

Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Comparative Sainthood, Comparative Prayer

by Julian F. Pas, *Department of Religious Studies, University of Saskatchewan, Canada*

INTRODUCTION

To become a sage, a saint, an immortal, a transcendent being, seems to be the common aspiration in many religious traditions. There is something alluring in the ideal of reaching above the level of common humanity, but such an ideal is not only attractive, it is also frightening. Sainthood (or whatever other term is used) can only be reached at an extremely high price. Yet in each religious tradition, it seems, there are some individuals, exceptional one must admit, who reach or who are perceived to reach this level of transcendent status.

When I studied Roman Catholic theology, I was immensely attracted by the phenomenon of sainthood. One of the reasons why the Catholic Church must be seen as divinely supported and therefore of divine origin, (so I learnt) was the fact that the Catholic Church had produced and still produces many saints. The continued flowering of saints within the Church was an infallible sign of divine presence, of divine power. (That was, in retrospect, an argument against Protestantism, which did not put great stock in saints and sainthood, but by the same token could not be overly impressed by the Catholic Church's display of sainthood!)

When I started to study Buddhism and other great Asian traditions, I discovered a new range of "saintly" phenomena. I was astounded to see that for instance, in Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as in Taoism, many individuals were mentioned and their biographies described, who were considered to be "sages" or "saints" in their own circles. Later I discovered that in Islam there had been mystics who certainly qualified for sainthood; where the Confucian tradition very

often quotes *sheng-jen* of old: persons of heroic stature and literally called "saints."

After so many experiences and years of reflection and maturation, I have abandoned my earlier Roman Catholic view that only the true Church of Christ can and does produce real saints. As I expressed in a degree dissertation, I admitted that other religions produced saints, but that these individuals transcended their own religious tradition and unknowingly pointed toward redemption by Jesus Christ. I now consider such a view as poorly informed, mildly intolerant, and perhaps too arrogant. There is, as I discovered in my later studies, authentic sainthood in other religious traditions. Concepts of what sainthood involves may differ and cannot be universally defined and certainly cannot depend upon bureaucratic decisions to be verified.

In this article, I would like to single out Buddhism and Christianity (Roman Catholicism) to present a comparative view of what is seen as sainthood. It is only a case study, but whenever possible or feasible, general principles will be invoked, so that it will become clear that these cases possibly point to a more universal concept of what constitutes a Christian saint versus what constitutes a Buddhist saint.

At the end of Shan-tao's biography in Chapter Three of my manuscript *Visions of Sukhāvati*, it is casually mentioned that Shan-tao could be considered to be an embodiment of 'Buddhist sainthood' and from a different angle, was comparable to one of the modern Roman Catholic saints, Saint John Vianney, parish priest of Ars (France). Further, Shan-tao's method of meditation, as explained in the *Kuan Wu-liang-shou-Fo ching*

opens up another field of evaluation and comparison with certain methods of Christian meditation and prayer.¹ These aspects of Shan-tao's personality and/or activities have to be discussed in order to fully evaluate his contribution to the religious life of his contemporaries and to the field of comparative religion. This essay, therefore, consists of two sub-divisions:

- 1) Christian and Buddhist Sainthood;
and
- 2) Christian and Buddhist Meditation
and Prayer.

These two fields of comparative study are not intended to be fully and exhaustively developed: the focus will be on the problems of authenticity of sainthood and of meditation-prayer within Buddhism as exemplified by Shan-tao. The reason why this viewpoint is being adopted here is because of the traditional 'superiority-complex' of Christianity, especially of Catholicism, toward non-Christian religions. Is such a stand legitimate, not so much from a theological perspective, but from the broader viewpoint of human experience? Shan-tao's testimony may offer an indication of how this problem can be solved.

CHRISTIAN AND BUDDHIST SAINTHOOD

Both Christianity and Buddhism extol the supreme perfection of man as the ultimate end of religious life. However, beyond this basic similarity there are marked differences as to the essence of his perfection and as to the means to attain it. Christian perfection consists in the full development of theological and moral virtues, resulting in intimate union with God. To be formally recognized as a saint, within Roman Catholicism, one has to cultivate the virtues in a heroic way: "When, by divine grace, a person's whole being is, as nearly as possible, governed by the complexus of virtues centered about religion, that stage of heroic virtue has been attained that the Church recognizes

as worthy of the title of saint."² Formal recognition as a saint is made through a slow and scrutinizing process of canonization: it is the final result of a canonical process "that establishes juridically the heroism of a person's virtues, as well as the truth of the miracles by which God has manifested his heroism."³

