia.

These influences have created large cultural areas where one breathes the same air. Thus, the cultural worlds of Asia have been built upon a quite unified prehistoric foundation. In the same manner, the Philippines, having remained outside Indian and Chinese influence, became a separate entity. The Spanish conquest, conversion to Christianity, and later the American influence, have accentuated still more this difference from the rest of Asia. Finally, the culture of that country is not so much a burden driving it back to a past where it knew what it was but more an anxious search for an identity for today and to-morrow.

Looking at Asia, as it is now, we can see that each country expresses in itself a more or less rich heritage accumulated through the generations. Like all precious things, this treasure weighs heavily on the hearts of its owners. They do not want to lose it. They cling to it and protect it. Above all, they feel that Christian and religious life must adapt itself to this known and definite reality. And this is where Christianity must take itself, first to reflect on itself, and then to purify itself in order to be able to become again a leaven in cultures other than those of the West.

b) What mentality? What customs?

The renewal must see itself face-to-face with an Asia which is very diversified and in profound revolution. Countries undergoing deep changes, institutions no longer the same, and human beings moving towards the future, these are that with which religious life must concern itself.

What strikes us with the greatest force is that religious life must respond to the new needs created by urbanization, industrialization and the formation of new social classes. Social justice, mass education, the emancipation of peoples, liberation . . . such are the problems which the Christian world, alert to what is going on in Asia, is faced with.

Along with the urgency of human development, there is the urgency of newly-awakening spiritual values, but now in a modern

context. It is as if today God can no longer show men He loves them in the same way He did fifty years ago. Values have changed, and God Himself depends on these values to show His love and solicitude. What could once be a sign of God's presence in religious institutions may not be of any value today.

If doing no work and begging for one's living is still a religious ideal in certain countries, we cannot be sure it will remain one in an industrialized society. We know that distributing relief as it was done for such long time is no longer viewed as a token of divine solicitude. Rather, it is seen as a relic of a paternalistic mentality. The large structures religious communities built for very useful purposes now raise problems today, for they have become in many cases signs of times already past.

If we rely on what the youth of any Asian country believe and say, we can see that conflicts exist between them and their parents, as well as between their cultures and the rest of the world. Remaining Indians, Burmese, Thais, Chinese, the youth are more different from their parents than their parents were from theirs.

This is why one must be very careful when saying: "That is contrary to the Japanese, Korean . . . mentality." Which generation's mentality? If we ask whether we must keep the traditional religious dress, or have a simpler one but still uniform, or give more freedom, the answers will vary according to the background, age and educational level. It can no longer be said: "In China they prefer religious women to keep the religious habit," without further qualifications.

Some facts are quite curious. Why has the traditional Chinese dress disappeared, for men as well as for women? Why in Japan do they use both the American-imitated clothes and the traditional kimono? Such cultural facts are difficult to account for but they are facts. Why is Zen, little practiced in Japan, so fashionable elsewhere?

Moreover, in the one same culture there are progressivists and traditionalists. One may say the countryside is the best representative of traditions, but the countryside must not be what we rely on for determining norms of religious-life adaptation. We must consider what is done in the most important cities and in groups which, while faithful to tradition, are marching forward.

Renewal must be carried out in the light of a mentality and of customs, but we must know what light to expose ourselves to, according to the goal aimed at by the religious congregations. The norms of adaptation will differ according to the working environment, the kind of activity, the social level of the persons we meet, the type of education we want to give. Therefore, renewal must be carried out with great attention being paid to the proposed goal. If a religious congregation has multiple goals, it must take them into account. It must from one aspect maintain its inner unity and still provide very different ways of life for its members: dependence and freedom, unity and diversity, community and autonomy, etc.

When one looks objectively at the Asian countries, one notices in each one of them an extraordinary mixture of new and old, and an intermingling of different environments and various micro-cultures. One can find anything there. And while one has to use discernment to know what one is going to adapt to, one must also discern the needs of the future. It is certain that due to industrialization the vital human masses are now in the cities and no longer in the country. These workers' customs differ greatly from those of the rural people.

However, the most important point — once one has decided where one wants to be inserted in order to bear witness to God in our world — is not adapting to customs but to mentality, for mentality is where religious feeling is in turn inserted.

c) From customs to mentality and spirituality

To customs and mentality I have added "spirituality." I use this word here to mean the interior attitude towards all human problems under their religious aspect.

Customs are easy to define but mentality is much less so, for it is to be found only in a diffused state and does not reveal itself fully without a careful analysis. It varies according to environment, in Asia as elsewhere in the world, but it is present everywhere. On the other hand an environment, e.g., the students' situation, will not necessarily encapsulate the same mentality in Asia as it does in America.

Though it is impossible to define the Asian mentality, it is certain that it differs from that of the West. This difference is seen mainly in customs, possibly, but what makes the real difference is mentality. No one will say that the Japanese mentality is the same as the Filipino, yet neither of them react or judge as Westerners do.

We may consider that a given mentality depends on temperament, and cultural heritage, but in all the countries of the world, mentality is also something which perpetually changes, on a ground which perdures. Peoples usually consider themselves as being the center of the world, each one in its own way though. Mentalities, however, do change by themselves and can also be shaped by appropriate means. Mentalities are ordinarily the results of a slow manipulation of minds by those who have power to influence through education, religion or politics.

This is why if on the one hand we must, in order to renew ourselves, take into account the mentality of the country, we must also keep in mind that a mentality can evolve, and can do so very fast. When we speak of renewing religious life in the light of the Asian mentality, we must not forget that, all the while accepting the realities of an existing mentality, we also can and must make it evolve for the better.

The existing mentality must not be assumed as an absolutely normative standard. If we are invited to renew our religious life in the light of the Asian mentality, we must at the same time pledge our religious ideal to the change, and even the overthrow, of those mentalities which are contrary to the spirit of Christ.

I use a very simple example. It is certain that in the Chinese mentality a great change is taking place regarding the meaning of human love and of personal relations in marriage. The woman is regarded only with difficulty as the equal of the man. But on this point the mentality is changing under the influence of the West in general, and more specifically, of Christianity.

The group mentality, so characteristic of China, may also be mentioned here. The Easterner is much more dependent on society and groups, though he is perhaps more individualistic than the Westerner. The Easterner is always conscious of the environ-

ment in which he lives and moves about. He finds it difficult to act without taking into account the innumerable and often impalpable bonds that link him to the whole. He never moves alone, without "feeling" the presence, observation and judgement of others. This fact must be considered in our renewal. Even those who seem the freest, the most emancipated, cannot escape this cultural reality, which is even deeper than a mentality, for it is even more deeply settled in the subconscious.

Now we must go still more deeply than does the notion of "mentality," to try to find what may be called the "spirituality" of a people. We have to do so, for this is the level at which the most profound religious tendencies will blossom. This is the level at which what we call the "interior life" of a person, a group or a people is lived.

In this "spirituality" must be included particularly the attitude towards God, the supernatural world, life, death, suffering and the things of this world. In this spirituality must also be included the profound attitudes of prayer, of contemplation.

On this point we find between East and West considerable differences, some of which are the results of influences undergone through centuries. Thus, Buddhism has impregnated the Chinese soul with compassion, gentleness and serenity. Buddhism has also developed in the Chinese soul a new piety, more calm and more serene than the traditional piety of Confucianism or popular religion.

Such things we absolutely must feel if we want to renew religious life in the light of Asian mentality and spirituality. The Chinese sense of the spiritual is less apparent than that of the Indian but it has its own very profound flavor.

It may be said that, generally speaking, the Asian is more sensitive to the almost impersonal feeling of the Divine Presence than to the encounter with a personal God. However, the feeling of a Japanese towards this divine presence diffused in nature is very different from that of the Indian. As a matter of fact, these very different grounds are the soil in which their contemplation takes root. In this soil we must plant the roots of an authentic Christian religious life, for only at such depth does man make himself an "image" of his God.

To want to renew religious life, while being concerned only with works, customs, mentality, is to do only a patch-up job. The shock of the works to be undertaken, the setting of customs and mentalities must make us go beyond these intermediate zones to throw ourselves into the very center and heart of the spirituality, by carrying in ourselves all the inexpressible riches of Christ.

2. The Paths of Renewal

Having presented some aspects of Asian cultures and mentalities that must be taken into account in any renewal of religious life, we must now try to see how this concern for renewal can be stirred up in ourselves. To draw up fine plans is not sufficient; they must be able to be put into effect. Even making them practical is not sufficient either; we must know what steps to take, what initiatives to undertake.

(a) The Sense of Need and Urgency

Everywhere we hear that the Church has become "irrelevant" to our modern world. Some say this a little too facilely. They would like to be absolutely like everybody else, to get as much involved in development, in progress, in the fight for social justice, as others are, and in the same way. If this is their notion, then the Church will always seem "irrelevant" to them in one way or another.

When is religious life meaningful to people? When is it not only useful but inspiring and, I would say, contagious? Is it when it has hardly anything religious about it any more? When it no longer carries any message from elsewhere? Or no longer more profound? The whole problem lies there. What was the meaning of Christ's life and His message for the society of His time? The Jews abandoned Him precisely because what He said and did did not seem to them relevant to their desires and to the situation of their country.

Therein lies one of the great problems of religious congregations. They are not expected to respond to the same needs and to have the same meaning as do the "Peace Corps" or other organizations of this kind. Religious life, indeed, finds its ultimate meaning in giving to human life and to every demand of man a dimension that other organizations cannot give. We can, therefore,

commit ourselves to men's fight for existence but with an insight larger and more profound. We must extend the coordinates of our action and open their perspectives to the real dimensions of man: depth, height, width, etc.

And if in human social action we may have many models among the great defenders of justice, in this matter of religious life we can only have the saints, and larger still, Christ, as the ideal of what we must be in this world as religious.

Thus, there are, it appears to us from the start of our search for renewal, two poles of our existence: men in their concrete existence and Christ, God's expression in the world. No renewal may be achieved without the continuous flow to-and-fro between these two poles. In fact, these are not opposed but in perpetual resonance. What has awakened the Church is the call of a world that suffers, or a world that is simply no longer resounding with it. And strangely enough, God cannot make Himself heard directly by us; He can only be understood through the mediation of man.

What has been called "the signs of times" are in fact the mysterious words spoken by a God who does not know how to make Himself heard. Could it be that because when we are alone with God, we make Him say what we want Him to tell us? During the first days of this meeting you have examined your role in many areas, in development, the apostolate. What compels you to strive for your renewal is the urgency of mankind's needs. Perhaps you are afraid that your way of life may lose all its meaning in men's eyes. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, I think the fear of peoples' judgement can be such as well.

But I believe that this reason of urgency can also be a bad counselor, for it may make one forget the real urgency — the free urgency, I dare to call it — the one coming from the love of Christ. We must go beyond too human motivations to make ours the ultimate motivation which gives a meaning to the others, i.e., Christ's example. We cannot simply get involved in apostolic action, in the social field or in any other, because of an urgency that catches the eye. We must do so from a deeper, and consequently a more real, insight into God's design for men.

This is essential, since the ultimate motivation of our religious

life is finally one of response to the love God shows us and which He asks us to show others. Here both motivations are identical, like the two Commandments, but the first one finally remains first.

Thus, it is not only that God's love draws us to Him but also that the love of others brings us back to God's love. It is not only the love of mankind which compels us to devote ourselves to their service but also God's love which impels us to do so. All this must be lived in religious life with a very special intensity, which at times may be excruciating. But such is our vocation, I think — to live a more extended life than that of Christians whose whole life is more taken up than ours in the tasks of human society.

God tells us many things through men's mediation. Through them He calls us, He begs us. With ears filled with these calls we must turn to God. We must understand — to stay within our topic — that it is our duty to make God intelligible to men and women in their own culture and mentality. It is the cry of God: "So that I may speak to them . . . you understand for Me their language, the language of their whole life. Then I shall speak to you directly."

(b) The Source of Renewal

It is not the sight of human misery that converts anybody. This is but a shock that makes us discover a situation and turns us to the Lord. We must distinguish between the shock that brings a self-examination, and the true rediscovery of the meaning of our existence, which is its consequence. If we only take in the shock, nothing happens in us. The shock may even render us unable to do anything. The shock must compel us to turn to ourselves, to the profound sources of our energy, and finally to God.

The process of renewal or re-birth can only originate in a return to the source of life. And this renewal will be the more real if we recover a more vivid awareness of the essence of religious life: a response of love to a very particular love of Christ. It is first a consecration to Him, a love responding to a love, to be lived in the concrete conditions of existence.

