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*"Let them reflect attentively on how Christian religious life may be able to assimilate the ascetic and contemplative traditions whose seeds were sometimes already planted by God in ancient cultures prior to the preaching of the Gospel."*

*Vatican Council II (Ad Gentes)*

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EAST-WEST SYMPOSIUM - "Mysticism of Integration" - Holyoke

"Blessed Simplicity is the monastic principle par excellence", Fr. Raimundo Panikkar told the more than 80 participants of the East-West monastic Symposium at Holyoke, Massachusetts, November 19-23, 1980, as he "struggled with all to describe the monk in our modern day."

The event, sponsored by the A.I.M. North American Board for East-West Dialog, was experienced as superb by an admixture of monks, nuns, scientists, scholars, professors, contemplatives, psychoanalysts, therapists, artists, masters and disciples, seekers and the sought. "The monk", Fr. Panikkar contended, "is not the paradigm for the fullness of the humanum but rather the monastic dimension is one constituent which every human being has and must cultivate in one way or another." The monk is the one who before all else aspires to be whole, one, unified, integrated, centered. This monastic dimension is the primordial religious dimension, previous to all divisions, previous to and different even from the way it is lived by individual monks.

Fr. Panikkar, professor of religious studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara spent the past year at Buddhist and Hindu spiritual centers as a pilgrim in India, the home of his own spiritual rootedness. Asked to speak at the Symposium on "The Monk as Universal Archetype: East and West", he offered his Sutra\* in essence as: "Blessed Simplicity" - the monastic principle par excellence! Human life, he maintained, is utterly complex. We live under the very sign of multiplicity. Through all this he sees the monk as one who "sails through the stream..." The speaker said he called simplicity holy in this monastic dimension because it reveres the real in a harmonious respect. The division today is not so much between East and West as it is between tradition and modernity. The mysticism of transcendence (West) and immanence (East) is being supplanted by the mysticism of integration. The modern monk does not want to renounce the created world nor deny the fullness of his/her humanum, but rather to transform, build and assimilate. Unification by simplification is what is desired.

Fr. Raimundo gave seven basic elements which to him constitute the strands of his Sutra, "Blessed Simplicity", elucidating each thread with a vibrancy and enthusiasm that was dynamic:

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\* sutra: a discourse by the Buddha or a disciple, accepted as authoritative teaching; literally, a thread on which jewels are hung.

- 1) Primacy of Being Over Doing: All monastic spirituality affirms that the fullness of being is the real thing, not becoming, not doing. In the West we have been, since the time of Permenides, preoccupied with doing. The technology in our modern world characterizes this preoccupation. But contemplation is that activity from which we can observe and contribute to the world. It is that activity which delights in the well-being of all beings, (Cf. Gita 12,4). Contemplation is a life which need not be justified, it is an end in itself. Contemplation becomes the fullness of existence, the very discovery of the person. The value of being lies in what it is, not in what it does. The dichotomy between being and doing does not exist - here contemplative action is the sharing of this being - allowing oneself to be stripped by the sharing. Often our desire to have and to do prevents us from contemplation. The monk does not aim at washing his/her hands of material things but rather tries to free these hands of things through simplification.
- 2) The Priority of Silence: Priority here does not mean exclusivity. True silence allows one to view all with a new innocence which no longer has anything to say. "The poor in spirit (the totally empty) shall see God." Silence belongs to nature, whereas the word belongs to culture. While the traditional monk's conversation has been in heaven, the modern monk wants to listen to the world. ... The priority of silence is not just the lack of speech - true silence explodes in prayer!
- 3) Mother Earth is Prior to the Brotherhood of Man: The monk through ora and labora has always cultivated him/herself and mother earth. The modern monk has an important role to play in establishing a more vital relationship with the earth which has become victim of modern exploitation. The unification of life cannot be carried out without the earth. The monk sits in solitary places, but roots him/herself in the earth.
- 4) Overcoming Spatial-temporal Involvement: Reality goes beyond space and time and is therefore "trans-temporal." There is a tension for the monk between traditional monasticism which often attempted to transcend space and time to dwell in heavenly realms and modern monasticism which sees the sacred in the secular. Today the monk sees true wisdom in the transfiguration of all our values. The modern monk does not cultivate hope of the future so much as the delight in the present. The modern dilemma of our time is to unite opposites: the masculine and feminine, the secular and the sacred, etc. The modern monk seeks a spirituality which is not exclusively spiritual. The challenge lies in the truth that one only has what one is! The new dimension is in assimilation vs. "getting away from it all." It is necessary for everyone to live this dimension. Christ alone is the primordial unity who cannot be divided. Today we need more than ever specialists, God-intoxicated persons, whose lives are centered, and for whom God is a fire they must pass on.
- 5) Trans-historical Consciousness is Above the Historical Task: The monk lives constantly yearning for total unification. Whereas time is always fragmentary. Peace does not exist in history because it must always look back and move ahead. There is something besides history to which the monk bears witness, i.e., the "trans-historical" awareness of reality. "Tempiternity" is that perfect integration of time and eternity in one single awareness, not as two realities. The monk must bear witness that the historical is not the only dimension. Through experience of the Taboric revelation the monk perceives the non-dualistic nature of reality which when shared with others reminds the world that we cannot be reduced to a mere historical being. Trans-historical consciousness leads to true happiness.
- 6) The Fullness of the Person Over the Individual: The notion of the "individual" is the result of the expediency in dividing the humanum into single units for the sake of manipulation. Monastic asceticism strives to overcome this dualism. Monastic consciousness has been universalized. Perfection for the monk consists in the realization that one is already the comprehensor, no longer with one's face to the Absolute and one's back to the relative. Through obedience (ob-audire) the monk has traditionally reached perfection. In the East it is fidelity to a master that frees us from our selves. In

