SPIRITUAL ESSAY

Christian Asceticism and Asia

Ascetical practice

FROM THE EARLIEST DAYS Christians were aware that mystical prayer and ascetical practice go hand in hand. St Paul was fascinated by the athletes who ran in the Isthmian games. 'Athletes exercise control in all things', he writes. 'They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one' (1 Cor 9:25). And he urged the Corinthian Christians to train themselves like the athletes in order to win the prize offered by Christ Jesus. Indeed, Paul saw himself as a runner who never looked back: 'I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus' (Phil 3:14). He had to discipline himself, he tells us, lest having preached to others he himself would be disqualified. Yet this discipline had one more powerful effect: it opened his heart to mystical grace, so that he could boast of a man who was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat.

Following in the footsteps of Paul and learning liberally from the surrounding culture, the Desert Fathers trained their disciples in the art of asceticism. They must have known that while mystical experience can strike like a bolt from the blue as it struck Paul on the road to Damascus, it is ordinarily the reward of persevering effort. And so they taught their disciples how to eat and how to fast, how to sit, how to breathe and, above all, how to read the scriptures and to pray. This teaching passed into Eastern monasticism where the monks developed hesychastic ways of prayer that are vibrantly alive today at Mount Athos and throughout the Orthodox world. It also passed into the rule of St Benedict and the Western religious orders where it was developed and refined and moulded into a whole body of doctrine that trained men and women to lead a life of prayer in accordance with the evangelical counsels.

St Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) was a great master of asceticism.

> 'For just as taking a walk, journeying on foot and running are bodily exercises,' he writes, 'so we call spiritual exercises every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul.'[1]

Here spiritual exercises or ascetical practices are a preparation for mysticism, for the direct action of God on the soul. And Ignatius wrote about ways of prayer, posture in prayer, breathing in prayer. He stressed examination of conscience, and he elaborated detailed rules for the discernment of spirits. He

gave instructions about food and sleep, about custody of the senses and penitential practices. He wrote rules of modesty. And his teaching dominated Catholic spirituality everywhere until the Second Vatican Council.

In the seventeenth century the accumulated wisdom of centuries was gathered and systematized in a new discipline called ascetical theology.[2] In conjunction with mystical theology, this new discipline, pastoral in nature, was taught in Catholic seminaries throughout the world. It was concerned principally with practice, with spiritual exercises, with ways of training mind and body. Joseph de Guibert tells us that while mystical theology is concerned with gift, ascetical theology is concerned with human effort. He then goes on to define the terms more strictly:

> Strictly: we may term mystical the interior life of those souls who are habitually led by the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, who are made so sensitive and so docile to these inspirations that their whole interior life is lived under this leading by grace. On the other hand, we can find an ascetical state in which personal effort and the methodical performances of spiritual exercises are more evident, while the continual flow of grace into the soul is less apparent and less perceived experientially.[3]

In this way, ascetical and mystical theology went hand in hand, guiding men and women in the way of prayer.

Crisis

In the twentieth century western culture broke down. Through a series of revolutions, traditional religion seemed to collapse. Old customs disappeared. Traditional values were called in question. Confusion reigned.

And in this turmoil it is hardly surprising if traditional ascetical practices were challenged, criticized and put to the test. The old religious training, it was now said, did not suit the new people. Contaminated by Stoicism, Neoplatonism, rationalism and Jansenism, it had strayed far from the authentic spirit of the gospel. Freud and Jung and the rest analysed the human psyche, it became clear to some psychologists that much of the traditional training in noviceships and seminaries was unhealthy, dehumanizing and destructive. There was a call for new wine in new wineskins. But what were the areas that caused dissatisfaction?

First of all, there was dissatisfaction with the traditional ways of praying. Here the Jesuits came under fire for teaching a dull, methodical, discursive prayer which they imposed on the whole Church. No less a person than Aldous Huxley accused the Jesuits of destroying western mysticism with their plodding emphasis on reasoning and thinking. Where was the vibrant mysticism of medieval Europe? What had happened to Julian of Norwich and Meister Eckhart? Where was *The cloud of unknowing*?