When one has come back to this point, forms of religious life as such become quite relative; the absolute is the relationship with God. Ways of life, mentality, customs, even spirituality, all these can take on different aspects. This relationship with God is expressed in a given way in one or other Christian country. Why not search out another way of expressing it in another cultural context? Placing the accent on the essential element of religious life, responding to the Lord's love, relativizes all the rest and makes a renewal possible within new perspectives. Before we can change and renew ourselves, we must see how all things are relative save the one essential response.

This demands a very deep "kenosis," an emptying of oneself, after the manner of Christ, but such a kenosis is necessary if we want to renew ourselves. We must return to our mother's womb, as Jesus told Nicodemus, and be reborn. And this renewal sometimes implies a veritable death.

Religious life may be defined as a particular form of Christian life, a form of Christian life in which are expressed the absoluteness of God and the absoluteness of the response. Celibacy is there as an expression of the absoluteness of the response. Celibacy is there as an expression of the absoluteness of the love received from God and offered to God.

This vocation is purely Gospel, but about this Gospel Christ Himself has said: "Who can understand, understand." Christ's offer is free; the response must be free. It can be justified by no other reason than the one Christ gave: the perception of a special call heard and understood.

The essential element of this response to Christ is not that it is a better way to save ourselves or to develop ourselves more fully. The response to God's love perceived in the depth of our being is a total offering, and thus includes the totality of the realm of love: God and men.

The realization of the needs of a suffering mankind may incite some to renounce the religious life in order to conform more fully to the condition of those they want to "save." They may think their action will then be more efficient. It is true that they will do more — at least I hope so — than they would in some narrow-

mind, formalistic way of religious life which is cut off from the world. But they will achieve less than they would, were they, while sensitizing themselves fully to the human condition, to draw more deeply from within God that motivation for all that has to be amended in religious life.

If we do not in all our contacts with Asian customs and spirituality constantly return to the Lord, we shall be caught up in the whirlwind of hasty adaptations, local customs, Oriental methods of meditation, etc. The danger always exists of indulging in the seduction of the exotic, and assuming some exterior adaptation to be the essential one.

As a matter of fact, this return to the source of renewal, the constant contemplation of God in faith, is the only sure means of renewing religious life in the light of Asian mentality and customs. Otherwise, the renewal will have no soul.

To what depth must this contemplation reach? It must be stated clearly: further than any yoga and any Zen on earth, to God Himself. If we are free from all excessive attachments to Western and Eastern methods, then we can give a Christian meaning to yoga and Zen. Otherwise, we become their slaves. But once we have said that, we must say again that it is better to go to God by those methods and interior attitudes that are familiar to the people of the country where we live.

When we undertake this adaptation to Asian methods of prayer and religious mentality, our eyes must be fixed on God Himself and His mystery in an act of faith that transcends any technique of prayer and contemplation. Faith is above any method, just as love is. It is God, discovered in love and faith, who will guide us so that we may find Him through the various possible ways, be it meditation, contemplation, yoga, Zen or any other method. Methods are but paths that we mark out in order to join, one step after the other, this God whom we seize and love in faith.

c) The Renewal Expressed in the Spiritual Life

This profound union with God in faith, in a faith that involves our whole personality, cannot but search for an expression that would be in harmony with the spirituality of the country. The expression of this love for God will then take forms which best correspond to the different customs.

I use China as an example. Even in this example it can be admitted that there are several ways adaptable to our spirituality. I do not wish to present all of them, but I can at least present a few.

(i) The Way of Filial Piety

God is seen as a very loving Father, with all the respect, affection, and also reserve, this implies. Our Christian attitude here has taken over the classical Chinese notion that Heaven is the father of all beings. If in the classical tradition this Heaven is ordinarily perceived as impersonal, it is also sometimes perceived as personal, and in that case it preferably is to be called *Shang-Ti* (上帝), the Emperor on-high.

This tradition is quite close to our biblical tradition, which in turn can here blossom in the context of a culture based on respect for paternal authority. This way of piety may seem too "paternalistic" to us, but it has flourished in Chinese Christianity, resulting in an extraordinary faithfulness to God, in persecution as well as in peace.

This tradition has given Chinese Christianity a note of faithfulness, and also of solidity. This aspect of divine fatherhood is one of the aspects which the Church in China tends to develop as one of its particular characteristics. I personally believe that we have here the foundations for a very beautiful expression of God's love.

(ii) The Way of Union with God in Creation

Western Christians see God present in nature as a person, who is to be found there by reason of His activity and His essence, as we say in theology. But the Japanese and Chinese, not to mention others, see in the cosmos rather the mysterious presence of the power of the Absolute, principle of all things. Such a presence is not personal, but absolutely immanent in all that exists. In Taoism, for instance, man no longer sees Heaven as a father but joins the eternal *Tao* (道), in a communion with its power which pervades the world and particularly man.

So the way of immanence, then, is the way explored by the Taoists. Even if it does not usually go beyond a feeling of harmony

with the *Tao* perceived in immanence, it may also lead to transcendence. The point here is no longer to regard Heaven with piety as a son regards his father, but to seize in the life that *Tao* gives us the *Tao* itself which is the source of all life and surpasses all existence.

Some religious people who would not be at home in the first tradition will be at ease in this latter. It is the mystical way China has elaborated and which Christianity can take for its own, harmonizing it with the first one, within the perspectives of Christian faith.

(iii) The Way of Attention and Peace

What is required from one who carries out a religious ceremony is to be totally attentive to what he is doing. It is a reverential attitude, respectful of the mystery accomplished in and through the rite. This total attention makes us aware of what we accomplish, concentrating all our faculties on the act itself and on its significance. The Chinese term is *ching* (敬), translated into English by "earnestness." To observe this *ching* is to be wholly absorbed in this ritual act in prayer, in attention to the mystery and to God Himself.

By observing this *ching* with the full attention of one's being, one attains the *ting* (定), which is total absorption, rest in an absolute attention that nothing distracts from the object of contemplation. It is, we would say, a total presence of our being in a perfect unification, turned towards the object of contemplation.

In the Confucian tradition, or perhaps more precisely in the neo-Confucian one, this process is still active. What is emphasized is the aspect of active attention and concentration. But this attention in order to do as well as one can what is to be done brings at the same time an inner pacification, which is expressed by another character *ching* (靜), the character meaning "quietude" or "peace."

Here Confucianists go their separate way from Buddhists; the former emphasize in the process the active aspect, while the Buddhists emphasize the more passive aspect of liberating peace and emptiness. But even among the neo-Confucianists some are attracted more by the *ching* of quietude tending towards emptiness,

than towards the *ching* of active attention.

So if in both traditions the same words are used, they describe quite different attitudes. The Confucian line emphasizes commitment and action; the Buddhist line emphasizes liberation and non-action.

These few remarks intend to show briefly how Chinese "spirituality" offers astonishing possibilities for elaborating ways of contemplation in accordance with the profound tendencies of the Chinese soul.

In the positive line we have the whole moral and human education of Confucianism embracing the development of the person, up to the discovery of the nature and principle of all things.

In the line which may be called "negative," or the way of emptiness, we have the Buddhist process culminating in the techniques of Zen (in Chinese: *Ch'an* 禪, which in Japanese became *Zen*).

I simply note that Christianity has always been anxious to keep both ways open, even if the first of them is more frequently used.

(iv) The Way of Liberation and Emptiness

In the experience of Buddhist contemplation already hinted at above, the process is determined by the fundamental notion of liberation from all that is passing in order to fix oneself on the immutable. The process will, therefore, begin with the observance of the virtues, with exercises intended to bring concentration of the mind. Very soon this concentration must bring a liberation from any thought. Thinking without thought will have to be attained.

The state of total rest in the *ting* will be "total absorption of the thought in the act of meditation," to such an extent as to allow the object itself of thinking to disappear. This *samadhi*, to use the Sanskrit expression translated by the Chinese *ting*, is perfect serenity in the most total emptiness. It is absolute rest, beyond any particular concept of things.

When one reaches a state of pure consciousness without subject or object, one has reached the ultimate point of the process, which should normally lead to the final illumination of the *satori* (in Chinese *chueh wu* or simply *wu* (覺悟), as the Japanese call this illumination). This illumination is the ultimate experience of Reality ... absolutely inexpressible.

(v) The Way of Chanting and Prayer

However marvelous are the ways described above, they are usually too learned for the bulk of the faithful. Consequently, most of them do not pray in the depths of their minds but with their bodies and their lips.

To go into any Buddhist or Taoist temple is enough to understand that the normal ways of prayer in China, as well as elsewhere, are very simple. They bow, prostrate, offer incense, recite prayers, chant texts, either alone or along with other people.

Instead of following the paths of the Confucianist philosophy of action, the Taoist ways of non-action, or the ways of Buddhist emptiness, most Buddhist and Taoist believers follow the very simple way of reciting prayers.

In some Buddhist monasteries the chanted reading of sacred books, or *sutras*, and the recitation of the name of Buddha Amida are also used. This recitation is called in Japanese *Nembutsu* (in Chinese: *nien Fo* (念佛)). When done with trust it creates an intimate communication with Amida, who takes care of those who pray to him to lead them into his paradise.

Moreover, this repetition in faith of the name alone of Amida purifies the heart and calms the mind, just as does the recitation of the name alone of Jesus, experienced in the Eastern Christian Churches as the "Jesus prayer." Some people even think the "Jesus prayer" has its origin through influences coming from distant Asia.

Taoist prayer has many different methods, from processes resembling yoga to a form of contemplation to which the Buddhist school of contemplation (*ch'an*) seems to owe quite a lot. There is also a profusion of other methods, often very complex and based

on psychosomatic and cosmic theories which sound rather strange to us. I do not mean to talk about these now. I wish only to afford a glance at the full realm of Chinese spirituality, which is very little known in Christian circles.

(d) Carrying on the Renewal in Our Lives

The fountain of renewal is a return to the inspiration which determined our life in its encounter with the Lord. This renewal can only be achieved by allowing to pass through the deep layers of different spiritualities the stream of life that comes from God and which waters our lives. This stream of life must make its way through our whole concrete existence.

Indeed, the most difficult problems arise here. I shall simply indicate some of the main points.

(i) The Spirit of the Congregation and Renewal

I have spoken already of the deep layer of Chinese culture where a spirituality blossoms. We must now move one step ahead.

Religious life supposes a certain community of life. All congregations have started with one or two persons who were joined by others having a similar view about their response to God's love, about prayer and the apostolate.

Thus, around a "spirit" a body was formed. This happened in a definite time and in a definite country. People who were there at the birth of their congregation were thus marked by their times. Their spirit living in this context had been able to blossom forth. Afterwards it may have become set in institutions. This is the problem with religious congregations even in their country of origin. They have maintained from their beginnings ways of life, institutions, concepts . . . from which the spirit seems to have vanished.

These congregations have come to the missions and most have kept the greatest possible conformity with the communities in their country of origin. "Faithfulness" to customs has been emphasized, by linking this faithfulness with faithfulness to the founders' spirit.

Herein, perhaps, lies the illusion. We must now recover the spirit in order to realize how relative are the traditional practices. It is by rediscovering the spirit that we will be freed from customs which prevent a renewal in a new culture.

Just as a return to our first gift of self to God frees us for every renewal, so the return to the first spirit of our founders frees us for a particular renewal. For renewal will be carried out within definite limits specified by the particular spirit of the congregation. Each congregation has, so to speak, its own strong points. The idea is not for each congregation to do all it sees other congregations do.

Actually nothing can be achieved without such a choice. Life takes many forms in this world but each seed produces only one type of tree.

A problem arises when a congregation has been founded for needs that no longer exist today. What is to be done? Nothing prevents us from turning to other aims with the same ardor and dedication as did the founders!

And what should be said when some invoke the founders' spirit in order to reject any renewal? When some assert that if traditional ways are given up, then everything will crack up? On the contrary, it can be proved that structures, customs, can be changed without the spirit dying. Even more, it is possible to show that the spirit is more alive when new modalities of its expression are searched out. This is the kind of proof that has to be given by those who want to go forward. Traditionalists need such a proof to be able to evolve.

It is the duty of members of a congregation founded in the West and transplanted in other countries to see how the founder's spirit can actuate this readaptation to the mentality of the new country. It is not an easy task but it is an urgent one.

(ii) Formation of Local Communities

The congregation's profound inspirations take shape at the level of community life. At this level as well, very serious questions arise about adapting to the mentality and customs of the country.

What type of community should be formed? Here many factors must be considered, as they must in any country in the world: standards of living in the country, the working environment, local habits, type of food, etc. When adapting to a country, the insertion-point of our work must be taken into account: working with workers, students, sick, etc. The important thing is for the way of life to be neither that of the rich nor that of the foreigner. And at the same time we must adapt ourselves in such a way that we may promote the progress of the society we are inserted into. Therefore, the congregations must at the same time be anxious to be models of adaptation, as well as an invitation to progress, in and through adaptation.