the West the monk has had to discover this same power in the command of the Abbot. The person is not just an "I" because person presumes a "thou". The idea of the person is to create a "we". If the "I" is strong enough in us, then the "we" can exist without either pomp or weakness. Today there are three areas which are important to the fullness of the person, all vitally interrelated and not to be seen out of context. These are the theoretical framework for modernity, for the potentialities of ourselves:

- a) corporality - body
- b) intimacy - sex
- c) unification - politics

a) There has been an anthropological change in our times regarding the consciousness of the limits of the human being. In the past we were a clan, a tribe, a church, an order. The contemporary world places the limits of the person in a more global sphere. There has been a certain neglect of the body and corporeal values in traditional monasticism; the body has been the servant, but a dead weight. True, the body is not yet resurrected but in this meantime the flesh can be treacherous! Today the monk finds the body not a servant but rather the body is him/herself. This is non-dualistic language - we are the body and without the body we would not be persons. Asceticism therefore is not mortification of the flesh but rather vivification of the body. In the East the sadhu at times goes naked in pursuit of the Absolute; in the West we have tended to overclothe the body with robe upon robe. In Yoga the ascetic tries to keep the body docile. This effort has expanded to mean the integration of the two poles. The very word meditation is linked with "medicine" - salvation has to do with health, "salva" - whole. To be holy (saved) is not only to be healthy but to be whole.

b) Human perfection has to sublimate the androgenous character of the individual. Eschatological perfection has no sense of sex. Sex has been seen as the sign of the differentiation of human beings. If sex makes itself felt we must simply overcome it. This has been a test of the authenticity of the monastic vocation. In the East the best in Tantra indicates a trend to the sacramentarian concept of the whole world. For the contemporary monk there is a positive function of sexuality: sex is not merely genital, nor even merely physical. We need an exogenous (outer) complement and not merely an endogenous (inner) complement. In China the Tao Te Ching speaks of the "friend, the beloved." It embraces the area of love and intimacy. Perhaps marriage is not the real issue today but rather friendship. The shakti has to be there, shakti internalized, tantra internalized, but not by oneself. The problem of celibacy does not have to do with intimacy or sex but rather with the problem of non-attachment and freedom. The essence is to be free without bondages. If we really deal on the sexual level with the other, we will not deal with the other as male or female but rather as person. Fr. Panikkar said he does not support women's ordination for the same reason he does not support the ordination of men. "I believe," he said, "in the ordination of persons!" Until we can deal with one another as persons rather than as male and female we as a whole are still in immaturity. Because of this the question of women's ordination is secondary. In past times (in some countries today) marriage was never linked with love. What binds one is the children, what bonds is the spouse. The ideal of the gospel is non-attachment. Celibacy is requested of us because we have to be non-attached.

c) Politics: Man/woman has always recognized that perfection is reached by contact with the Absolute. Striving for perfection in traditional monasticism meant isolation from others, i.e. enclosure. Politics is a matter of awareness of what is good for the community, the well-being of the polis. Contemporary man/woman is unable to believe one can fulfill this responsibility in this way. The monk still wants to be solitary but without isolation. The world belongs to God but he renders it to the highest bidder. If we are not willing to pay the highest price, we cannot complain! There is no possibility for a neutral place today. We are in the crucible of the contentions of human beings. Of the great religious problems of our day, all have their basis in political problems and therefore these cannot remain apart.