Then there was the traditional attitude towards the human body and towards sexuality. It all seemed so negative, and the exaggerated distinction between

mind and body, sense and spirit, led to an unhealthy dualism. People learning about the immense potentialities of the human body and the high value of sexuality were loathe to accept talk about subduing the flesh and conquering the passions. The old self-flagellation no longer made sense. What people wanted (and what they felt was more authentically Christian) was a conversion to the body and to the material world.

Again, in the twentieth century the laity were looking for prayer, even mystical prayer. But the ascetical and mystical literature, monastic in nature, was written by celibates for celibates. It had little esteem for marriage and at times it was offensive to women.

Again, the old doctrine ignored the social problems that plague contemporary society. Hunger, oppression, violation of human rights, racial discrimination, unemployment – these problems, which did not exist for the old ascetical and mystical theologians, could not be overlooked in the twentieth century.

All in all, it was clear that Christianity needed a new ascetical theology.

The new search

At this time enterprising people, inspired by the Spirit, began to look for new ways within the western tradition. A revival of biblical studies helped many to pray by savouring and relishing the word of God. Liturgical renewal led others to a deeper appreciation of the eucharistic sacrifice and devotion to Christ in our midst. Charismatic renewal led others to baptism in the Spirit and prayer in tongues. Research in spirituality revealed hitherto unnoticed treasures of mysticism in the Ignatian tradition.

And at this time also, imaginative people turned their eyes to an Asia that seemed to offer everything the West lacked. Asia seemed to offer not only treasures of wisdom and mysticism but also simple and practical ways of meditation. Its ascetical practice was holistic, rejecting all body–soul dualism. It promised not only health of mind and body but also longevity and the development of human potential. It led to liberation and enlightenment. To a generation floundering in religious and cultural confusion, all this was very appealing. The key question was: *Is it possible to unite Asian ascetical practice with Christian faith?*

Already in the 1950s an interesting and significant book called *Christian yoga* came from the pen of a Belgian Benedictine monk.[4] J. M. Déchanet was a child of his times, dissatisfied with the traditional ascetical training; but he was also a loyal son of the pre-Vatican Catholic Church who felt obliged to disassociate himself from the Hindu religion. Whereas yoga at its deepest level is a way to wisdom, liberation and union with God, Déchanet cut it from its Hindu roots and used the *asanas* as a technique for attaining deep, inner silence. He writes:

> As for the practices of yoga, we shall take them simply for what they are, neither religion nor mysticism, but a discipline, a skill . . . For us yoga shall be a *technique* that allows man – when this is fitting – to establish

> himself in silence; not merely away from noise, but effectively in the silence of the senses, desires and worries, accepting above all to remain silent so that the Holy Spirit of God may now and then make its voice heard and the spirit of man be listening.[5]

When this was written, the Catholic Church had not yet made its deep commitment to dialogue with other religions. Consequently Déchanet could see yoga as no more than a technique that prepared for Christian prayer. Yet his book was prophetic. It prepared the way for the dialogue that was to come.

Ascetical training in East Asia

Just as in the West an ascetical tradition was built up through many centuries, so also in the East, by a similar process, an ascetical tradition slowly came to birth, manifesting itself in the entire culture of China and Japan. This ascetical training, known as *gyo*, is at the very heart of the tea ceremony, calligraphy, judo, fencing, archery and the other so-called 'ways'.[6] In its religious form where it is called *shugyo*, it appears in Zen and other forms of Buddhist meditation where the Master seeks to lead the disciple to that wisdom in emptiness that forms the very basis of East Asian culture.