The very life of the community poses the question of obedience. It is certain that we cannot simply take over for a religious community the attitude too often prevalent in Chinese families where no one dares to speak one's mind in the presence of authority. Religious obedience is something else, for it is based on a law of fraternity and love. The ideal is not to aim at a harmony due only to submission, when Christ teaches us a harmony based in fraternal exchange. Adaptation cannot be built upon old traditions but upon what is now becoming the modern mentality. In any case, the new generation is not the least inclined to accept the limitations borne by previous generations.

One of the important aspects of renewal, here as anywhere else in the world, is the growth of communication among the members of communities. In China, group harmony maintained at all costs masked a strong individualism. We must now, for the sake of the renewal, break with this individualism and bring all members of communities into an exchange of life, through common prayer, Gospel sharing, meetings, the whole of life. Here again we must take "mentality" into account. An Easterner will generally be more reticent about this than a Westerner. So it is important not to force ways of exchange that compel too wide an opening of the inner self. We must respect more reserved mentalities. After this has been obtained, we must go ahead with prudence and charity, being convinced that a balance of relationship in harmony is of primary importance in the great Asian cultures. But this attitude implies a tendency to rely on what is sure because it is known. Under these circumstances, tradition is easily called upon to justify conservatism and even immobility.

Daily living is always a difficult problem to solve. What type of food is going to be selected? How are guests to be welcomed? We surely must conform to the ways of the country. This is ordinarily difficult when there are many foreigners in the community, but it is possible to find a solution according to which people's health is safeguarded, while life complies with the necessities of adaptation. With regard to hospitality, much could be said, for in all the countries of the world religious communities are often "inhospitable." The reason for this attitude is in principle quite valid: retreat from the world, the safeguarding of the community's privacy. But openness, charity, are essential Christian virtues.

We would need a whole chapter about relationships with families. In some cultures the obligations of family are greater than in others. The religious' obligations towards their families remain; they may be very great. In this area moral obligations exist which foreigners realize only with difficulty, and which cause the hearts of religious great anxieties when they cannot comply with them. On the other hand, it is also necessary to bring to the fore the detachment which is asked and re-asked for by Christ. Here the renewal will reinstate family relationships within evangelical perspectives, while always taking into account the human values expressed by mentality and customs.

Achieving a renewal in the light of mentality and customs does not mean sacrificing the evangelical spirit to these mentalities and customs. If this is what happens, it is not a renewal; it is a burial. We must, therefore, every time we are faced with mentalities and cultures, examine them first in the light of Christ, which is the ultimate light.

I have just touched upon a very important point, for tradition and customs are often called upon to justify an excessive traditionalism. For the sake of "our culture" we risk rejecting, along with influences and excessive pressures from without, fraternal invitations to progress. I know this raises the problem of freedom and initiative for congregations and local Churches, We must tend to give more and more initiative and power of decision to local people. Thus, the renewal can really be effected in the light of local mentality and customs.

(e) Apostolate and Renewal

I use here the word "apostolate" in its widest sense. To be an apostle is to be an envoy, which means to make known the divine message through one's life, work and words. Any relationship with people becomes an apostolate, that is to say, an expression of mission. In religious life any action, any prayer, existence itself are apostolic in the sense that they explicitly bear witness to God's mystery and love. It is one of the deepest meanings of religious life to be a witness to God and to His love.

Now if there is one thing certain in God's Church it is that what makes us conscious of God's love for mankind is our own concern and laboring for others. Through really loving others we come to a real love of God.

The renewal in the Church is almost always due to a consciousness of human needs. The shock of the encounter with a world that searches and suffers obliges us to question ourselves: are we what we should be? God makes some of His friends aware of the needs of people. Very often what has compelled the clergy and the religious to recover their ideal and to conform their lives to it has been the needs of Christians.

The tendency of any religious body is to build around itself walls, defenses, intended to secure its peace, but which in fact distances it from God. An ear which closes itself to the cries of people also becomes deaf to the word of God. I know it is hard to respond to human miseries and anguishes, but these must pull us away from our comfort. By getting involved with them we will also get involved with God's love for men.

Here the field of reflection is infinite. But once the principles are set, the ways of renewal become clear. How many religious men and women have left a comfortable life to live closer to the poor! How many have resumed praying so as to respond to others' spiritual needs! How many communities have transformed themselves to become models of Christian charity!

Here the problem that concerns us is raised again. In the Buddhist tradition, for example, the monasteries are almost always built in quiet places, inviting to meditation and peace. Through centuries the principle was to get away from the world.

But now Buddhists undertake social work, and male and female bonzes settle more and more in the cities. So it cannot be said that in the Chinese world the religious tradition is to get away from the world. Nor must we draw a picture of the ideal religious woman, which would have been true for previous generations. Young religious women are sensitive to the problems of the society in which they are living. They want to respond to them, and the desire of responding to their contemporaries' needs in a changing society compels them to renew themselves. This creates conflicts, which are not simply between themselves and foreign religious women but among themselves, between those who are sensitive to the needs of their time and those who are not.

Another remark. The changes demanded by a renewal in accord with the challenge of our times must not be made at the speed and in the way they would be made in the West. We must avoid wishing to do in Asia what has been or is being done elsewhere, in the same way and at the same speed. Each culture goes forward at its own pace.

Therefore, it is necessary in our apostolic planning to keep before us the experiences of the Christian West, but we must be humble enough to rethink them in the focus of the local situation, and I mean by "situation" both the coming into a new era (urbanization, industrialization, etc.), and the always-alive relationship to a tradition which is expressed in mentalities and customs.

Such are the principles. It is for each religious congregation to see what it must and can do, taking all these elements into account.

Reaching the end of this talk, we should overhaul it from its beginning, for after having recognized the size of the problem in a concrete situation, we must consider it anew before God. We must realize the extent of the implications of our commitment to the Lord. It is with Him that we must talk about the problems raised in the concrete situation of a religious life by a real renewal. Then we must re-enlist in daily life with a stronger and clearer view of the loving design of God, which He asks us to make ours and to make known to the world.

FORMATION OF ASIAN RELIGIOUS

by Sister Vandana, R.S.C.J.

Introduction

All Christian formation is the work of the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit. He penetrates all things, - ourselves, our countries, our cultures, our very work of "formation". All we have to do is to let Him do, to let Him penetrate, for "He is the doer". Only the Spirit can form Christ in people, even as He formed "the Heart of Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary". We have but to make sure that we provide the right environment, so that people may grow - to be "religious", i.e. men and women in love with Christ. (If a religion is not in love with Jesus Christ, she or he may be a good servant of the Lord, perhaps a good "*Karma-Yogi*", but I cannot believe she can be a "*Bhakta*" or a "*Gnyani*"*). True formation will enable them to grow in this union with God and man while remaining what they are - Asian. Today we are becoming more conscious that we are not only Indonesian or Chinese, Malayan or Indian, but also Asian.

Formation of *Asian* religious is formation of a people who have a dual cultural heritage - a Christian heritage and their own national heritage. In Europe, America, Australia, the culture is a Christian culture. In Asia it may be Hindu, Buddhist or Islamic. This is where *Inculturation* plays a big role in formation. Also, formation to be real and effective, has to be rooted in the existential situation of each country and culture. This is why we must be aware

* Yoga comes from the Sanskrit root "Yug", meaning yoke or union. Yoga is union as well as a means to that union with God which implies complete harmony within oneself, with nature and with God. There are in Hindu spirituality three ways or 'marg' of attaining this union :- "*Karma marg*" (or Yoga)—the path of selfless service, "*Bhakti marg*" the way of love and devotion, and "*Gnyan-marg*"—the way of knowledge and contemplation.

of Asian realities, and see that formation springs from Asian soil.

I shall therefore deal with this topic under three headings:

I. The Asian Realities

II. Inculturation - Mission and History

III. 'Formation' of Religious in the context of Asian Realities.

I. THE ASIAN REALITIES

As this meeting is Asian in character, it is fitting that we approach the subject in an existential manner and look briefly at the chief trends in the *Asian situation* because to know what should be the life of an Asian religious woman, we should first know life in Asia. According to To Thi Anh, our religious Life in Asia:

1. has been imposed from above;
2. it is lived in western expression;
3. the rules were often conceived by men
4. who did not know Asia.

We need to know Asia to live effectively in it and the transformation taking place in this vast continent and some of their implications for the Church. No more is the centre of the world the West; the people of Asia have been awakened from their long slumber and have become conscious of their "boon". The text of the Kathopanishad (1:3-14) : "*Uttishthata jagrata, prapya varan nibhodat*" (Arise, awake and be aware of the *boon* you have received) seems to have come alive. Though Asia's people, constituting two-thirds of the world population, differ so markedly in races, languages, civilisations, religious and climatic conditions, with diverse ideologies, political regimes and social and economic organisations, yet this diversity should not blind us to the *unity of Asia* at the deep level and the whole gamut of relations that bind the various countries into a single Asian family. We, the peoples of Asia, share a

common vision of realities, have inherited a common concept of life, of man, of the world, hold to certain basic values, moral and religious. Asia is the home of ancient world religions and great civilisations. Political independence has facilitated the Asians' desire for indigenisation, for being "themselves", for the renaissance of local cultures, the development of vernacular languages and literature, the reform and revitalisation of old religions and the rise of new religions. While the forces of secularisation have had an impact on Asian countries, though differently from their consequences in Europe or America, by and large the moral and religious values have still their appeal, expression and practice. Besides the process of secularisation, the spread of mass education, modern means of social communication and the marvels of technology have altered the relationships, thought-patterns, value systems and the style of life, and made the modern Asian secular in many aspects; a new materialism holding sway on the educated and wealthier urban classes. The Asian problem is not the preservation of traditional, cultural and religious values, nor the acceptance of modern, technological, secular values, but of appropriating the latter without abandoning the former and of finding a new synthesis and equilibrium. This will need much discernment and courage on our parts—discernment to see which values of the modern and secular we should accept, and courage to say "No—thus far and no further" to some of the consumer society's "mod cons" offered us by technological advances. Only so can we be sure of preserving the traditional, spiritual and cultural values while adopting some of the modern scientific secular values.

While half of Asia is under communist regime, the Asian countries are generally poor and under-developed, and over-populated. All this makes the third-world countries face a critical situation of continued dependence and exploitation. While the elite try to "conscientise" the masses, it will take long before the war against poverty, exploitation, injustice, ignorance, unequal trade and tariff regulations will be won. But Modern Asia's youthfulness is its hope. Half the Asian population is below the age of 20. According to third-world experts' predictions, in

their hands lies the future of Asia and the world within the next 25 years. That Asian youth is or can be dynamic, can be seen from the student participation in the struggle for national independence in countries like India, Ceylon, Indonesia, etc.

This is the Asia in which we have to practise Christianity. We cannot think of how to 'form' our religious, unless we realise some of the existential challenges put to the Church by the traits we have outlined—the challenges of Marxism and all forms of humanism, the challenge of numbers (60% of world population), the challenge of pluralism, of development and liberation of the religions of Asia, of the Youth, of revolution—violent or nonviolent. (cf. Amalorpavadass: *Theology of Evangelisation in the Indian Context*. N.B.C.L.C. Bangalore, 1971). Have we, the Church in Asia, a theology, and a spirituality that can help our young Sisters face these challenges and make them relevant to the needs of our countries today? Have we made the Gospel message intelligible to Asia?

II. INCULTURATION

The 'foreignness' of the Gospel presentation in Asia is, and has been a stumbling block. But with the emergence of the sense of identity in Asian cultures, the Church has been made conscious of her duty to seek the meaning of her existence in Asian Society, and to know how to communicate the Gospel message to non-Christian Asia. For this she realises that she has to look deep into the inner recesses of Eastern life and cultures, *to find out the concepts and thought patterns that are bearers of meaning for Asians*. She has to know her rootedness in God—"Urdhva-Moola", Roots upwards, as the Bhagvad Gita XV. 1 expresses it—, but also, her rootedness in the local culture and her growth into the manifold avenues of Asian life at different levels, in different countries.