7) The Primacy of the Sacred: The unity sought by all has traditionally been realized

under the sages of the sacred. Reality is complex, so too is human existence. The monk endeavors to be the very manifestation of the sacred. The sacred is the center of everything, of every activity. Monastic spirituality is the center, but is not the whole of reality. It is a part, a dimension of human life. The secular also pertains to the center of all things. Monasticism claims to be secular (not profane), but still no less sacred. It will abandon neither time nor space. In the East all is sacred, therefore the monk stands at the top of the hierarchy, whereas in the West the sacred is in dialog with the profane. This is a mutation of considerable import for our times and may be the most significant change of all: "the sacredness of the secular." The sacred is the center of the secular and often challenges it. The monk is placed therefore in the center of our times.

The problem of secularity lies in overcoming the split between the temporal and the eternal. The separation between the sacred and the profane is no longer tenable. The secular is no longer that which is fleeting but is that which is the very clothing of the permanent; the true life is hidden in the reality of the present moment. There are four fundamental sociological groups: the Church - religion; Academia - teaching, research; Government and military; and Industry - commerce, poets, craftsmen, artists. To none of these does the monk strictly belong. But he/she belongs by vocation to a fifth group: the Renunciates, those who have abandoned the world. The contemporary world has another category to which the monk belongs by association, e.g. the Guerilla, the dissident, revolutionary, those not content with the system, yet who depend upon that very system which they seek to overthrow. The contemporary monk may very well belong to this last category as one who liberates self from the system in order to take a radical outlook toward a totally new system. The monk establishes an association with this sixth group and also with the seventh: the True Marginals.

A Symposium participant, impressed with the urgency of the immanent mutation in modernity, asked the question: where do we begin? Begin by being present was the response still resounding in the hearts of the group during the final 2½-hour liturgy which featured the singing of bhajans, the arati (Eastern fire blessing) at the doxology and contemplative dancing with the gifts. A complete copy of the proceedings will be available later in 1981 from Seabury Press. Tapes of the lectures will also be released through the N.A.B.E.W.D. Secretariate, to be announced later.

Others who flanked the rostrum with Fr. Panikkar were Professor Michael von Brück of East Germany; Sr. Myriam Dardenne, O.C.S.O., Whitethorn, California; Ewert Cousins, Bethlehem, Connecticut; Abbot Cornelius Tholens of Amsterdam; Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O. Spencer, Massachusetts; Armand Veilleux, O.C.S.O., Quebec; Paolo Soleri, Arizona and Odette Baumer, Switzerland.

Monastic communities represented at the Symposium included: Benedictine Grange, Conception, St. Procopius, Assumption, Transfiguration, Osage, St. Mary's (Wrentham), Sacred Heart (Yankton), Hampton, Redwoods, St. Benedict's (Spencer, Massachusetts), Mistassini (Quebec). Fr. Felix, a priest from Bombay, assisted with the liturgies during the five days, as did Sr. Marie Therese Archenbault, O.S.F., Sioux Indian from Denver, focusing the indigenous contemplative presence for the group. Kalpana Das, Hindu from the Monchanin Crosscultural Centre in Quebec, was also present.

Workshops and meditation sessions of various forms were offered to the participants during the Symposium supplying a fruitful cross fertilization of the new monastic synthesis being offered by Fr. Panikkar and others. A public communication issued from the Symposium stated that a network of the heart in common concern for the contemplative dimension in everyone has been forming, which itself has to be the common ground for every effort to build a world of well-being and mutual support. These insights constituted a challenge for all to join hands across walls and barriers of exploitation and destruction, in mutual understanding and respect. The Symposium urged Churches and institutions to stress what is common among them and respect their differences. All divisions between action and contemplation must disappear, all polarization between East and West, right and left, must be overcome. The urgency of a common effort to

avert the threat of disaster was recognized as common yet individual responsibility to be well informed, to "think globally and act locally" now.

This Symposium was made possible by grants from the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities and the A.I.M. in Vanves, France. The participants as well as the N.A.B.E.W.D. are deeply grateful and indebted to both organizations as well as to the Sisters of St. Joseph at Holyoke for their great generosity and indefatigable efforts, all of which helped to make the Symposium the great success that it was.

#### A.I.M. GUEST AT BOARD MEETING AND SYMPOSIUM - Holyoke

Abbot C.J.A. Tholens, O.S.B. of Amsterdam arrived in New York, November 16, 1980 to be present in behalf of the A.I.M. (Aide Inter-Monasteres), at the 4th annual board meeting of the North American Board for East-West Dialog and for the Symposium which followed. The Abbot is one of the original founders of the A.I.M. and helped spearhead both monastic dialog groups in Europe (D.I.M.) and this present North American Board. His presence at the Board meeting and at the Symposium was insightful, beneficial and giftful.