The idea of heroicity of virtue or of 'superhuman virtue' was in fact taken over from Aristotle by Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas: through them the term found its way into scholastic theology and finally into ascetic-mystical use.⁴ According to P. Lambertini (later Benedict XIV), "the attainment of a heroic degree of natural virtue of one kind or another was theoretically possible to nature unaided by grace, though it was rarely, if ever, actually so attained."⁵ Although "the heroic degree is, in fact, simply the perfection of virtue," or, in other words, "Heroic virtue is based upon the intensity of charity,"⁶ in more recent times the emphasis has been considered "fulfillment of the duties and obligations of one's state" (Benedict XV), or, according to another papal document, "heroic virtue was to be sought in the ordinary things of daily life." (Pius XI).⁷

What seems to be essential in the definition of Christian sainthood, as explained above, is, from the human side, heroic virtue, and from God's side, the assistance of divine grace. Virtue in a heroic degree cannot be achieved without supernatural help, and, as a more basic presupposition, divine help is thought to be only fully available within the Christian Church.

The whole problem of sainthood and the Christian conception of it can only be fully understood within the broader perspectives of the Church's attitude toward the non-Christian religions. Although this attitude has changed throughout the ages, the present official stand taken by the Roman Catholic Church was clearly expressed in the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions in 1965,⁸ where it is said that the Church "rejects nothing

that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and life, those precepts and teachings which ... often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men."⁹

A conclusion that may be drawn from this statement is that only the Church possesses the *full* light or the full Truth, and therefore the full means of divine grace which lead mankind to perfect sainthood. If the Church is consistent with her exclusive claims of divine revelation, sainthood achieved outside her ranks, cannot be considered as fully authentic. This is an *a priori* position which seems unescapable.

However "from the fruits you can recognize the tree."¹⁰ This saying reflects the opposite approach; it is *a posteriori*, or based on observation of facts outside the Church. Here, we return to Shan-tao. Although it has been said that "... the Christian Saint is unique in human records [that] He is quite, quite different from the Buddhist, from the Zoroastrian ...;" that "all the good stuff that the Buddhist ... possesses is in the Saint ...," etc.,¹¹ the argument is not convincing when we consider Shan-tao as a concrete example of Buddhist sainthood. Whatever is attributed to Christian saints in the following text, can, with some adjustments, be applied to such Buddhists as Shan-tao:

Saints are *men* who are *super-natural*. Super-naturalized. Their actions, bodily or mental, thus constantly rise higher than their human source because of that added thing that is to be called Grace—God's 'free gift'—which is *so* added, however as to be infused throughout their Self ...

No question whatsoever, in a Saint, of working for his own career, or name, or wealth, or comfort. Lest he be deluding

himself, he will try rather for total effacement, personal humiliation, poverty so complete as possible, nay, suffering it-self.¹²

When comparing Shan-tao with one of the modern Christian saints, St. John Vianney (1786-1859, canonized in 1925), the following parallel characteristics are most striking: born in a farmer's family, John Vianney was a poor student who was unable to learn Latin and theology and was almost refused for the priesthood. Shan-tao apparently had a brighter intelligence, but was not interested in the abstract speculations of the San-lun School. Both men had a preference for contemplative-active life, in which direct religious experience was central. Both men were characterized by the practice of common moral virtues, which they developed to the extreme: deep consciousness of their personal sinfulness,¹³ extreme asceticism and poverty,¹⁴ radical chastity,¹⁵ total surrender to the service of others.¹⁶ In fact, their lifestyles, although in many respects quite different, are similar in that both took to the active ministry of their fellowmen (serving them for more than thirty years) and drew their energy from prayer and meditation. The example of their lives drew the people and made them believe in their respective ideals: J. Vianney was active in Ars for thirty years and "by degrees the place was completely reformed."¹⁷ Shan-tao worked in Ch'ang-an for over thirty years and the whole city was won over to the invocation of Buddha Amita. In order to touch people emotionally, both men used similar methods: the lustre of ritual and of external media. Shan-tao's example of using Pure Land representations and of organizing 'rebirth-rituals' is well known; but incidentally, similar attitudes characterized J. Vianney: "Another attitude of the Curé ... is significant: his affection for the externals of worship: his enthusiastic love for pictures, ornaments, decorations; for the embellishment of the

church and the pomp of ceremony. He wanted to make use of everything to appeal to, to stir up hearts and minds."¹⁸

Further, if the subject of mystical and extraordinary experiences is touched upon, it appears that both men were unusually privileged: Shan-tao's practice of *samādhi* was often accompanied with raptures and ecstasies; it appears that he had the gift of reading the minds of others (see, e.g., the incident about Tao-ch'o's threefold shortcoming), and it is also reported that he predicted his own death a few days before it took place. J. Vianney is said to have had numerous supernatural visions and ecstasies (although he was extremely reluctant to communicate these events to others),¹⁹ it is reported that he had an extraordinary talent in knowing the thoughts and wishes of others,²⁰ and also predicted his death, a few days before it actually happened.²¹