To take a concrete case, Thailand for instance: to understand the belief-value systems of Thailand (where 90% are Theravada Buddhists) is important: they create different customs and behavior patterns. Only an underst-

anding, awareness, and appreciation of these can help us in our work of evangelisation and of formation of religious. According to a study made by Kingshill of the Ku Daeng village ("The Red Bomb," Bangkok Christian College), if it is a typical Thai village, 7 themes dominate the Thai villager. These themes are:

- utility (which includes merit; thus we can help here to develop a sense of justice)
- fun (sense of play; for a celibate life this is very essential)
- individuality (Easterners are supposed to have little)
- communal responsibility (very good to balance individuality)
- playing it safe (therefore cultivate courage, initiative)
- "Do good, receive good; do evil, receive evil"
(How different is Christ's law!)

Now it is very important that we know these and profit by them in our formation, to "form", not "deform" or radically change.

Someone has called Thai politeness a "social cosmetic" and asked how surface or deep are their smiles? Do we take cognizance of this, or for that matter of Japanese politeness and the deference of their bows? If every Vietnamese is at heart a Confucian—for a thousand years the Vietnamese assimilated Chinese culture with Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism—what difference does this make to us in our work of formation? These are *social, cultural, religious "Realities" of Asian countries*, of which we must take cognizance if our inculturation and to formation are to be rooted in realism.

For there is no such thing as a Christianity in general—only concrete Christianities: a European Christianity, a Chinese Christianity, a Japanese or Thai Christianity, a

Filipino or Burmese Christianity. In his book "the Gathering of the Ungifted" John Meagher brings this point home by a parable based on the Second Book of Kings. You know of course, that the prophet Elijah swore to the priests of Baal that he would prove to them beyond the shadow of a doubt, that Baal was a false god and Yahweh the only true God. And he did, or rather, Yahweh did, by sending down fire from heaven to consume his sacrifice.

Well, now suppose, says Mr. Meagher, suppose Yahweh did not perform that miracle: suppose the Lord had declined to play Elijah's little game. Suppose the people of Israel, the priests of Baal, and Elijah himself had to choose between the idols of the Gentiles and the true God without the assistance of signs and wonders. What then? Mr. Meagher tells this story to suggest what then.

"I think we really ought to get together and pray over this squabble", suggested the chief prophet of Baal.

"That's all right with me", said Elijah. "Just come to the altar of Yahweh any old time, at your convenience, and I'll be glad to join you".

"That would be selling out", pointed the chief prophet of Baal. "Nix. We'll go to neutral ground".

"Just pick your spot", said Elijah. "You may think it's neutral ground, if that makes you comfortable, but all Israel is Yahweh's".

"We have to reach some sort of agreement about the praying, too", said the chief prophet of Baal.

"How do you mean?" asked Elijah.

"Some sort of compromise", said the chief prophet of Baal, "so nobody will have the advantage. If we pray in Hebrew, you'll have the advantage; if we pray in Phoenician, I will".

"What do you have in mind?" asked Elijah. "I don't know Latin".

“Very funny,” said the chief prophet of Baal. “Well Hebrew and Phoenician are both Semitic languages. How about we just pray in Semitic?”

“Nice try,” said Elijah, “You would have made a good diplomat. It just happens that there isn’t such a thing as Semitic”.

“You’re a hard man to please,” said the chief prophet of Baal.

There is no such thing as Semitic, only Hebrew and Phoenician ; no such thing as Roman, only Spanish, French and Italian ; no such thing as Malayó-Polynesian, only Tagalog and Visayan and Bahasa Indonesia. Linguists group languages into families, but no one speaks a language family, not even linguists. What people actually speak is some particular language, learned first at mother’s knee, then from Sister in primary school. But if this is true of language, is it not also true of Christianity ?

For some time now we have realised that *the task of the Church in Asia is to become indigenous*. As the Incarnation is for all nations, embracing all human life and thought, so Christianity in Asia should be based, not on Greek, but on Asian ground, and Asian Christians should find their depths in their own way. It is interesting to note the different forms the struggle for indigenisation is taking in various countries and to speculate on the outcome. For example, might not the unique contribution of Japan to the Church be an artistic conveying of the Gospel ? And might not India share a contemplative experience of the Gospel ?

(In the section of the life of prayer in their Constitutions, a Japanese congregation has this paragraph : “O God our Father, we Japanese have a natural character that finds it hard to recognise You as a God who is unique and personal but at the same time this natural character can easily communicate with nature that you have created. And we can accept readily the words of your Only Beloved Son when He points to the lilies of the field to tell us about You, and

the birds of the air, to show us Your power". (From Mission Sisters of the Sacred Heart).

But that is of the future ; the current situation is nearer to the description of the *Japanese Church* given by Dr. Kazoh Kitamori (Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary, Tokyo) which he sees as, "more like a telegraph pole than a tree in its thinking. It needs to put its roots down." (Gotemba Consultation, Japan, 1967).

The Episcopal Church's Bishop Dehqani-Tafti of Iran uses the simile of television sets to make the same point. He says : "Individual Christians in *Iran* should not think of themselves as television antennae or sets, tuned to receive and to reproduce exactly what comes to them from the sending station abroad. We ought to think of ourselves as *trees with our roots within the soil of our own ethnicism and culture, receiving the water of life through our own soil and breathing the Holy Spirit through our own skies*. Antennae and television sets are mechanical, imported and only good to reproduce a programme set by others. They will be broken by storms and their use could be limited or directed by orders from above. Trees on the other hand, have their roots within the soil of their locality. They are creative and they grow. Because they have roots they can often stand up to storms." This reminds me of the thinking of a Chinese Christian in Hong Kong, Mr. Feng Shang-li, who wrote : "Why is the *Chinese Church* like a flower stuck in a vase ? At times its resplendence dazzles the eye, but unfortunately it has no roots." ("The Chinese Church and Chinese Culture" in Ching Jeng, Vol. XI : 2, 68). Incidentally, it is interesting how each of the above, speaking of an Asian Church, uses the tree symbolism. (cf. Appendix I, "The Church is like a living tree.")

AN INDIGENOUS THEOLOGY would mean then, one that is *rooted in, relevant to, and redeeming for the life and culture of a country*. It also means therefore, one that is wrestling with the major questions that are asked by the people of the land. When the Church isolates herself from the world she loses a relevant theology. One of those strug-

gling to produce a 'rooted' theology is Kosuka Koyama, working among village farmers in Thailand, men whose lives are spent tending water-buffaloes. He writes: "When I reach the Church, I concentrate on grasping and understanding my audience. I count how many older people there are. How many younger people? Are there new faces, sick persons, pregnant women, crippled? Then I say to myself: 'I am sent to this Congregation today.' I begin speaking from where they are: i.e., cock-fighting. From talking about the human situation I go on to call God into this real, human situation. It was not I but my audiences, who determined this 'theology from below.' The truth of 'kenosis' in the God incarnate means, to me, to begin my sermon with sticky-rice and cock-fighting when preaching to northern Thailand farmers. I decided to subordinate great theological thoughts like those of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth, to the intellectual and spiritual needs of the farmers. ... I decided that my theology in northern Thailand must begin with the need of the farmers..." So too, Dr. Kosuka Koyama, a Japanese theologian who worked for many years in Thailand, emphasises the need for our Christian thinking to be "*grounded*" (*rooted*) *in the soil of the place where we live and work*. He worked out his theology in a Thai-Buddhist "*tranquility-piety*" setting based on John 3. 16 and John 12. 27. Dr. Koyama speaks too of a Chinese theologian, *Choan-Seng Song's* idea of the "*painful*" (radically disturbing) aspect of involvement based on love. "In the Chinese language the word love and pain are interchangeable, and combined into making a verbal expression signifying human love in its highest degree; a mother pain-loves her child; God pain-loves His rebellious people. What is the Gospel of Christ but God's ultimate involvement with man and thus God's profoundly 'perturbed mind'? The words of Jesus, "Now is my soul troubled," heard in Thailand, convey a message of special significance in interpreting the substance and power of the Gospel of Christ". ("*God is Disturbed*" in *Frontier*, Summer, 1964, quoted in *Asian Christian Thinking* by Cecil Hargreaves).

Is not *involvement* the only soil from which a genuine theology comes into existence, whether it is Aristotle convey-

ing the Gospel of Christ through the medium of Aquinas, or a Northern Thai conveying it through the medium of water-buffaloes and cock-fighting, or a Latin-American theologian of today through the medium of "liberation" and "development" in which he is involved? The theology of Indonesia begins and grows in Indonesia and nowhere else. In this decision lies the beginning of Asian theology.

This would also mean understanding and respecting the *customs, festivals, ideals of the people* in their daily life and seasonal life, e.g., in many Asian countries our life is very much linked with the rhythm of the cosmic order. "Your coming and going, your waking and sleep, your birth and death are part of the rhythmic phenomena of the stars and their surroundings" as Alan Watts puts it. If there is any disturbance in the cosmic order, it is said to have a human cause. According to Confucianism, Hinduism, etc., if there are natural disasters, floods, droughts, famines, etc., they call for repentance. In Vietnam, China, Taiwan, India, too, they have special celebrations and festivals at springtime, when all nature is reborn. You have to go into the same rhythm and be renewed with the new flower blossoming. We put specific colour everywhere, decorate houses, avoid unkind words, etc. How have we, the Church and religious, integrated this? Involved ourselves in this? Has it affected our thinking, praying, theologising, our formation?

So, too P. Chenchiah in D.A. Thangasamy's "The Theology of Chenchiah" (YMCA and CISRS, 1966) outlines "*some likely features of Indian Christian theology*" in seven points.

1. The primacy of the Holy Spirit
2. Christian Yoga
3. The explanation of the Gospel of the Resurrection
4. An entry into the inheritance of Hinduism and Sufism
5. Ashrams as the nursing-beds of theology
6. The importance of the present experience of Jesus as against tradition

7. The aim of theological training to achieve a sensitive soul rather than an informed mind.

How far have our houses of formation and seminaries in India included any of those features in their training programmes ?

I have taken time over developing the idea of an indigenous theology not only because in the course of religious formation, our young men and women have to study theology (and how relevant is the theology most of them study ?) but also because unless the Gospel is preached in terms of actual realities, all our talk of indigenisation, inculturation and even more, of formation programmes, will be irrelevant. What we shall continue to produce will be religious, men and women, who feel and think, not as their true selves, nor speak in their own tongues. They will not, therefore, 'ring true'.

They will feel the gap "*between my Catholic self*" and the "*self that lies underneath*", as Shusaku Endo, the Catholic Japanese "Graham Greene", put it. In spite of his fundamental Christian optimism about the universality and comprehensiveness of the Christian faith, he speaks of the "mud-swamp Japanese in me". He says that though he himself had embraced Christianity, "there was always that feeling in my heart that it was something borrowed, and I began to wonder what my real self was like". His devastating honesty and realism finds, I am sure, an echo in many an Asian, and perhaps African heart today. How many of us brought up on Western Christianity and on Western culture, though born and bred in Asia, have felt this and perhaps voiced it as did a brilliant Indian Jesuit I know. On returning to India from his theological studies in Europe he said he felt 'schizophrenic': "I think like a Westerner: I feel like an Asian".

How grateful I myself am to the CRI that I attended the last Asian Religious Women's Meeting in Manila, for it was there I saw the wisdom oft-repeated by many speakers, that we should not go on sending our Sisters to Europe and America for their studies in theology and spirituality, but

rather that they should study the Buddhist or Hindi or Islamic spiritualities of their own countries and apostolic milieux. That made me cancel a scholarship to the USA and decide for a year in Rishikesh in the Himalayas among Hindu Sanyasis and Sanyasinis (monks and nuns) and pilgrims from India and abroad. It opened my eyes too, to the thousands (literally) of foreign youth who came to India to seek God, and made me question the relevance of our religious formation 'au fond'; of how difficult it is to share our religious experience with others of different faiths if our own faith and experience are not in our own 'medium', and how vital and urgent is the task of Inculturation or Indigenisation. Later, I will share with you some of my Himalayan reflections. "The fostering of an indigenous church depends on the building up of its spiritual life through communion with God in prayer, in public and private worship, through *the knowledge of the Bible in the vernacular*, though an indigenous leadership of men and women who will share their religious experience with others....." (H. Reudi Weber, "Asia and the Ecumenical Movement", Sc. M. 1966). Christianity does, in fact, have an infinite capacity for adaptation and that (to use one of Shusaku Endo's metaphors) "somewhere within the great symphony of Christianity is a strain that fits the Japanese tradition and touches the Japanese heart". And so, too, somewhere within the great symphony would be found a strain that would fit and touch the Chinese, Korean, Thai, Malaysian, Philippinian, Pakistani, and Tibetan heart and mind. Deep down many of us perhaps have felt with Endo that it was only because the Christian faith was first presented in so foreign a form ("the tree of Hellenistic Christianity") that it could not take root in the soil of the Asian setting. The dilemma which his book, "*Silence*", a novel of the CIM Church in Japan, presents, viz., "the conflict between his Japanese sensibility and the Hellenistic Christianity that has been given to him" reflects the dilemma of Asian Christianity as a whole, and in many other parts of the world where "Hellenised" Christianity seems nowadays increasingly out of place. The huge sales of his novel in Japan, it has been suggested, reflect not only the popularity of a theme centering on the foreignness of the missionaries, but also the existence among Japanese people of the wistful longing to

understand the full truth about Christianity. (cf. Cecil Hargreaves, *Asian Christian Thinking*. ISPCK-CLS-LPH).