#### 4th ANNUAL BOARD MEETING - New Advisory Board Members - Holyoke

Abbot Armand Veilleux, O.C.S.O., chairman, presided at the two-day 4th annual meeting of the North American Board for East-West Dialog, November 17-18, 1980 at Holyoke, Massachusetts. Other members present included: Sr. Pascaline Coff, O.S.B., Secretary; Fr. Theophane Boyd, O.C.S.O.; Edward J. Bednar; Sr. Donald Corcoran, O.S.B.; Sr. Renée Genereux, O.S.B.; and Abbot Lawrence Wagner, O.S.B. (Abbot Jerome Hanus, Conception and Dr. Robert Muller of the United Nations, were unable to be present.)

A renewed goal statement drawn up and approved by the Board included: the development of encounter, mutual exchange and understanding between monastic persons of all religions; bringing monastic spirituality and experience to questions of inter-religious dialog; encouraging and being supportive of Benedictines and Cistercians in Asia with their own dialog with non-Christian monastics; making available certain expertise, scholarship, resources and information pertinent to the dialog; and the sensitization of North American monastics to the spiritual value of Eastern religious traditions.

Areas of interest and concern were assigned to the individual members for the coming year and a contract with Seabury Press was signed for the publication of the Symposium Proceedings. An editorial board responsible for the same was appointed.

Offices and membership: Sr. Pascaline Coff was re-elected Executive Secretary for another three years; Fr. Theophane Boyd, O.C.S.O. of Spencer Abbey was unanimously re-elected to membership on the Board. Three additional members were invited to an advisory capacity: Fr. Raimundo Panikkar, Dr. Robert Muller (who just completed a 3-year term on the Board), and Professor Ewert Cousins.

The main preoccupation of the members was the five-day East-West Symposium to be held immediately after the meeting, November 19-23 at the Mt. Marie Conference Center at Holyoke. One of the main respondents to Fr. Panikkar was a young Lutheran Minister from Rostock University, East Germany who was sponsored by the N.A.B.E.W.D. with lectureships in various spiritual centers in the U.S.A. for six weeks prior to the Symposium. Professor Michael von Brück's contribution was praised by many at the Symposium and in the centers he visited including Holy Trinity Abbey, Huntsville, Utah. Another monastic symposium on dialog to be held in 1982 or 1983 is under consideration by the Board.

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"WHEN PURE DIALOG TAKES OVER, WE CEASE BEING JUST HINDUS AND CHRISTIANS DEFENDING RESPECTIVE POSITIONS, TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE OTHER BY DEEPENING OUR SELF-KNOWLEDGE: SLOWLY WE BEGIN TO UNEARTH OUR COMMON HUMANITY. WE BEGIN TO SEE OURSELVES AS LIVING, LOVING HUMAN BEINGS SEEKING TOGETHER THE DEEPER AND BETTER MYSTERY OF REALITY."

R. Panikkar

## EAST-WEST NEWS:

Vanves, France - D.I.M. Meets. D.I.M. (Intermonastic Dialog) Commission met December 4-5, 1980 in Vanves, France at the A.I.M. International Secretariate. Secretary General, Abbot Robert de Floris led the group in a study of two recent texts made by Abbot Primate Victor Dammertz at Kandy and Monsignor Pietro Rossano at the Congress of Abbots in Rome, both on East-West monastic dialog. A third text by the Head of the Roman Secretariate for Interreligious Relations, Archbishop Jean Jadot to the Synod of Bishops in Rome, was read, stressing the importance of the role of monks in this dialog, particularly in the domain of Buddhism and Hinduism. "The Secretariate follows with attention all that takes place between Christian and non-Christian monks in this domain," the Archbishop said. A special study of the problem of sensibilization of monasteries made note of the great contribution already being made by the monks of Praglia and Camaldolese.

Reflecting on the Dalai Lama's recent visit to Rome and his stay at Sant'Anselmo's, the similarities of Tibetan and Christian monasticism were noted in areas of liturgy, asceticism, the mystical and the sense of purification - on the one hand the doctrine of multiple reincarnations in order to free souls from this earthly cycle, and on the other hand, the Church speaks of purgatory as a means of attaining a state of purity in order to see God.