This ascetical training can be summed up in the triple formula:
training of the body,
training of the breathing,
training of the mind.
Let us look at these three points.[7]

The attitude towards the human body in East Asia is greatly influenced by Chinese medicine which speaks of *meridians* or channels through which energy flows, giving life to the whole person. This energy is known as *chi* in Chinese and *ki* in Japanese. The source of this energy is the belly (in Japanese *hara*) which is called 'the sea of energy'; and of particular importance is the *tanden*, a point located a few centimetres below the navel. This is the source of creativity and the principal locus of religious experience. One is encouraged to be aware of it existentially not only in the time of meditation but in all the affairs of life. In the martial arts, awareness of the *tanden* is vital.

A little known Zen Master, Master Torajiro Okada, writes powerfully that *tanden* is the shrine of the divine: it is here that sacred energy dwells. He divides people into three classes. The first class value the head: they amass vast quantities of knowledge, grow big heads – and topple over like a pyramid standing upside down. The second class throw out the chest. Such persons seem courageous and strong but inwardly they are weak. Then he goes on:

> But those who regard the belly as the most important part and so have built the stronghold where the Divine can grow – these are the people of the highest rank. They develop their minds as well as their bodies in the right way. Strength flows out from them and produces a spiritual condition of ease and equanimity. They do what seems good to them without violating any law.[8]

The Master goes on to say that the sorrows of humanity are caused by loss of balance, and the way to balance – to a healthy body and an upright heart – is to sit correctly.

Correct posture, then, in which one is aware of the *tanden* and remains centred in the *tanden*, is of primary importance. This can be the lotus posture or the Japanese *seiza* in which one sits back on one's heels – or one can sit on a chair with back straight and eyes slightly open. And then, whether standing or sitting or walking or sleeping, one remains centred in the *hara*. Now one has great stability and inner strength. The important change is interior, as Master Okada stresses when he says: 'Even if the body is changed in *seiza*, the deepest inner state does not change so easily'.[9]

It is interesting to recall that Zen Master Dogen, founder of the Soto sect, said that correct sitting is already enlightenment.

Next comes training of the breathing. Here again abdominal breathing is the key. One breathes from the *tanden*, slowly and rhythmically. And just as the very sitting is a religious experience, so also is the breathing. Energy now flows through the body.

It should be noted that we are here speaking not just of the breath and energy in my little body but of the breath and energy of the cosmos. Zen Masters, with characteristic bluntness, say that the energy must flow down through the anus, through the cushion to the very centre of the earth, and then upwards through the top of the head to the outermost regions of the universe.

Tanden breathing, then, makes one balanced and brings one into harmony with the whole universe. Master Okada again gives simple and practical advice: 'Sit quite still, breathe gently giving out long breaths, the strength in the lower belly'.[10]

When *tanden* breathing becomes habitual, one acquires a wonderful physical and spiritual stability.

The third point is training of the mind. The human mind is wild and restless, wandering here and there, going anxiously into the future or nostalgically into the past. The great art is to bring the mind to rest on a single point. This is one-pointedness – in Japanese *seishin toitsu*. It is done through the breathing and the sitting. Though the mind is now in the present moment, it does not rest in one part of the body but flows through the whole body in a state that is known as *no-mind* (in Japanese *mushin*) or *no-self* (in Japanese *muga*).

Distractions come. But one does not fight them. One lets them come and lets them go. 'Let go; let flow' is the advice one hears. Master Okada's advice is simple and clear: 'Do not try to free yourself from all thoughts. Simply be aware and keep your strength in your belly'.[11] In this way thoughts flow in and out, while one remains centred at a deeper level.

For the sake of clarity the process has been divided into three; but in fact it is all one holistic action.

Faith and salvation

While training of the body, the breathing and the mind is important in the martial arts and all the 'ways', when one comes to religious meditation another

element of the greatest importance enters in: namely, faith. For in Buddhism, ascetical practice is wedded to a great faith in the threefold treasure – the Buddha, the *dharma* and the *sangha*. One who practises meditation in the temple begins with the proclamation:

I put my faith in the Buddha,
I put my faith in the *dharma*,
I put my faith in the *sangha*.