There is need for serious theological reflection on *the failure of Christianity to make a serious impact on the masses of Chinese peoples*. These comments of a scholarly Chinese woman threw light on this: "The Easterner regards religion as based on personal experience, a contact with the Absolute which takes place in faith, that is co-extensive with life itself. He finds it difficult to comprehend the importance of many dogmas which seem irrelevant to life. And he is puzzled if a religion that speaks of the freedom of the children of God surrounds its teachings with protective sanctions!" (Julia Ching : "Faith and Ideology in the light of the New China", *Pro Mundi Vita* 1974.)

It is important that we ourselves understand and be Asians; that we rethink even our concept of man (not body/soul) : that *our anthropology and eschatology be rethought in the places where we are*.

The East Asian Region of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences published a paper entitled: "Evangelisation in East Asia Today". In it we read: "Conversion to the Christian faith is not to be perceived as a rupture with our cultural heritage, but rather as a marvellous fulfillment far beyond our expectations. Evangelisation should impel us to *study further the valid spiritual values contained in our cultural and religious traditions*. We must then make a conscious and enlightened effort to assume and integrate those values and religious currents of thought that have informed the life of our countries throughout the ages. Otherwise the Christian message will continue to be an idiom foreign to our local culture". According to the Asian Bishops, it is possible for Western civilisation to become spiritually enriched by Asian culture, Asian values, Asian attitudes. Some of these values and attitudes are very important to know, recognise and take cognisance of in our formation of Asian religious, for often we tend to treat those who come for initiation to religious life as though they were all Westerners. "So much good has been done, so much wisdom has been acquired and so many

noble aspirations have been sought among the so-called non-Christian cultures, that common sense alone makes it very difficult to accept that God has been absent from non-judaео-christian history, and has not been acting in it. One of the challenging tasks for the man of faith is to discern 'where' in history God is especially active. China, for instance, has during the past century witnessed a remarkable transition from a closed, unequal, corrupt, feudalist system to a dynamic effort to transform man and society — to create what Mao calls "the new socialist man". Phenomena of this kind seem to demand of the Church some criteria by which we can see if the hand of God is here, and how. ("Contemporary Church, Contemporary China" by Herbert Dargan, advisor to Jesuit General for East Asia, in "The Louvain Consultation on China", *Pro Mundi Vita*).

One of the principal themes of the 1974 Synod of Bishops in Rome was that of "indigenisation" or 'inculturation' or local 'incarnations' of Christian faith and life within the cultures and life of the different peoples of the new nations (former "mission countries"). The Proclamation of the Gospel must be seen as an "incarnation", analogous to the mystery by which the Word of God was made flesh. Evangelisation is therefore not merely the transmission of a message, because this message of the Gospel is not merely ideas or doctrine. The Message is a Person, the Person of Our Lord Jesus, who entered human life in a very concrete way, in a definite country, at a definite period in history, speaking a definite language; who laid down his life for his friends, and who having risen from the dead now wants to enter the lives of all men, taking all peoples as they are, the way they think and feel, with their history and cultures, to be His flesh and blood. This analogy embodies a reality. Jesus became a man, *this* man, a Jew, a carpenter. You cannot just become a man in general. If then He became man for all people, *his* "Good News" must also become Chinese, Arabic, Indian, Thai, Phillipine, Ceylonese, etc.

How this difficult task is to be achieved has to be worked out in each different culture, at grass roots. Synods, general congregations, and chapters, the Holy See itself, can

only determine objectives. It is for us, the 'ordinary Christian', to see how, concretely, this can and should be achieved.

We now turn to the concrete ideas involved in the formation of Asian religions. (It may be good to cast an eye on inculturation from the point of view of Mission and History—how it has come about that at this present moment in history we are called to Inculturation. (cf Appendix II)

III. FORMATION OF RELIGIOUS IN THE CONTEXT OF ASIAN REALITIES

Introduction

Formation in Asia is such a vast topic that I know I will be forgiven for taking the approach I do. I have confined myself to abstracting what are for me the key elements in formation to a vowed following of Christ and express them *through the Indian spiritual experience*. The nuances and the examples will be Indian, as in this area more than any other, one is bound to draw upon the sources of one's personal experiences. Nevertheless, the elements are universal and essential and each one will be able to relive the process that I have gone through in the Indian context, in and through the values of her own culture. Also today is an age of *pluriformity* and *experimentation*. Here I take it for granted that in the area of formation, too, these will be allowed, so that we may learn from our own and each other's mistakes. Formation after all is essentially the work of the Spirit; all we can do is to surround the candidate with all the resources, Christian and Indian (or Chinese, Malaysian or Tibetan as the case may be) and then let them grow and experience God as He chooses to give Himself and as they are—with their double inheritance.

If I had to give a subtitle to this talk, I'd choose the Chinese proverb : "FIND YOUR ROOTS AND TAKE WING". For me it sums up the chief qualities of Asian formation today, which we have to first identify, know and to be rooted in. Based on the Gospels and the spirit of the

Congregation and its specific charism, the formation of Asian religious has to be adapted to our own cultural and spiritual genius. Only so it can become creative, rooted in existential realities of each country. At the risk of generalising and making too neat distinctions, I would like to point out some of the basic differences between the Eastern and Western approach, some of the Eastern values we could give more importance to, and learn from some of the strengths of the West.

1. The place of the Person in the Eastern world

One of the first essentials, perhaps, is that we should realize the difference between our concepts of man and person and that of Westerners. This is specially important in International Congregations to attain harmony and understanding, where Easterners and Westerners live together in community. But it is also vitally important for the formatrices to know it. In the East, the person is more "heart", and knowledge is more intuitive in character. The West has an intellectual heritage where knowledge is more science than wisdom—not that there has not been wisdom found in the West. For gone are the days when we could say: East is East and West is West, or that the East is passive, traditionalist, spiritual, while the West is active, progressive, materialist. Today East and West are coming together very fast indeed. Who can say that Japan or North Vietnam are passive, or that Red China is traditionalist, or that all Indian youths are spiritual? Nevertheless, it is true to say that *the place of the Person in the Eastern world differs greatly from that of the Western world* and in the confusion of structural relationship.

In the East, specially China, the person involves himself only in so far as it is necessary to maintain harmony in that relationship. The person keeps to himself; he does not expose himself as in the West. This has countless consequences in communities of Easterners and Westerners living together. "If the 'missionary' does not assume kenosis, he will pile up endless difficulties; not that kenosis works miracles, but at least it creates an attitude of

receptivity which is essential to the understanding of others". (Yves Raguin : *Missionary Spirituality*). In the West they stress promotion of the person's individual rights by providing an atmosphere of freedom for him to exercise these rights. Before joining religious life the person has usually enjoyed independence of her parents, has had her own bank account, her own room, perhaps even her own house. She was able to stand on her own feet; everyone respected her liberty and usually there was the minimum of interference. Westerners with this background will naturally find it difficult to understand in Asia the strong family and group ties which they will find here, the innumerable pressures brought to bear on the person, where no one lets you do "your own thing", and where the individual's rights are often not respected in practice. I say "in practice" because in theory in the East, too, the worth of man is acknowledged, but the accent differs from the West. Thus in the Chinese tradition, heaven, earth and man are the basis of all creation, and the highest in the scale of value is Man; "heaven's second edition, its shadow" (Fung Yu-Lan : *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy*). In India, the Advait (non-duality) philosophy "equates" the person with Brahman : "*Aham Brahmasmi*" (I am Brahman) is one of the Mahavakyas (great sayings) of the Hindu Scriptures, the Upanishads. And speaking of the glory of human nature, Swami Vivekanand says : "We are the greatest God . . . Christ and Buddha are but waves of the boundless Ocean that I Am". In *Buddhism*, too, man is the centre : "Look within; thou art the Buddha". But there is no distinct ego whose uniqueness has a sublime dignity. Buddha insisted on the illusion of the ego, and *the whole process of salvation is in exactly the opposite direction of Western civilisation*, which aims at the full development of the person. Rather it is a passage to a new plane of consciousness where there is no longer an ego but only pure being. Likewise in the *Taoist* virtue of "Wu-wei" (non-interference, non-willing, non-action), "men should lose themselves in Tao as fish in water . . . Your self is a body lent to you by the universe . . . You do not own yourself". In *Confucianism*, not cosmic reality but the family, the clan, the sovereign takes precedence over the individual. The "great-hearted" man

cultivates his virtues to serve society. While commenting on this phenomenon of how *Asian societies do not recognise the dignity of the person as an end in itself*, Sr. To Thi Anh says that there is then "little hope of being a pioneer in an unknown domain to assume all the risks of being one's unique self . . . " "I think with regret of all the originality and creative powers which have not been fully developed in Asia because of educational systems and social conformism. Perhaps we do not have as many mental sicknesses, breakdowns, neuroses as in the West, but also less inventors and creators" (*Eastern and Western Cultural Values; Conflict or Harmony ? EAPI. Manila*). While producing original, creative people in the West, focussing attention on the dignity of the person, there is the risk of INDIVIDUALISM. Hence, *their need to stress community in the West*. In the East, exalting the totality of which man is member may mean NOT a full development of the individual's *uniqueness*. Hence *our need perhaps to stress the formation of the individual personality*, so that she is a fully developed woman, which does NOT mean a fully developed woman of the West, efficient, active, outgoing; which is perhaps what we have tended to do. Mrs. Marcos, the first Lady of the Philippines, at the UN International Women's Conference, speaking of the oriental woman's mystique, said: "The oriental woman has not sacrificed her femininity to individualism, but has rather enhanced it with participation For all their suffering and sadness of the third world, the oriental woman may be happier than her sisters in other parts of the world. She knows by instinct and by tradition, that as the bearer of life she has the duty and the right to nourish it, and thereafter to cherish it, and to cherish is to love." And to love, one may add, is to efface the self. Jose Rizal, the Philippine National hero said: "Only women can give birth to men; it is their mothers and their wives who will determine what kind of men they are". And those of us who have lived in an Eastern family know, that while their Western counterparts claim social equality with men, the oriental woman, while appearing to be self-effacing and deferent to man, has in reality often the greater, if more subtle power.

In the polarity of individualism and participation, the Westerner has chosen to affirm himself by stressing the former, the Easterner by stressing the latter. At first in this area when East meets West, it appears as though "never the twain shall meet"; they are separated by politics, social situations, different philosophies, etc. But when they get into some depth, where mankind is lonely, suffers, anguishes, loves, prays, then they suddenly find in the other, apparently so different, a replica of themselves, an ineffable friend and brother. Heraclitus' statement seems to me relevant here for formation of religious of international congregations. "Whatever are opposites, co-operate; and from the divergent proceeds the most beautiful harmony". But *we can only produce harmony if we allow ourselves to remain divergent*, and be what we ARE, instead of trying to imitate our Western counterparts.

This is not to say that we cannot learn from their strengths. While the Eastern ideal of life may be the remedy of the Western disease of technosis, we can learn from the West high regard for the individual, some modern sciences and techniques, social awareness, organisational methods. They might learn from the East, moderation, proportion, harmony with nature and with the Absolute, relaxation, patience, the value of suffering, failure, inaction, space, silence.