Abbot Simon Tonini, Coordinator of the European D.I.M. and official spokesman for A.I.M. interrelations with the Sacred Congregation for Religious, the Secretariate on Missions and the Secretariate for Interreligious Relations, offered to compose with Dom Jean Leclercq and Fr. Matus a brochure on texts containing the thought of the Church on dialog since Vatican II. These pontifical texts with a brief commentary are aimed at helping monastics throughout the world to get a better knowledge of the problems and relieve certain doubts with regard to the non-Christian world. Also planned is an Interreligious Bibliography on dialog being prepared by Fr. DeGive to aid Christian monks to orient themselves in the choice of texts to enlighten them.

Finally two experts - one on Chinese Buddhism and the other from Sri Lanka - were called in to moderate a round table discussion for the members of this European commission for Intermonastic Dialog.

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Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka - Following the 3rd PanAsian Monastic Conference in Kandy, August 24, 1980, Sr. Donald Corcoran, O.S.B. and Fr. Jean Leclercq made a short pilgrimage by car to the Buddhist temple ruins and carved stone Buddhas at Polonnaruwa in northern Sri Lanka. The large stone Buddhas (second century A.D.) were also visited by Thomas Merton on his Asian journey and seemed to evoke a real moment of grace for him: "... (in Polonnaruwa) my Asian pilgrimage has come clear and purified itself."

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Coupvray, France: Cité de Communantes - Jews, Christians and Muslims are uniting to found a new "Jerusalem: of Peace at Coupvray, France. "Our belief is that in the heart of man, there is a common desire for the Absolute, or for God ... Believing this, we, as Jews, Christians and Muslims have decided to come together to create a 'city of communities'...that through our life together, we may all learn true respect for one another, for the unique contribution of each." The new city is located 35 kilometres east of Paris on 85 acres of woodlands, orchards and gardens. Each community has its own study center, workshop and guest accommodation and is responsible for its own expenses and means of income. However, all three groups work together toward providing facilities for symposia and other forms of meetings and communication which could be used by intellectual and cultural organizations regardless of religious beliefs (Contributions are needed to help transform the project into a living experience: Cité de Communantes, 16 rue Maître-Albert, 75005 Paris, France. French Banker: BIMP account #400 430E)

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Indonesia - By far the largest religion in Indonesia is that of Islam. Indonesia is often called the largest Islamic country in the world, with approximately 120 million people, or 90% of the population, acknowledging themselves to be Muslims. Within the Islamic community of Indonesia today four strains or approaches to Islam can be detected: cultural Islam, traditionalist, reformists and independents.

Formal government-sponsored dialogs between representatives of various religions were held in all parts of Indonesia between the years 1968-1975. However, these failed to interest a large portion of the various religious communities with any lasting effects on relationships between believers of different faiths. In November 1979 a new round of interreligious dialogs was sponsored by the government. Catholic leaders have encouraged Catholics to maintain a position of openness towards invitations and initiatives on the part of the Muslim majority in Indonesia.

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West Africa - The Order of Holy Cross, an Anglican monastic order for men has ten houses and works, among which is the Holy Cross Monastery and Novitiate in Bolahun, Liberia, West Africa. The monks began work in Liberia in 1922 and opened their novitiate there in 1976. It is staffed by 14 members, four of who are North Americans and the rest Africans. The monks are engaged in primary and secondary evangelism, serving there over ten mission stations and parish churches, also leper work. Prior Dominic Wilson of Chicago reports that a new project is underway toward a foundation in Mampong, Ghana, in the Ashanti region to be staffed by three African junior professed under the direction of one American life professed monk.

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Northern New Mexico - a \$5 million Islamic community complete with a mosque and minarets is being built in northern New Mexico--primarily with Saudi Arabian money to show that Islam can fit in with modern America and help spread the faith. Groundbreaking for the 1,000 acre project took place in early July of 1980 on a high plateau overlooking the Abiquiu village, some 60 miles north of Santa Fe. The complex will include a seven dome mosque, a 120 student school, the first traditional Moslem boarding school in the U.S.A., with homes and workshops for about 300 farmers, craftsmen and families. The community will be a mix of American Moslems and Moslems from the rest of the world, and is intended as a launching pad for new Islamic expansion efforts across the country.

The land is bordered by the Carson National Forest on the West and on the north by high cliffs just beyond a large plateau where most of the building complex is planned. The tract was purchased last March for \$1,372,015.75 by a newly-formed, non-profit corporation based in Santa Fe called Dar-al-Islam, which means "Place of Surrender." The Corporation was formed in January of 1980 to facilitate the spread of Islam in North America. Financing of the project has moved swiftly, mainly because many oil-rich Saudis have viewed it as an appropriate way to comply with an Islamic rule about annual contributions to charity. "It is a purification of their incomes." The money is mostly petrodollars. Some of the funds have also come from Egypt and the U.S.A.