This act of faith is a total commitment and it echoes through the whole process of meditation that follows. Buddhist meditation is penetrated through and through with silent faith. Moreover one must be ready to die for that faith. In fact one passes through the great doubt and the great death, abandoning the security that comes from clinging to anything. One clings to nothing – to nothing whatever – and one breaks through to enlightenment.

Faith in the *dharma* means faith in the Buddhist teaching, particularly as it is enshrined in the Lotus Sutra, the Heart Sutra and the Kegon Sutra. These *sutras* are constantly chanted by monks; and then, when one enters the silent meditation, abandoning words and letters, the naked faith of pure commitment carries on. Silent, wordless and thought-less meditation is nothing other than an act of pure faith.

So important is this faith that the saintly founder of the Pure Land sect held that faith alone was necessary – faith was the only *shugyo* or ascetical practice. Shinran (1173–1262) abandoned all ascetical practices, proclaiming that it was enough to call on the name of Amida. Even the greatest sinner, if he or she recites the name with faith, will be reborn in the Pure Land.[12]

For it must be remembered that Buddhism is a religion of salvation. Through reliance on one's deepest self or on the mercy of Another, one is liberated from illusion, freed from the cycle of birth and death, and reborn as a Buddha. The Zen monk, vowing to save not only himself but all sentient beings, chants with great determination:

Living beings are innumerable – I vow to save them all.
Illusive desires and lusts are inexhaustible – I vow to extinguish them all.
Gates to the Truth are numberless – I vow to learn and master them all.
The way of enlightenment is peerless – I vow to realize it.

These vows are a great act of selfless compassion. One sacrifices everything in order to bring to salvation the whole universe. One walks the way of the Buddha.

Asia and the West

At the end of the nineteenth century large numbers of religious seekers in Europe and America looked nostalgically towards the mystic East. At the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 the youthful and charming Vivekananda (1863–1902), disciple of the great mystic Ramakrishna, held spellbound hundreds of sophisticated western intellectuals with his mellifluous words of Asian wisdom; and in the ensuing years Hinduism gave birth to people of genius like the mystic Ramana Maharishi, the poet Rabindranath

Tagore and the religious activist Mahatma Gandhi. All this could not fail to impress the religious world of the West.

At Chicago Zen Buddhism was also represented by the Rinzai monk Shaku Soen (1858–1919).[13] Less impressive than Vivekananda and less fluent in English, he nevertheless introduced to the West a young Japanese disciple who was to become one of the most brilliant religious writers of the twentieth century. Dr D. T. Suzuki, sage and scholar, wrote prolifically; and 'Suzuki Zen' swept through the western world. Soon it became fashionable to talk about the sound of one hand clapping and to ask if a dog possessed the Buddha nature. Suzuki's melodramatic descriptions of the earthshaking experience of *satori* appealed to great writers like the eclectic Aldous Huxley and the adventurous Alan Watts who were looking for extraordinary experiences, caring little whether they came from Zen or mescalin or ecstatic love.

In the sixties thousands of young hippies flocked to India in search of mystical experience, while Indian gurus and Zen masters made their way to California which soon became the home of beat Zen and all kinds of esoteric experience. This movement of Asian religious experience still lives in the West in the Transcendental Meditation of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and in the influential New Age.

Though eastern religions were taught in the universities and great scholars like Carl Jung and Mircea Eliade studied the Asian classics, most orthodox Christians distanced themselves from this movement. It did, however, fire the fertile imagination of a very creative Trappist monk. Thomas Merton (1915–68) wrote enthusiastically about mystics and Zen masters and entered into dialogue with the great Suzuki. He died symbolically, if tragically, at a conference on interreligious dialogue in Bangkok.

Meanwhile, another group of Christians, orthodox Christians, was quietly carrying on a profound and significant dialogue with the ascetical and mystical traditions of Asia. Missionaries deemed it a sacred duty to listen to the Spirit working in Asian culture; and eventually their time came to speak to the religious seekers in the West.