2. Silence

Silence and the role that this mighty instrument can play in the formation of the Eastern, if not all, religious, cannot be overestimated. One of the most striking things I learnt during my Sabbatical year spent among Hindus and Bhuddists last year was their faith in the power of silence. We have all heard of how Zen Masters and Hindu Gurus have been known to teach their disciples in and through silence. Ramana Maharishi, the great sage of Tiruvanmalai in South India used mostly silence to communicate the most precious spiritual doctrine, like the Young Guru in Shanakaracharya's Hymn to Dakshinamoorthy, who taught by his "Silent Discourse" (Maun Vyakhya) the highest essence of God. In the Gospels, too, we are told, "Jesus autem tacebat." And this

may be said not only of His Passion, but also of His long hidden life and short public life, where He often taught, healed, saved primarily by His silence. Some of us have also experienced this in our own little ways, at the feet of a Hindu Guru in an Ashram or a Buddhist Master in a monastery. Apparently mute, perhaps looking uninterested, the Guru often gives the most intense spiritual direction, sometimes even without a look or touch. We Christians have a lot to learn here I feel. We are so used to thinking that only by talking can one communicate and teach. Influenced perhaps by the West, we have grown accustomed to thinking that words are essential for communication, or its best medium; and so we are constantly in search of newer modes of group dynamics, games and exercises. We find it difficult to believe that *silence can be a more powerful, more effective, more speedy medium of communication than multiplicity of words*. The Japanese, they say, have the sensitivity to "speak by silence" Perhaps they inherit it from the Zen Buddhists who stress that to speak "of the ultimate mystery makes nonsense, that to manipulate the Supreme even with our intelligence is a blasphemy, and that silence is the base and source of all speech, all thought, all being". Silence of thought and word is a *pre-requisite to contemplation*, especially contemplation-in-action; for it to become a habit, physical WITHDRAWAL is necessary; for a long period initially (far longer, I am persuaded, than we allow in Christian religious life,) according to individual needs. For this to become a reality, we would have to revise our ideas of the primacy of works and the apostolate over contemplation. But Our Lord Jesus Himself indulged in these withdrawals from time to time, though His public life was full and demanding. (cf. Lk. 5. 42; 6. 13; 9. 11, etc.).

If we need a *Theology of Communication by Silence*, we have but to turn to the Blessed Trinity, the ideal community of faith-sharing, if one may so speak ! (All that the Father hath is Mine . . . The Father showeth the Son all that He doth . . . etc.) St. John of the Cross reminds us that God spoke but one Word, and He speaks it ever from the depths of His eternal silence. Any attempt to speak of the Father seems to involve a contradiction. Raymond

Panikkar in his "The Trinity and the World Religious" speaks of the Spirit being the "permanent Interiorisation of the Father", the "bottomless Interiority of God". Once again we find as in the Father, whose mystery and kenosis we have not yet plumbed, "the profound mystery of hiddenness and silence about the Spirit's moving". The modern thrust driving people into involvement is of the Spirit. To be caught up in the tide of love; communion and involvement, inserted in the life of the world is all as it should be. But the way of the Spirit is also and first driving us into the Desert. Our words and action to be effective, must be *rooted in a strong spirituality* of silence. This is very Eastern and in today's world of noise and superabundant activity, very essential. Also, only so will our relationships with each other be true.

Encounter with persons then becomes encounter with God, for it will take place in a contemplative spirit, "so that the image of God and beyond the image, God Himself, is discovered in the person of the other. We must seek to meet our brother in his inmost heart" (or, as Hindus would say, 'in the cave of the heart'). "And like the meeting of God and man, the meeting of humans with one another will be creative", (cf. Cistercian Monks and Asian Religions" by Ghislain Lafont, OSB, in *Cistercian Studies*, Vol. IX, 1974).

3. Creativity

Creativity is a quality that I think we religious, and especially those in charge of formation, need badly today, when religious life, its very meaning and relevance are being questioned, when the mission of the different congregations are being sorted out. *If creativity is the capacity to see unusual relationships and make unique connections, one needs to be quiet* and to develop a keen sense of observation. "Our creativity", it has been truly said, "is hindered by our lack of silence. We do not achieve that creativity which would come from more collaboration with others and from more interior serenity. The Spirit cannot act in us because we are too noisy. We have not enough spirit of contemplation and

serenity to enter into relationship with others and to grasp what the reality is. So we do things but we are not sufficiently significant (or creative). We need more silence about ourselves and confidence in God who enters into history. We have a contemplative call which we sometimes forget, because we do not create the conditions of silence and expectation which are necessary for us to live it". (C. Camacho, Superior General of the Society of the Sacred Heart).

To be creative we need, besides silence, *not to be bound by the opinion of others*. And here, community-centredness, such as we have in the East, can be an obstacle. We can cease to produce for the sake of releasing what is within, and produce instead for the approval of the group, or to serve a function in the group. In a highly-structured society like ours, this may produce skilled craftsmen, but not necessarily creative personalities.

In non-Christian countries, creativity is required too for developing a Christian culture which in course of time will absorb into itself the achievements and values of the great non-Christian civilisations, and so produce a new and as yet unimagined combinations and syntheses (cf. Bishop Neil: *The Unfinished Task*).

In prayer, too, freedom in the Spirit means a voyage of discovery into the fulness of our creative potentialities, the possibility of sharing in God's continuous creation of the universe. Our desires when desired by the Creator Spirit are often accepted by God as an expression of the freedom He has granted to creation. Too many Christians prefer the yoke of bondage and the dullness of passivity, and learn neither to pray nor to create. (cf. Hargreaves : *Asian Christian Thinking*) "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom". This freedom of the spirit applies also to *fearlessness of speech* when it is required. In Asia we are courteous and reluctant to tell the truth if we think it will hurt the others. Yet the Gospels are clear on this point. Our lord spoke graciously (Lk. 4. 22) yet fearlessly (Lk. 12. 37-44) and asked us to do likewise (Lk.12. 4-12). It is in the last analysis the freedom we grant to the Holy Spirit to be active

in us which enables our creative capacity to come to maturity. This Creator Spirit is the Inner Guru who alone can really "form" any person, even as He formed "the Heart of Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary".

4. The Guru

The Guru is another oriental (Indian) concept and practice. The Guru-Chela relationship is something we could profitably explore, adapt, and use. As Zen Masters, Buddhist Anagarikas and Kalyan Mitras (friends of one's salvation) are found in Buddhist countries, so in India the Guru is the Teacher, but more, he is the one who mediates God-experience to others. This is what I think the "formatrices" should be. According to the Upanishads *the Guru should be a Brahmanistha*, one established in God (Mundaka Up. 2.12), for only he who abides in Love can lead others to experience that love (Jn. 15. 4,10). He should also be *Shrotriya*, one learned in the Scriptures, with the wisdom of the heart, not merely intellectual knowledge, by which one can never grasp God, as the Upanishads never tire of telling us, as emphatically as does *The Cloud of Unknowing*. The Guru must be, further, a *Shrushruvan*, one who has "heard of God" (Jn. 3. 40; 15. 3). *It is the Guru who chooses the disciple* rather than the other way around. "Not through much learning is the Atman reached; it is reached by the chosen of Him". (Kathnopnishad 1.2.23; of Jn. 15. 16). Only after a period of considerable testing does he accept the disciple, who then should remain with him for a long time. The patience and long waiting implied in the formation of a Hindu disciple always strikes me in contrast to the speed with which we turn out our young apostles, in an efficiency-oriented manner, often after two or three years of 'Novitiate' and oftener with no further chances of long desert-period of withdrawal. In ancient India, the disciples came with "fuel in hand", symbol of willingness to learn with a docile spirit and a heart willing to serve the Guru (Guruseva and Guru bhakti) to "tend his fire".

The Christian Guru would differ from his Hindu counterpart in being the "one who serves" (Mt. 33.11) and in creating the disciple not as servant but as a friend (Jn. 15.1),

and in sharing all he is and does (Jn. 15. 15). In exchange, the Guru would exact perfect obedience (*Guropdeshpalan*). Many a spiritual leader of India has been heard to say, like Swami Shivananda, that he would have obedience from his disciples rather than “*sashtang-namaskar*” (full length prostrations), and gifts of all sorts laid at his feet. Often the disciple would learn obedience the hard way, through much detachment and renunciation. Most often the formation of the disciple was done by *the power of his example*, the very life of this God-experienced man, and lessons were caught rather than taught. By merely staying quietly at the Master’s feet and observing respectfully his actions and reactions, the disciple would learn much. *Guru-bhakti* or devotion to the Guru can take many forms. Stripped of some exaggerations (some appearing almost to be “idolatory” to us at first sight), and if understood aright, most of them can be acceptable to the Christians of India. What is more Eastern and Biblical, for instance, than touching the feet of a revered person—a teacher, an elder, a parent? Why have Indian Christians given up this beautiful custom? So, too, sitting at the feet quietly of a God-experienced man as Mary did at the feet of Jesus (Lk. 10. 39), can be a most powerful experience. Often the true Gurus have what the Fathers of the Eastern Church call “*cardiognosis*”, ability to read hearts, and the “*dioractices*”, one with the gift of perspicacity, is highly prized. The Guru trains his disciple until such time as he *needs no other Guru except the Indwelling Spirit*, until his own God-experience in the depth of his heart showed him: “*Tat-Tvam-asi* (Thou art That). To seek this God-experience becomes THE goal and ambition of the disciple’s life, and normally he would keep to the same Guru all his life unless the Spirit clearly showed otherwise. Perhaps there is something in this continuity of formation from which we might learn? (Although if the formatrice is not a true “guru” it might lead to other difficulties! **)

** For more on this subject cf. “*Gurus, Ashrams and Christians*” by Vandana, rscj. being published by Darton, Longman & Todd. 1978.

5. God-experience

"Seeking God" is the Hindu disciple, nun or monk's goal as of a Benedictine. With single-mindedness (*ekagrata*) he pursued his one object, and even if absorbed in work or service, which as the Bhagvad Gita teaches him, has always got to be disinterested (*Nishkam karma*), work has always to be subordinated to the contemplative dimension of his "religious life". To the non-Christian of India it is often a subject of mystery if not of scandal, that Catholic priests and nuns lend themselves, or more often give themselves, so entirely to "works", that while they admire our efficiency, discipline of our schools, hospitals, etc., the prayer dimension appears to them non-existent or utterly submerged in 'work'. Our Lord was often seen praying with and by His disciples. and He taught the importance of "the one thing necessary" (Lk. 11.42). While it is true that for the adept, work is also prayer and that God can be truly encountered in the service of others, especially the poor and the oppressed whom most religious are eager to serve today, there is a tendency among us to think perhaps that either contemplation as such is quite possible to combine with action (and we forget that normally this takes a long time before this state is reached) or that contemplation is meant only for a few special souls, whereas every Christian is called to it, and a fortiori, all religious. It should be normal for the novice to begin with it. Swami Abhishiktanand notes in one of his books that unfortunately often the *Christian tends to end where the Hindu begins* ; and perhaps this is because of our lack of understanding of "contemplation" or because we do not have recourse to the many meditation techniques available to prepare us for the gift of contemplation which God alone can give, or because we do not persevere in one method with "one-pointedness" (*ekagrata*). Those of us who have begun to learn them, whether they be Buddhist or Hindu, may find it difficult to integrate them into our Christian experience. This is where the novice would need guidance and who better than the "formatice" herself can be her guide? One efficacious way would be for her to *learn these methods with the novices*, and then in the light of the Gospel, help her to use and integrate the methods. This would also be a helpful thing to do when it comes to *sending novices and*

young religious, as we should do, to *Buddhist monasteries, Hindu ashrams or Sufi mystics*, according to the country where we live and work ; for it is only by living with them, watching and learning from them, which pre-supposes humility in us, to know that we are not self-sufficient or all-knowing, that we can learn how to be authentic in our prayer lives and how WE can integrate the methods (which can and should be disassociated from their philosophies or metaphysics or religion), into our Christian and religious life. Yoga and Zen for instance, which are so popular with some Christians in the West today, are hardly practised by Christians in the East.

As religious in Asian countries we have also to realise that some of these lands have had for centuries, their own experience of God, in a different mode, with its own validity. It is the same Christ expressing Himself in other terms, in other modes of experience ; of "EXPERIENCE"—not modes of thought or organisation as in other traditions. Thus in India, for instance, Fr. Bede Griffiths made a strong statement to a group of religious (who were reflecting together how we could make religious life more indigenous, more authentic in India), when he said that a house of formation that does not try to integrate the Upanishadic experience, the highest known to Hinduism, is failing the Indian Church today. Yet how many Formatrices in India have themselves had this Upanishadic experience of God ? How many are even familiar with the Upanishads ?***

6. The Scriptures

For this we need to *know and pray the Scriptures*. First of all, our own. "Perfectae Caritatis" expects every religious to handle the Gospels daily ; this is a MUST. Often we are not thoroughly enough soaked in them, or are conversant only with the words ; they have perhaps not been adequately contemplated and interiorised. For this St. Ignatius' methods (not only the first discursive method to which most religious

*** Books like "Prayer" (ISPCK). "Hindu-Christian Meeting Point" (CISRS) Bangalore; "Saccidananda" (ISPCK); "The Further Shore" (ISPCK)—By Swami Abhishiktanand who tried to capture the Hindu experience of God in Christian terms may be found helpful.

do or used to confine themselves, but all his methods of meditation and contemplation) can be a great help. But with these methods of contemplating the Christ of the Gospels, the important thing is to remember again the wise comment of Ignatius : "Non abundantia scientiae, sed sentire et gustare res interne". Once again, it is contemplation of a heart rather than of much thinking : "to feel and to relish the 'inner thing'."