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"A DIALOG OF LIFE, LIVING TOGETHER IN PEACE, IS THE MOST ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF DIALOG."

Bira II

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS:

Dalai Lama to visit University of Wisconsin - July 1981

Plans are underway for a two-week cultural exchange with the Dalai Lama and his monks at the University of Wisconsin campus in Madison in July 1981. For further details, contact: Geshe Sopa, 5127 Lake Mendota Dr., Madison, WI 53705 (608-233-8015)

East-West Seminar - Bangalore - July 1981

Asirvanam Benedictine Monastery on the outskirts of Bangalore, India will hold its 4th annual Seminar in July 1981. Fr. Cletus Matthews, coordinator, indicates that topics will include Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Jainism and others. Expertise is being sought at present to finalize plans. For further details, see May '81 Bulletin #11, N.A.B.E.W.D.

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"WE ALL LIVE UNDER THE SAME SKY, BUT WE DO NOT ALL HAVE THE SAME HORIZON."

K. Adenauer

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## TEXTS:

The Present Challenge: A Radical Change of Consciousness - Bede Griffiths, O.S.B.

The present state of the world is not due to some defect in the use of science and technology, which can be corrected. Western science and technology are based on a false philosophy which has undermined the whole of Western civilization. It is based on the belief, of which Descartes was the spokesman in the 17th century, that there is a material world, extended in space and time, independent of human consciousness, and that the human mind can examine this world objectively and so arrive at a knowledge of 'reality' which will give him control over the world. This view has now been proved false by science itself, but the old-fashioned view of science and reality still dominates the ordinary man in the West. ... The only hope lies in a deliberate break with the whole system and an attempt to reconstruct science and technology on a new basis. This will only come when the Western world has undergone a radical change of consciousness and has recovered the wisdom of the ancient world, the world not only of Christian Europe but of India and China and Islam. Unfortunately India and China and the Arab world are now exposed to the full force of Western science and technology with all its devastating effects. The new world must therefore be the creation of East and West together seeking to recover the wisdom which has been lost and to advance into a new age now beginning." (Foreward to The Golden String - see page 12 for information.)

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Dialog between Christian and non-Christian Monks: Opportunities and Difficulties

Monsignor Pietro Rossano, Secretariate for Interreligious Relations (excerpts)

The historical change which has occurred in society and in the Church's perspectives (since Vatican II) creates a new situation, wherein monks also are called upon by the Council to rethink their relationships with other peoples and particularly with their brothers and sisters of the great non-Christian spiritual traditions. Similarly, the latter too are forced by the current of history to question themselves about their own identity and the meaning of their existence within their own society.

The Apostolic Letter which the Pope (John Paul II) sent out for the XVth Centenary of St. Benedict's birth begins with these words: "In all religions there are those who, in their endeavor to appease in one way or another the cravings of the human heart, are drawn towards the Absolute and the Eternal." In fact, the attraction exercised by the Absolute and the Eternal, and the resulting detachment from transitory features of life is a constant element of universal monasticism. ... According to Ch. Dumont: "What seems to be the only constant characteristic of all forms of monasticism - Christian or not - is the conviction that the quest for the Absolute demands from man his detachment from the transitory elements of life. The monastic intuition presupposes an interior conviction of the reality of the transcendent, and of the need to discover and to follow a discipline or a method, in order to pass from frustration to completeness, as the meaning of existence is to be found above it, in this transcendence." (Bulletin de Spiritualité monastique, X, 1977, 148).

There are some invariable human qualities, which are in the last analysis, rooted in Wisdom and in the divine creative Word. It is thanks to such common elements that one can speak of the "monastic archetype" existing in the human race and it is both a duty and a pleasure to discover and to analyse this phenomenon with the help of modern scientific methodology: the search for the Absolute and the Permanent; detachment from the transitory and ephemeral; asceticism and freedom of the spirit; rules of living and discipline; personal poverty and spiritual wealth; humility and a sense of one's limitations; peace and silence; gentleness and benevolence; purity and sobriety.

This archetype, which has flourished in diverse but similar forms among all peoples has been subject throughout history to the influences of ideologies and of founders who have adapted it to the various historic, geographical and cultural situations in which their lives were passed. Hence, the historian may say that, whereas the effects of Bodhidharma's work were decisive in the Far East, in the West the same was true for the work of St. Antony, St. Pachomius, St. Basil and finally St. Benedict. It was thanks to the work of these great masters that Christianity's own unmistakable features were imposed upon the "human" monastic archetype in the West. Whereas in the Orient, the Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist Traditions which Bodhidharma represented, impel the spiritual seeker towards the self-realization of his "profound nature" and the identification of the self with Nature, leading to a "motionless repose of the spirit in its true form" (Yogasutra, IV, 34), there is, in Christianity, a bi-polarisation -- yet without confusion -- of individual and community, solitude and sharing, cell and choir, individual prayer and eucharistic celebration. All of these states of being gravitate around the ruling presence of Jesus Christ, "Lord of the depths of my spirit."