Finally, there is one 'fact' narrated about the two men that shows how people in their immediate surroundings must have seen them: of Shan-tao it is said that light came out of his mouth whenever he pronounced the name of Amita; with regard to Vianney, there have been several witnesses stating that they saw light shining forth from his person: one person going into the confessional "saw him wholly enveloped in a transparent and unearthly radiance."²² At another occasion, someone observed that the priest's face "seemed to project two fiery rays, his features being completely hidden by the brightness of their light."²³ No matter how these 'facts' are interpreted, one reasonable explanation is that somebody who is fully absorbed in the transcendent (however understood), like these two men, becomes somehow transparent and shining; or, in modern terminology: they radiate an aura, which can be seen by some witnesses who would translate this phenomenon in terms of light. What is said about J. Vianney in this respect, can probably equally be applied to Shan-tao: "As he grew old there came upon his visage, ... an ethereal spiritual beauty."²⁴

One possible conclusion of this comparison is, that, notwithstanding the great difference of ideological background, and the differences in circumstances and personality, a common spirit appears to have animated their lives: complete renunciation of the self, total devotion to their fellowmen, total reliance on the transcendent. This total reliance was the very source of their heroic life and the cause of their great achievements. Another conclusion is that Shan-tao's life and personality (although less furnished with historical information than J. Vianney's) shows that authentic sainthood is possible in Buddhism. Finally, as a happy result of the above comparison, it has become clear that Shan-tao's person and life is even more fully understood and appreciated when compared with his outstanding Christian counterpart, St. John Vianney. One light does not obscure the other, but increases its intensity and splendor.

CHRISTIAN AND BUDDHIST MEDITATION

Generally speaking, it can be said that Christian prayer, even when it assumes the higher forms of contemplation, is usually directed toward dialogue with the Divine Being or with Jesus Christ and may sometimes reach high levels of union. Buddhist meditation, on the other hand, is characterized by intellectual analysis at the beginning with the aim of understanding the nature of reality and eventually reaching mystical experiences of absorption. If this is true in principle, or theoretically, it does not follow that the facts always correspond with the theory. Christian meditation also can be rather intellectual, directed at the understanding of some points of doctrine, whereas in Buddhism certain forms of meditation seem to approach the Christian way of prayer.

In fact, two concrete examples of close similarity in method, and perhaps in aim and final result, are available for comparison: (1) the Buddhist 'meditation' method consisting in visualization-inspection, described in *Kuan Wu-liang-*

shou-fo ching (KWLSC) and explained by Shan-tao in his commentary is comparable to a particular form of Christian contemplation recommended by St. Ignatius of Loyola in his 'Spiritual Exercises.' (2) the oral invocation of the name of Buddha Amita is comparable to a certain Christian prayer, probably existing universally in the Christian Church, but clearly exemplified in what is called Jesus prayer (*Herzensgebet*) in the Eastern Orthodox branch of Christianity.

1. *Amita-Inspection vs. Ignatian Contemplation*

The 'Spiritual Exercises' written by St. Ignatius²⁵ consists in a very methodical system of meditations to bring about a kind of inner conversion to God. The whole program takes four weeks to be completed. The first week is spent in mental preparation and could be called an initial awakening of the soul. From the second week onward, most of the exercises are called 'contemplation,' and it is here that a striking similarity with Buddhist visualization-inspection appears. The preparatory stages in both cases are different; according to the Christian method, the meditator tries to make himself fully aware of being in God's presence and asks for his divine assistance to make a fruitful meditation possible. As Shan-tao pointed out in his *Commentary*, the Buddhist meditator purifies himself, worships the Buddha and, seated in the right bodily posture, concentrates his full attention on the chosen object. The exercise itself, however, is strikingly similar in both cases: the Buddhist meditator imagines, visualizes, and inspects, one by one, the various adornments of *Sukhāvatī*, to reach a climax in the vision of the Buddha and his two assistant bodhisattvas. In the Ignatian exercise, the direct prelude sets before the meditator a general and summary view of the meditation topic, but afterwards, in the meditation itself, according to Ignatius' own words:

... let it [the mind] pause upon the several parts, so as to consider them and penetrate their meaning. It is as if a man should cast his eyes upon some painting, comprising a great variety of objects, and in one comprehensive view take them all in confusedly and know what the picture contains and then afterwards should fix his gaze on the several particulars which are there represented, examining each in turn more fully and accurately."²⁶