The Scriptures of Other Faiths. A very significant document has been published by the National Biblical, Liturgical and Catechetical Centre, Bangalore, India, 1974, after a research seminar of about 50 scholars on non-Biblical Scriptures. Without going into the intricacies of the theological question here, of how far we can say that these Scriptures are "inspired" or can be called "the Word of God", it is enough for us to realise that the same Spirit works in all men and all cultures. *The Hidden Christ or Unknown Christ* of Hinduism or Buddhism or of any other religion has *to be sought* by us with pure hearts before He can be found : and if sought by us in the Spirit of the Pharisees, He will surely pass us by. If to be 'radical' means going to the roots, then for us of Asia, it surely means having the *courage to go back to our double heritage as Asian Christians*—to that of our ancient, multiple cultures and religions—in the Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian or Tao Scriptures, and to that of the Bible. When we speak of the indigenisation of the Church in Asia, this is where we should begin. The meditative reading of these Scriptures would surely play an important role in the growth of our own spiritual life and that of the indigenous Church. Thus, "the mystery of Christ experienced and lived in India should be the inspiration and source of religious life in India. Every Church should produce, or has produced its own form of religious life" (Paul Puthanangady : *Religious life, an Eschatological Sign*). The time has come, nay it is past, that we should have a genuinely Thai or Chinese or Philipino or Indian form of Religious life. It is by first living an indigenous life, drawing its spirit and inspiration from the indigenous culture and Scriptures that we can hope to evolve an indigenous theology which will be a reflection on that life and an indigenous liturgy

which would flow naturally from the indigenous life lived and a true experience of God in that mode—Thai or Japanese, Indian or Malay. To make this experience of God possible for others, it is obvious that there should be one or more in charge of formation who are themselves people who have had the experience of God and are or can be *Upagurus* (small gurus). For if Christ is our only Satguru (true master) or Paramguru (the highest master), we can be called Upagurus. As Kathop. 2. reminds us, "He cannot be taught by one who has not reached Him. The way to Him is through a teacher who has seen Him," one who has found the Ineffable and the Unnamable, above all within his own self.

7. Interiority

Interiority is one of the basic characteristics of Eastern and Indian spirituality. All forms of Yoga are meant to lead one to the One in the "Cave of the heart, in the lotus flower in the centre of the castle of Brahman", the castle of Brahman being the body (cf. Paul's "temple of the Holy Spirit"). This text of the Chandogya Upanishad is only one of many such which bring one constantly back to the Reality within. For there is no doubt that it is by becoming more and more aware of the Divine Presence within, that we become aware of that Presence surrounding us on all sides. *The call of India is this call within.*

This perhaps is *our contribution to the Church Universal*, emphasizing or bringing out more refulgently the luminous doctrine already in the Church, viz. the Indwelling Presence of the Spirit. Abbe Monchanin used to say that until India has contributed her share in developing this theology of the Holy Spirit, the mystery of the Church will remain incomplete. Though in a sense, one might say there is no within or without with regard to the presence which is all-pervading (which is what the Hindu name of God "Vishnu" means). "There is no outside and no inside in the mystery of God... yet the mind is so much distracted through the senses which are "turned outwards," that it needs first of all to be withdrawn from external things. "The Self-Existent" (*Swayambhu*) pierced the openings (of the senses) outward.

Therefore, one looks outward, not within himself. A certain wise man seeking immortality, however, introspectively beheld the soul (*Atman*) face to face" (Kathopnishad 4.1). Hence Yoga (from the root 'yug' meaning union) tries to fulfil this need of recollecting and gathering towards their centre all thoughts and all desires. Then, after we have been inwardly, fully illumined by the glory of the Presence, we realise that there are no limits to that Glory, no limits to that Presence (cf. *Prayer* by Swami Abhishiktanand).

Contemplation is something to which all Christians are called. Contemplative life as a "Vocation" means a way of life where every detail of life, of daily living, is oriented towards recollection, or what Buddhists would call "*mindfulness*," the inner "attitude" by which we find meaning. Contemplative life is a form of life designed to provide an optimum environment to attain mindfulness, for a radical search for meaning. But it seems to me, that all religious life in varying degrees according to the charism of its founder and the nature of its apostolate should be geared to finding this search for meaning in life. I would venture to suggest that in a vocation for "contemplatives-in-action", this need for an "optimum environment" is all the more imperative. It is perhaps mainly, though not only, in the initial stages, that long periods of SOLITUDE and a desert experience must be obtained—the length always measured to the individual's needs. Fr. David F. K. Staindl-Rast, OSB, has a very pertinent remark to make with regard to this solitude: "*True solitude* without togetherness (provided by a community) can deteriorate into loneliness, and therefore one needs strong roots in the togetherness of a community to be solitary rather than lonely. Loneliness is aloneness which is cut off from togetherness; solitude is aloneness supported by togetherness. "Blessed solitude" is that which one can enjoy by descending into the "cave of the heart" in the togetherness of the Trinitarian community life. To enable the young, indeed all of us, to attain to this Interiority, "to be inwardly fully illumined by the glory of the Presence", in order to live constantly in the Presence everywhere, it is necessary that they have ample leisure.

8. Leisure

Leisure is not the "privilege of those who have time, but the virtue of those who take time". It is not laziness either, easily found in our warmer Asian countries ; nor is it the opposite of work. (We should be able to work in leisure). One often hears today of certain congregations having become too "work-oriented". This might be due, I think, to one or both of the following reasons. Perhaps we try to be the Providence of God and undertake too many good works ; there is so much to do and if we don't do it, who will ? Or it may be because we have not really understood that the opposite of work is PLAY. *Play is very important in life*, not only for children. While work is something we do to accomplish a purpose which lies outside the activity itself, once the purpose is achieved the activity ceases (like polishing one's shoes) ; play is something we do for its own sake, because we find meaning in it (like singing). Leisure introduces into every activity an element of play ; it is not done only to get it done. Thus *leisure provides a climate in which man can be open for meaning*. This is a value we in Asia already have, and perhaps under the impact of Western influence, of technology, science, activism, may be in danger of losing. And yet, if we want to be truly "contemplative", especially contemplatives-in-action, we will need to stress in our own lives and thereby in our formation, the necessity of leisure, "ascetical leisure". "I ask for a moment's indulgence to sit by Thy side", wrote Tagore. "The works that I have in hand I will finish afterwards.....Now it is time to sit quiet, face to face with Thee and to sing dedication of life in this silent and overflowing leisure". We need to have courage to make time to "waste" it in this way, if we are to be truly creative, both in our own lives and as "gurus" or "formatrices". The candidates will always do what they see us do, not what they hear us say. "I cannot hear what you are saying for listening to what you are", is what they might say to us.

This may also have something to do with *our sense of the Absolute*, of the Transcendence which the youth of today, especially the many thousands who come to the East from the Occident, are so earnestly searching. Fr. Arevalo, S.J.,

speaking to some Asian religious in Manila last June, remarked that in the last ten years we have lost something of the sense of the Absolute and oneness with Christ. We have been so outward-looking that our efficiency as Christians is lost ; that dimension of interior conversion is the only thing we have to offer to the secular world after all. If Government now does the things we used to do, and better than we did perhaps, we shall have to refine what we have to give, by entering into His inner mysteries. The East has much to give ; we must be conscious of our "mission" ourselves, if we are to inspire the young to carry it out. Rosemarie Houghton said to some priests in London something I think significant : "Now we are asking you priests to do the one thing you were meant to do—give us God". For this we need a withdrawal, and also a withdrawal which is insertion ; not a life of prayer which is divorced from life, but what in the depth of us is truly human ; sharing in the mysteries of Christ's life, descending into the cave of our hearts, so as to reach people in their depths. To live our lives at that level, where we can speak the word of prophecy again, we shall need leisure. Someone has aptly said, "*To live leisurely*, means to take things one by one, to single them out for grateful consideration". To learn and then to teach how to be fully concerned with only the "here and now", or to live what Caussade called "the sacrament of the present moment", is a Must if we are to be truly contemplative.

Here again we have much to learn from the Buddhist meditation techniques and the single-mindedness (*ekagrata*) of Yoga. A sound Buddhist principle put into modern English says : "A saint is one who walks when he walks, who talks when he talks. He does not dream while listening, he does not think while acting. This is very hard. That is why he is a saint.". To live leisurely, means to celebrate every moment of life, as it comes, one by one. A contemplative community, and all Christian communities are meant to be so, has been rightly called "*a solitude-community which provides leisure to celebrate life*". This is an Eastern value we must continue to hold on to, and fast, as the speed, efficiency and pressure of the consumer societies

of the West hasten with greater acceleration to invade our world. This will require not only that we be communities of discernment, but also requires great renunciation. *Discernment* to see what the Spirit wants us to adapt and what to eschew. Oftentimes I feel *we have indiscriminately taken on the values and even the problems of the Western religious*, without seeing whether they really apply to us. Thus we begin to talk of whether we should have "superiorless communities" when our cultures are quite differently oriented towards authority ; or whether we should have "devotion to the Sacred Heart" any longer, just because in the West some time ago, there was much discussion of this devotion being "passe". (Actually in the East, and especially perhaps in India, we have great scope for a spirituality of the heart. I can recall on more than one occasion when a non-Christian has asked about the Sacred Heart with interest. In an Ashram where I lived for a long time and where I tried to give a more aesthetic picture of Christ, some refused it saying they liked Christ with the Heart !) *Renunciation* will be required because to choose to keep the value of leisure in our lives, we shall have to give up other values, which perhaps, from the "apostolic", point of view, seem urgently needed. But often, we must admit, what we call "apostolic" is merely activism, because it is devoid of this contemplative dimension which leisure makes possible.

9. Renunciation

Renunciation or non-attachment as it would be called in Indian spirituality, is a characteristic virtue of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain nuns. Perhaps we Christian religious may find ourselves not exacting enough in this area, either with ourselves or with those whom we train. Often young people come to us expecting an austere life, eager to give themselves generously, and are sometimes disappointed that *we do not ask enough of them*, and they settle down to a comfortable life. Our Lord expected and exacted much of His disciples by way of detachment, faith in renunciation (cf. Lk. 9.23-26 ; 10.58 ; 5.4 ; 14.33 ; Mt. 4.19). Shankaracharya, the great eighth century Indian philosopher-saint demanded this non-attachment (*vairagya*) as one of the pre-requisites of a student of Brahma Vidya (Wisdom of God), that is, from the

candidate who came seeking God "in religious life", even before the "*mumukshu*" (one who desired salvation) began his spiritual training. Renunciation in Hinduism is not a running away from the world, as is so often thought, but overcoming it. Because the Bhakta (the devotee of God) is so attached to Him, he is non-attached to all else. Because his desire for God is so great, he has "desirelessness" for everything else. This is the one-pointedness (*ekagrata*) demanded of the Sadhak (novice) which involves great renunciation. Modern spiritual masters emphasize the teaching of the Bhagvad Gita (1.28), "*Nishkam karma*", action without desiring any fruit of that action. This means that activities involved in daily living need not be feared as obstacles to the spiritual life ; they can all be God-filled.

Perhaps where we Christians and religious have to learn something from the standards of Hindu ascetism and renunciation, is in the area of *external simplicity and austerity of life*, which provides a correspondence between interior "one-pointedness" (simplicity of a soul that seeks and longs for nothing but her God) and external doing without superfluities. It is interesting how what one considers "superfluities" or "luxuries", another will consider as "necessities". This is where I believe it of great educational worth for us to go and live for a while with Hindu, Jain or Buddhist nuns ; we shall inevitably begin to examine our consciences regarding what we call our "vow of poverty", and begin to see more concretely perhaps the importance of living austere if we are truly seeking God—this, quite apart from the "witness value" we often speak of. One of the eight elements of Patanjali's system of Yoga is *aparigraha*—non-storing, or abstinence from greed, avarice, anxiety about the future. If from the earliest stages of formation, we could insist on non-storing, not having more than we strictly require for today, we would go far in understanding the evangelical idea of poverty, as well as begin to see the Gandhian principles of non-stealing and non-possession. Gandhiji maintained : "Whoever maintains more than the minimum that is really necessary for him, is guilty of theft". Then with true catholicity of mind, he allows for pluriformity according to needs, which would prevent us from being

judgmental about one another. "Everyone cannot be judged by the same standard. An ant may fall from grace if it stores two grains instead of one. An elephant on the other hand will have a lot of grass heaped before itself, and yet it cannot be charged of having great possessions". In his "Ashram Observances" Gandhi goes on to explain how renunciation does not necessarily mean "*Mannyasa*" (Renunciation of the world). Not everyone is called to live in a cave, go wandering from place to place or be a monk or nun. For ordinary people it means cultivating "mental detachment". "Whoever lives in this world and does so only for serving it, is a sannyasi". Those who give themselves easily to a life of enjoyment of unnecessary things and power, in whatever form (and how great an area of self-examination there is here for us !) are not fit for contemplation (cf. Gita 2.44 ; 2.47 ; 3.19, 25-26). "One who is undisturbed in mind and in sorrow, who is void of longing in pleasure, free from desire, fear, wrath, such a one of steadfast thought is called a Muni' (a silent one, a sage ; Gita 2.56).