I now come to the matter of meeting and dialog which appear to us to be imperative in this our own period of history. Dialog is not a confrontation between opposing ideologies, but an encounter between two of the "living universes" which are human beings. The men are often better than their ideas, richer and more unpredictable than the formulas they use. Inter-monastic dialog is possible only when the Christian monk is truly living his own identity; and when he expresses his fundamental choice in a concrete and coherent manner, he provokes surprise, wonder and expectancy in his interlocutor. For a monk, the cutting edge of dialog is the total living out of his own vocation ... I have no hesitation in stating that all dialog depends on the coherence, the style and the beauty of living out one's own Christian and Benedictine identity.

Yet, for the spark of dialog to burst into flame, this crystal-clear identity of Jesus Christ's kalos stratiotes ("good soldier," II Tim. 2:3) should go hand in hand with an attitude of openness, humility and attention to the other person. The monk has to be aware that "God is greater than our heart" (I Jn 3:20); that his Wisdom rejoices to dwell among the sons of men (Prov. 8:31); that "He made from one single stock every nation of men to live on the whole face of the earth...that they should seek God" (Acts 17:26-27); that "the seeds of contemplative life were sown here and there in ancient civilizations before the preaching of the Gospel" (A.G. 18); and that it is a law of life that "one grows through the help of others" (Kierkegaard).

The grace of being inspired by Christ does not bestow upon us a monopoly of the Spirit of God. While we are sure of the Truth, we have no exclusive control over it, and even though the path traced out for us by Christ in the Gospel is perfectly illuminated, he himself wants all men to go in search of his mystery. Therefore, it is the Christian monk's duty to be understanding about the efforts made, in the past and still today, by this world's spiritual seekers to find God, whatever the face they may give to him.

The Christian monk must make an inventory of his own soul, learning to recognize the limitations of his own subjectivity and his own culture, and especially of the manner in which he personifies and expresses the sequela Christi. The fact of his eschatological witness does not exempt him from feeling that he is a pilgrim in the world along with so many other brothers, "with whom we ought to meet together...like pilgrims journeying

forth to look for God, not in human edifices but in men's hearts." (Paul VI Discourse made to non-Christian monastics in India, Oss. Rom., Dec. 4, 1964). By this attitude of humility and openness, the Christian monk will allow the other person to look at him and assess him, and this, through the path he had already trodden towards the purifying of his heart and the assumption of the divine nature, can help him to bring out unsuspected aspects of his own tradition, to be enriched and to "discover the Orient within himself."

The vital points in the problem of acculturation are, on the one hand, to sacrifice no part of one's identity and on the other, not to barricade oneself in any ivory tower. Acculturation is a living process, continuous and without haste, achieved through a gracious and open attitude, "that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph" (II Thess. 3:1). Benedictine traditions cannot be rejected, but there is no doubt that they can be extended, expanded and adapted to the genius and the culture of different peoples.

Still more important is the question of adapting oriental methods in order to come into contact with the inner self, and the using of these techniques to attain a spiritual experience. Here I am referring particularly to Yoga, Zen and Transcendental Meditation. Everyone knows or should know, that even the methods and forms of asceticism and of Christian mysticism themselves did not just fall straight from heaven. When one studies the forms of Christian prayer since New Testament times, they may be seen to be modeled upon those among which they originated: Judaism, Hellenism and Rome itself. Each culture gave expression to its mode of prayer and its own spiritual itinerary. The Church adopted them after purifying and raising them to the Christian level.

I have nothing in common with those who assert that all methods from Asia are an invention of the devil, which should be rejected because bound up with a conception of the world not to be shared by Christians. It is true that today such methods are being commercialized, sad to say! All the same, we have, I think, to acknowledge that these methods have a certain independence in their own right, vis-a-vis the ideological context in which they have been developed; otherwise we would have to deny man any ability for approaching God "by the footsteps of the heart" (St. Thomas). What has been discovered by the explorers of the spirit and the seekers after God may be regarded as the riches of a human heritage.