Mission and inculturation

In the sixteenth century when the missionaries sailed from Lisbon to India, South East Asia and Japan, one of their first priorities was inculturation. That is to say, they wanted to unite Christian faith with Asian culture in a blessed and fruitful marriage. The far-sighted Italian, Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606) had a vision of a thoroughly Asian Christianity with religious leaders born and bred in Asia. In China, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) first adopted the garb of a Buddhist monk and then that of a scholar, writing more than twenty volumes in Chinese on mathematics, apologetics, literature and astronomy. In India, Robert de Nobili (1577–1656), impressed by the religiosity of the people, lived as a *sannyasi* or holy man. He wore saffron robes, walked in wooden clogs, adopted the vegetarian diet and marked his brow with a rectangular shape of paste to signify that he was a religious teacher. He lived the ascetical life of a Brahman to lead people to the gospel.

Seventeenth-century theology, it is true, was not prepared for esoteric dialogue with the so-called pagan religions, and de Nobili and Ricci never found favour with the establishment. Nevertheless their example of inculturation lived on in Christian *sannyasis* and ascetics who followed the poor Christ in ashrams and centres of prayer throughout Asia. And as the era of the foreign missionaries came to an end, Indian, Chinese and Japanese Christians undertook the work of inculturation, studying and assimilating the ascetical and mystical traditions of their ancestors.[14]

And the Second Vatican Council made its mark. Speaking about the necessity of bringing the rich treasures of Christian mysticism to the world, the Council – in words that recall the memory of Ricci and de Nobili – speaks about the ascetical and mystical traditions that were sometimes planted by God in ancient cultures prior to the preaching of the gospel. For missionaries the Council has this advice:

> Let them reflect attentively on how Christian religious life may be able to assimilate the ascetical and contemplative traditions whose seeds were sometimes already planted by God in ancient cultures prior to the preaching of the gospel.[15]

Can this be taken as an exhortation to assimilate the ascetical and mystical traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and the other Asian religions? Challenging words indeed.

Zen and Christian contemplation

Already before the Second Vatican Council a German Jesuit, following in the footsteps of Ricci and de Nobili, was practising Zen in Japan. Hugo Lassalle (1898–1990), who became Enomiya Makibi after taking Japanese citizenship and who is frequently known as Enomiya-Lassalle, started to practise Zen in 1943 with a view to understanding Japanese culture and adapting the Christian message to the Asian mentality. And so he practised Zen in temples throughout Japan before taking direction from a single master in Kamakura.

The approach of Lassalle was quite different from that of Déchanet who wrote *Christian yoga.* Whereas Déchanet took the externals of yoga and disassociated himself from the underlying wisdom, Lassalle was fascinated by the underlying wisdom – the *satori* or enlightenment – and made it his aim to attain to this enlightenment and to lead others in the same path. His first book, *Zen: the way to enlightenment* spoke about enlightenment for Christians and his subsequent books centred around the same theme.[16] He believed that *satori*, a beautiful jewel of Asian culture and religion, could be integrated into Christianity. Not only *could* it be integrated: it *must* be integrated. And so Lassalle wanted to introduce Zen practice into noviceships and seminaries as part of the religious training. But he could convince neither his colleagues nor church authorities that this was a good idea.

At first Lassalle was interested in building a Japanese Christianity and in finding a Japanese way of prayer – this was part of his vision of inculturation –

but as time went on, he felt that he had a mission to the universal Church. And so he gave retreats in Europe, introducing hundreds of Christians to Zen practice. It need hardly be said that he met with opposition. The Zen enlightenment, it was said, was monistic and irreconcilable with the gospel. To this Lassalle, always practical, replied that he and other Christians had had a glimpse of *satori* and that, far from distancing them from the gospel, the experience deepened their commitment to Jesus Christ. And so he continued with his work.

And yet, while no one doubted Lasalle's sincerity and deep piety, his approach raised, and continues to raise, theological and pastoral problems that cannot be sidestepped. Some of these questions come from Buddhists.