Renunciation in Indian spirituality does not mean only non-possession, detachment, desirelessness, but also self-control. Gandhiji stressed silence of word, of the tongue. Monday was his day of "*maun*" (silence) and even when international politicians came to see him, he kept it strictly. Total withdrawal into the "desert" was done from time to time. This, he maintained, enabled one to regain proper balance in one's life, put first things first again in the midst of activity and over-activity. He gave importance, too to control of the palate. He believed that the observance of real Brahmacharya (not only in the sense of celibacy, but of total following of God) was found from experience to be extremely difficult so long as one had not acquired mastery over the sense of taste. "Eating is necessary only for sustaining the body and keeping it a fit instrument for service, not for self-indulgence. Food must be taken like medicine under proper restraint. One must avoid exciting foods such as spices and condiments ; meat and liquor are taboo". When one understands why food for the Hindu is considered sacred and why they think it is so important what you eat because of its effects on the spiritual life, one begins to see why they

look down on Christians as "wine-bibbers and meat-eaters", as one reads in the life of Robert de Nobili. Neither can they believe that a religious who loses his temper and has no self-control over himself in that area, can be truly a Brahma-chari (celibate).

It is not irrelevant for us then, in the light of all this to question ourselves honestly with regard to our Christian and religious standards of austerity and self-control, of equanimity and non-storing ; to ask ourselves whether the time has not come to imitate our Hindu and Jain Sisters in their standard of living, rather than continue in our western standards full of comforts that ill-befit a life of dedication to God-seeking and service of others, especially the poor, with whom we seek or desire to seek solidarity. Cardinal Newman has a very appropriate word on this subject : "I must say this...the comforts of life are the main cause of our want of love of God. Much as we may lament and struggle against it, till we learn to dispense with them in good measure, we shall not overcome it. Till we, in a certain sense, detach ourselves from our bodies, our minds will not be in a state to receive divine impressions and to exert heavenly aspirations. A smooth and easy life, an uninterrupted enjoyment of the goods of Providence, full meals, soft raiments, well-furnished houses, the pleasure of sense, the feeling of security, the consciousness of wealth, these and and the like, if we are not careful, choke up all the avenues of the soul". This should make us think of our life style.

10. The Way of Life

The simplicity and austerity of our lives should distinguish us religious in our style of life, from the seculars among whom we live. Today it should also be an OPEN COMMUNITY, where all sorts of people should be welcomed. Hospitality should be a characteristic of us religious, especially in Asian countries where this quality is so much prized. I have had some unfortunate experiences in this respect, with a couple of congregations who are known for their generosity. When I arrived unexpectedly once, with an Anglican friend, at a Convent, I was told there was no room for us. There was plenty of room, as WE could see; a large spacious hall with carpets, where we

said we would be very grateful and happy to spend the night. But according to their standard of living, this was something unheard of. In spite of our saying that we both came from Ashrams where we slept on the floor as a rule, they would not hear of such a thing. And so we had to leave, to hunt for another place. Sometimes non-Christian institutions have given more charitable hospitality, even though their standard of living was less high. This is something to think about in the light of the Gospels which we claim to follow in our professedly "evangelical" lives.

An Open Community would enable people and our youth especially, to see the way we live, the way we eat and sleep and rejoice and forgive one another. I was very happy to hear from a Czech religious working in Indonesia how their congregation had started taking young girls who asked if they could come and live a "nun's life" for a short while, the way the Buddhist monks allowed young men to "take the robe" for a period. This, to my mind, is a step in the right direction.

An Open Community, especially of a contemplative order, would have the beneficial effect of enabling seculars, often so hungry for God and for prayer, to come and pray, even learn to pray with us. Often there is a great deal of prayer going on within the convent walls, but, as the conference of Asian Monastics held in Bangalore last year pointed out, the time has come for our contemplative communities to be SEEN to pray, and as in Hindu Ashrams, to throw open our doors to all who wish to come and pray with us. In India at least, the Ashram way of life offers a good opening for an indigenous form of religious life,—no matter what our apostolate may be.

Studies and Preparation for the Apostolate form an important part of any formation programme. The studies of the religious should naturally fit them for their mission, according to the charism of their foundresses and the needs of the Church in their countries. We have already spoken of the need for the study of an indigenous theology; and first its development in each country. This would apply to all branches of study; the studies of the religious should be done

to fit the needs of their own country, and for the most part done within their own countries. Those of us who have had training and formation in a foreign country, know how often it is very difficult to adapt the training to one's own country. Specialisation in some subject may require going abroad, but even then we should be sure that the training there received will really fit us better afterwards to render service to the Church and the country in which we have to work. Initial formation is best given in one's own country.

Without in any way being narrowly nationalistic, especially in international congregations, it is imperative that the young religious study the language and culture of the country if they are to give their best to the people, to understand them and communicate meaningfully. For this, an academic study is not enough. It is necessary to go for a time, at least, to live among the people, for the most part non-Christian, and experience their life. There must be an experiential knowledge of their language, culture, religion, philosophy of life. Needless to say people will hasten to point out the risk involved in sending out young religious, especially if sent alone, to live in a non-Christian milieu. In my experience, it is almost always found that the young religious has returned far more strongly rooted in her faith and vocation, as it has had to be—often for the first time in her life—challenged. This maturing experience has sometimes a greater value than the knowledge acquired of the language and culture. Thus enriched and prepared realistically, the young religious can be far more effective and creative in her apostolate; having found her "roots" she can "take wing".

So, too, some form of professional study is a MUST in today's world, unless she has already had some before joining religious life. More and more congregations are now realising the wisdom of expecting the candidate to have finished her professional studies before entering; this also ensures that a maturer woman joins the congregation, and we know what this would mean also with regard to effective maturity. Many of the current problems one meets with today due to affective immaturity in religious life would be done away with. Often, however, the studies that have to

be done, whether theological, linguistic or others, require time, and this is often a commodity we are not prepared to pay the price of; so eager are we to send off the young to labour in the harvest where the labourers are few. Yet, whether it is for study, or whether it is a question of laying strong and deep foundations of the interior life and spirituality, time is required.

11. Time and space

Time and space are required after the seed is sown, before the fruit appears. In his book "*Water and Fire*", Gerald Vann says a wise thing: "We must first be feminine (contemplative) to reality, before we can hope to be wisely and graciously masculine (active) and give that reality to others". It takes time to learn to listen "to the essence of things". I once asked a Hindu Sannyasi in the Himalayas, how he learnt to be so still and calm in the midst of his hectic work as a secretary of a large Ashram. He smiled and said: "For ten years I remained alone in these forests and hardly spoke to anyone". In those same forests today, I know a young French monk (*sanayasi*) who keeps *maun* (silence), and hopes to keep it for ten years. I expect he will produce something magnificent and creative after this long waiting and maturing. I am convinced daily more that thus, and not otherwise, can we produce, especially in today's fast-moving world, contemplatives-in-action. We speak much today of "integration" of prayer and life. I do not believe that this integration can really take place after two or three years of novitiate, especially as often even that period is not given exclusively to the development of the interior spirit, but is mingled with the study of many other things. It takes time and patience to produce contemplatives. "Thus, and not otherwise". Asians are said to be patient. Let us be truly Asian in this, and be content to let things take their own time. "Wu-wei" in the spirit of Tao is here called for! It takes time to learn to be in tune with Tao, to be in harmony with one's self and with all beings.

If you have gone on a warm afternoon to an Asian village and asked for water, you will probably remember

the gracious courtesy and slow movements of the villager as he drew water for you from his well. He was in no haste, and in harmony with nature. This could have been for us, too, "living waters" if we knew who it was who gave us to drink and how. Tagore once wrote: "To be able to take considerable time to give water to a passing stranger and claim no merit, seems very simple, compared to producing an amazing number of things in one minute. . . but that simplicity is the product of centuries of culture. In a few years' time, it might be possible for me to learn how to make holes in a thousand needles simultaneously by turning a wheel, but to be absolutely simple in one's hospitality to one's enemy or stranger, requires generations of training". So, too, Our Lord did not send forth His apostles before He had kept them with Him, and united them intimately to Himself first. St. Paul was not sent before he was first "possessed" in his inmost being by Christ. And so, too, with all the saints. They took time to retire into the "desert", to withdraw into silent intimacy with Christ.

12. Contact in the Pierced Heart of Christ

Only a personal and constant contact with His pierced Heart can form us, conform us, to Him. This takes time; though God could do it in a moment, He normally lets nature take its time. Contact with God day after day in contemplative prayer will then produce calmness, openness, joy, intuition, human health. Interiority, control, transcendence of the mental, integration of the body, are among some of the Eastern values which we shall develop in ourselves. At the same time, we shall learn to receive, I should say, continue to receive, humbly all the best values of the West, without losing our own souls, patiently seeking to develop our own identity, our own authentic form of religious life. Even if at times, it looks as though it were an unsurmountable difficulty, we shall persevere in faith and patience, and the Lord will give increase in His own time.

Conclusion

We have talked earlier of the Tree symbol. I would

like to end with a reflection on another beautiful and often-used symbol in the East—the LOTUS. The lotus needs mud in which to sink its roots. It needs water to support and nourish it. Each morning we see the bud, tightly closed, but full with promise. Imperceptibly, in the light and warmth of the sun, it opens its petals, slowly revealing its loveliness. We watch but cannot detect the movement. Yet it happens. And there, in the noon, it lies, stretched to its fullest extent, reflecting His Glory.

And so it is with the formation of all our young God-seekers. We can but provide the mud and water as nourishment. We expose them to the Sun, and watch. Occasionally we may have to protect, but He warms and beautifies, in His own good time. Thus and not otherwise.....

APPENDIX I

The Church is like a tree, not a neatly-structured organization :

The significance of this “modern Asian parable” has been, well brought out by Cecil Hargreaves in his excellent book, *Asian Christian Thinking* (ISPCH. CLS. LPH. 1972), which has inspired many of the ideas expressed here. The tree imagery is used by many modern Asian Christian writers, e.g. in India by Gandhiji, Dr. Radhakrishnan, Tagore, and its underlying pattern of thinking is scriptural, not geographical (cf. Jn. 15 : 1-10).

The themes of :

- rootedness** - the importance and emphasis of an indigenous, living theology rooted in the soil.
- growth** - the root and branch symbolism for Mission—what is sometimes called in East Asia “the evangelisation of the sweet potato vine” through family and group contacts.

relatedness- between God and humanity ; mysticism and history ; contemplation and prophecy ; detachment and personalism. People in other parts of the world are looking to Asia to learn more about true relatedness and an experience as in history. (cf the book, St. John's Gospel and India's Search for Reality, ISPCK on an Ecumenical Seminar held at Christ Prem Seva Ashram, Pune, India - 1973).

Many famous Asians of Hindu and Buddhist cultures use this symbolism. Gandhiji said of his Satyagraha Ashram "Insistence on truth constitutes the root of the Ashram. Prayer is the principal feeder of that root". In Hindu Scriptures, the Upanishads and the Bhagvad Gita speak of the imperishable *asvattha*—the peepal tree.

Dr. Radhakrishnan explains : As the tree originates in God, it is said to have its roots "above"; as it extends into the world, its branches are said to go downwards (cf. *Katha Up* 6:1, *Svetasvatara Up* 3.9 and 6.6; *Rigveda* 1,24,7). For *Tagore*, tree imagery has a psychological significance : Man is intended to achieve "the rhythm of an inner balance" that a tree has, and it has a social significance : symbols of interrelationship between different parts of a whole. Dharma is the "principle of relationship which holds us firm". *Tagore*, while challenging some aspects of Hindu spirituality, put a new dynamism into Asian culture. *Lao-tse* in China uses the idea of dharma, too—a—key link between the Indian and Chinese cultural background : "those who have dharma (virtue) attend to their obligations; those who have no virtue attend to their claims". Very often the tree metaphor provided the best illustration of the message they were trying to convey.

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