Everything that can serve for edification, anything that can help one to make contact with another's inmost experiences or his starting point, so as to be able mentally to travel his road in the light of Christ - all of this may lend to a fruitful dialog that monks alone are suited to undertake with their brothers, non-Christian spiritual seekers. In so doing they will render a great service to the Church and to the world. (Congress of Abbots, Rome, September, 1980)

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The Breath of God: To the Zen Center of Soan, Japan - Odette Baumer-Despeigne, Switzerland (translated by Sr. Sarah Schwartzberg, O.S.B.) (excerpts)

Soan, located in the mountainous region northwest of Tokyo and near Takamori, is a small community directed by a Japanese Dominican, Shigeto Oshida. The chief characteristic of this community is its effort to live an integral Christianity in a purely Japanese lifestyle. Its members combine an intensely active life with a no less intense contemplative life, where all strive simply to 'live', in the strong sense of the word, beyond the distinction between active and contemplative life. The permanent core is formed by a dozen persons, all Japanese, without distinction of sex, age, or civil status. Long-term guests become one with this core.

The community is open to all who are welcomed equally: Christians of various denominations, members of other religions, those who are searching spiritually or those seeking help with personal problems. The same respect and deference for the 'mystery of the divine presence that dwells in each human heart; is shown to all.

Properly speaking, there is neither a 'rule' nor rules! The community life is based solely on four principles:

- 1) Openness to all, which creates a climate wherein each tries to be genuine, without a mask, simply being oneself.
- 2) Members renounce all personal property and the community, as much as possible, possesses nothing outside of what is absolutely necessary for daily life and what is required to face difficulties, sickness, accidents, etc. The living standard is that of most modest villagers: a low table, a cushion for sitting on the ground and a shelf. For sleeping, one unrolls a thin mattress, sheets and covers on the ground of the hermitage.
- 3) "Whoever fails to rise at 5:30 a.m, at the sound of the bell is not part of Soan." It is left to each one's sense of responsibility to put his or her services at the disposal of the community, to work to the best of one's ability according to the needs of the moment.
- 4) The community does not make long-term plans; they live in the present, leaving it to God to determine the next day. "It is in the present that one must face life."

Once a month a sesshin takes place, a 3-day retreat of silence and of long hours dedicated to zazen ("za" in Japanese means sitting and "zen", meditation.) "Zazen practice is to let yourself be seduced by the Breath of God, by the Holy Spirit. If you do not undergo this seduction, pray that it will be granted to you, it is a gift; prayer has no other end than to beg the Lord to make himself irresistible."

Fr. Oshida describes Soan as "...Life itself, like a breath that deepens each day, seeking to approach its divine source...Life that flows like a river always descending without any part ever stopping, never stopping anything for oneself." To grasp the subtlety of such phrases, one must understand the fundamental traits of traditional Japanese culture. On one hand, a great love of nature and a need to live in communion with it stems from the most ancient religion: Shintoism. On the other hand, there is the "Zen spirit," arising from the second ancestral religion, Buddhism. Fr. Oshida defines Zen in this way: "It is a state -- or rather a road towards a state -- in which all that exists is perceived from the viewpoint of the Beyond, in the divine light. Zen strives to deepen interior silence; it is to train oneself to die to oneself in the Word of God, to let oneself be moved by the breath of God." The Zen spirit insists on the impermanent character of all things here below and on the necessity of searching beyond concepts for the solution to the enigma of the origin of our existence. It is upon such elements that Christianity grafted itself.

Buddhist by birth, Fr. Oshida practiced Zen until the day, when, meeting a genuine Christian, he experienced the presence of Christ in this man. Following this spiritual shock, he became a Christian and entered the Dominicans. He has said, "I have never tried to integrate Zen in my Christianity. Zen is a constituent part of my soul and my body since my birth. If there has been integration in me, it is Christ himself who did it, without warning me."

Returning from the Dominican novitiate in Canada, Fr. Oshida suffered a recurrence of tuberculosis which carried him to the doors of death several times: "Sickness has been my guru, my spiritual master; it is then that I have begun to become supple in the hands of God." This was the moment above all that proved the need "to search out my identity as a man born in a country having a well-defined history, civilization and tradition."

It was in the early 60's that Fr. Oshida began to build the foundation of the Center of Soan. He was then staying at the hospital of Fujimi. Very soon companions in suffering in the hospital joined with him in searching for a new life style. In 1963, with the help of some friends, he bought the land of Soan and built there a hermitage and a chapel. Time and again people of every background came to join him, asking to live there permanently. The center at Soan was definitely created.

One cannot but give thanks to the "Breath of God" who inspired it, for Soan brings unsuspected riches to whoever arrives there without preconceived ideas.

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