For the fact is that Zen, as practised in the temple, is primarily an act of faith. It has already been said that the true Zen person puts his or her faith in the Buddha, the *dharma* and the *sangha*, and that this faith lives on as pure faith or naked faith when one enters the silence of *zazen*. The Zen practitioner must be willing to pass through the great doubt and to die the great death; and only a deep faith commitment gives the strength to do this.

But Lassalle did not put his faith in the Buddha, the *dharma* and the *sangha*. All who lived with him and loved him (and this includes the presenter writer) know that he was a rather traditional Catholic priest who celebrated the eucharist with great devotion and lived the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. Besides, he constantly read the Christian mystics, and his own writings are full of quotations from the Rhineland mystics, Richard of St Victor, St John of the Cross and others in whom, he claimed, he found the *satori* he sought. About the Lotus Sutra, the Kegon Sutra, the Heart Sutra he writes almost nothing. As for salvation, he did not doubt that Jesus was his Saviour and the Saviour of the world. What, then, was the nature of his Zen? And what was the nature of his *satori*?

Lassalle was aware of this criticism. He replied by distinguishing between Zen and Zen Buddhism, a distinction which, he claimed, was recognized by his Buddhist teacher. Zen, he held, could be separated from Zen Buddhism (that is to say, from the Buddha, the *dharma* and the *sangha*) and integrated into a Christianity wherein one is devoted to Jesus, the gospel and the Church. Indeed, it could be integrated into Judaism, Islam or any religion. The long hours of sitting or *zazen* would remain; enlightenment would remain; but the commitment would be different. The greatest Zen Buddhists, he maintained, insisted that one must transcend Zen Buddhism in order to reach the fullness of enlightenment.

Yet this way of thinking was, and remains, controversial. For some Buddhists, Lassalle Zen is heretical Zen ('*gedo* Zen'); and they do not accept it. For some historians, Zen and Zen Buddhism are indissolubly linked – to tear Zen from its Buddhist roots, they claim, is to do violence both to Zen and to Buddhism.[17] This controversy is not likely to go away in the near future.

Some Christians prefer to *dialogue with* Zen and to *learn from* Zen. They sit with straight back, their strength in the lower abdomen. They practise *tanden*

breathing. They attain to one-pointedness. But they are sitting silently in the presence of God or with the Pauline 'I live now not I but Christ lives in me' or with the Jesus prayer or with a biblical *koan*. These Christians are friendly with Buddhists and many meditate with them; but they make no claim to a *satori* like that of Buddhists since they have their own enlightenment based on the gospel. And they do not call their practice Zen. They are in the tradition of Ricci and de Nobili as developed in the Second Vatican Council. This surely is the way of the future.

The new mysticism

It has already been said that the twentieth century witnessed a breakdown in the ascetical practice of the Christian West. And now it becomes clear that the apparent breakdown was a time of growth. It was a time when Christian people began to search for new ways of praying, for new ways of training their minds and bodies in the service of God. It was a time when Western Christians turned their eyes towards Asia and when Asian Christians became aware of the riches of their own ascetical and mystical tradition.

It all reminds us of those early days when the gospel moved into the Greek world and the gentiles, realizing that they could not live like Jews, created their own Christian culture and found their own ways of praying. St John and St Paul were great mystics; but when their teaching met Greek thought, something new was born. Gregory, Basil, Augustine, Dionysius and the rest created a new mysticism. It was not the same as the mysticism of Plotinus; neither was it the same as the mysticism of John and Paul. It was a third way – a *tertium quid.*

And now at the end of the twentieth century we see a similar creative process. Thanks to the endeavours and the prayers of modern prophets and pioneers, a new mysticism is coming to birth. It is not the mysticism of Eckhart, St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila; nor is it the mysticism of Chuang Tzu, Hakuin and Ramakrishna. It is a third way, a *tertium quid.* It is the gospel of Jesus Christ in a new world.

For the fact is that everywhere we see Christians of all ages and cultures sitting quietly in meditation. Some sit before a crucifix or an ikon in one-pointed meditation. Others sit and breathe as they look at the tabernacle. Others practise mindfulness, awareness of God in their surroundings. Others recite a mantra to the rhythm of their breath. Others, influenced by Zen or yoga or *vipassana*, open their minds and hearts to the presence of God in the universe. Others just talk to God. We hear of many new approaches to the living God.

Assuredly, these ways of prayer cannot immediately be called mystical. But they are gateways to mysticism. They all lead to silence and to the wordless state that St Teresa calls the prayer of quiet. Here one remains silent or one-pointed in the presence of God while the imagination (she called it 'the fool of the house') romps wildly here and there. This prayer of quiet is in her fourth mansion; and from it one may be called to the higher mansions. Indeed, one who perseveres will soon hear the voice of the Master: 'Friend, move up higher . . .' (Lk 14:10) and he or she will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at table.

Theological significance

And this popular movement towards mysticism is of the greatest theological significance. For it is precisely through the contemplation of the people of God that the Church grows in wisdom and comes to understand more and more deeply the word of God. This is the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council. Speaking about what theologians call development of doctrine, the Council says that there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. And then it goes on:

> This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (cf Lk 2:19, 51), through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of faith.[18]

Here, treating of the development of doctrine, the Council gives pride of place to the contemplation of the people. Only secondly come the bishops; and the learned theologians are not even mentioned.

Like Mary who pondered these things in her heart, the people of God throughout the world are sitting in meditation. They are coming to an intimate understanding of the scriptures and the events related therein. And this, the Council says, is the prime factor in the development of dogma and the Church's growth in wisdom. The first will be last and the last first.

William Johnston

NOTES

[1] St Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises*, introductory observations.

[2] The discipline called ascetical theology dates only from the seventeenth century. 'Ascetical' comes from the Greek '*askein*'. This word is not used in the Pauline letters but is found in one of Paul's speeches in the Acts of the Apostles (cf Acts 24:16). In the early Church the name 'ascetic' was given to the one who fought against the flesh and made public profession of celibacy. Then the word 'ascetic' came to be applied to the exercises of monastic life. The word was not used in ancient Latin except as a transcript of the Greek, nor was it used in the Middle Ages.

[3] Joseph de Guibert, *Theologia spiritualis ascetica et mystica* (Rome, 1946), 1.IV.9.

[4] J. M. Déchanet OSB, *Christian yoga* (French original 1956, English translation 1960).

[5] *Ibid.*, p 59.

[6] For the historical development of Zen from India through China to Japan, see Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: a history* vols I and II (London and New York, 1988). For the relationship between Buddhist meditation and the ways, see Trevor Leggett, *Zen and the ways* (London, 1978).

[7] K. Kadowaki, *Call to meditation* (unpublished manuscript).

[8] Quoted in K. Graf Durckheim, *Hara: the vital centre of man* (London, 1962), p 176.

[9] *Ibid.*, p 177.

[10] *Ibid.*, p 178.

[11] *Ibid.*, p 181.

[12] See the classic *Tannisho*, written around the year 1290 by Yuien, a disciple of Shinran.

[13] See Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism in the twentieth century* (New York, 1992), pp 3ff.
[14] See Vandana, *Gurus, ashrams and Christians* (London 1978); also Swami Abhishiktananda (originally Dom Henri Le Saux OSB), *Hindu-Christian meeting point* (Bombay, 1969).
[15] *Ad gentes* no 18.
[16] Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle, *Zen – the way to enlightenment* (London, 1973). See also *Zen meditation for Christians* (Illinois, 1974).
[17] Heinrich Dumoulin writes: 'One might say that without Zen, Buddhism would not be what it is today. Zen represents one of the purest manifestations of the religious essence of Buddhism; it is the fruit and flower of that larger tree' (*Zen Buddhism: a history* vol I, p xvii).
[18] *Dei verbum* no 8.