The usefulness of this method consists in its results: not only are the various particulars of a given object, for instance, the events in the life of Christ, better understood through this application of the senses, but also a feeling of direct participation is evoked: "For by this means the Mysteries of our Lord's Life will be contemplated not as long past events, but as present realities of which we are ourselves actual spectators."²⁷ It is certain that this method of contemplation is much older than the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius. Many authors on spirituality in the Middle Ages had already applied and propagated it. However, it was considered to be an appropriate way for beginners, and not only the sense of sight was used, but, in fact, all the senses. Although some authors rejected the method as dangerous, eventually leading to wild imaginations and uncontrolled fantasies, the majority did approve it as a preparatory method to higher mysticism.²⁸ It is here that one can see the essential difference between Christian and Buddhist way: in the Christian version, the application of the senses leads up to a vivid mental image of the topic under consideration; but there it stops. There is no 'immersion' into it, no realization of complete union with the person, for instance of

Jesus Christ. The final phase would be a dialogue between the meditator and the divine Person, and even if a mystical experience would follow, the sense of separateness between the human and the divine is never abandoned. In the Buddhist context, however, absorption into the very essence of the Buddha, or in other words, identification with the Buddha nature, is proposed as the desired effect of the practice. Whether the meditator is always successful is a different matter, but the possibility of the experience is positively indicated as a reachable goal.

Abandoning temporarily the comparative viewpoint, what is the psychological significance of the various meditations described in the *KWLSC*? C. G. Jung has drawn the attention to the deep symbolical values of the various objects of 'meditation'.²⁹ Some of Jung's presuppositions are based on incorrect information as when he says that the *KWLSC* "belongs to the sphere of the so-called theistic Buddhism, in which one finds the teachings of the Ādibuddha, or Mahābuddha, (the 'Urbuddha'), from whom proceed the five Dhyānibuddhas or bodhisattvas."³⁰ This initial mixing up of two distinct cult developments, warns to caution. About the various symbolism expressed in the sutra, the author offers the following interpretations: both the setting sun (first exercise) and the water (second exercise) are allegorical presentations of Buddha Amita, the giver of immortality.³¹ The sun is the source of warmth and light and as such, giver of life; water is another source of life. (Both symbols are equally important in Christian allegorism.)³²

The setting sun, furthermore, is perhaps chosen for its hypnotical value: the fixation of a bright object prepares for the subsequent light-visions. The water as object stirs the active imagination, since no external object is used anymore. The practitioner imagines a mirroring water surface, reflecting the light; the change of water into ice is a procedure to change the immaterial sunlight into material water and hence, into the solid materiality of ice. In this way, the vision becomes

concretized, materialized. Based on the materiality of this world, another reality of 'spiritual matter' ("seelischer Stoff") is created. Ice changed into blue lapis lazuli, becomes an illuminating and transparent bottom, an absolutely real foundation.

The shape of the 'Land' is octagonal and correspondingly, there are eight lakes: the source of its water is the wishing-pearl, symbolizing the highest value. The voice of the water proclaiming the basic truths of Buddhism, means that ultimately the Buddha himself is the center, and the source of the water.

The climax of the sutra consists in the reconstruction of the Buddha-image: this leads to the insight that the Buddha is identical with the psyche of the meditator, with the meditator himself. The Buddha seated on the lotus in the center of the octagonal Amita-Land 'reveals' himself as the true self of the meditator. The I-consciousness disappears, the anti-pole is reached in which the world vanishes as an illusion.³³

The last part of Jung's article analyzes the significance of the practice and compares it with Western methods. He feels that Western meditation has nothing comparable to this practice, which aims at the total penetration and understanding of the unconscious: whereas the Western spirit seeks 'Erhebung' (which seems to point toward external knowledge of the real), the Eastern spirit wants 'Versenking, Vertiefung',³⁴ i.e., 'descends' to an inner experience of the real, leading up to the extreme point where the most inner self, the unconscious self, is clearly understood and therefore loses its own individual identity, which is experienced as absorbed in, or identical with Buddhahood.³⁵ Only in the Western practice of psychoanalysis, is the Oriental approach somewhat realized.

From another viewpoint, it appears that Western religion (Christianity) rather emphasizes God's Transcendence and Holiness, resulting into a depreciation of the self; whereas Eastern religiosity (Hinduism, Buddhism, perhaps also Taoism) looks for the Immanence of the 'Divine,' the

'Buddha-nature,' etc. so that emancipation consists in becoming conscious of the true self (Hinduism) or the real 'no-self' (Buddhism). If the *kuan* sutras provide a method for visualizing and inspecting the Buddhas and their transcendent realms, their ultimate aim, at least in the *KWLSC* does not consist in only 'seeing' the Buddhas, but in realizing that there is no Buddha beyond one's consciousness. It appears that this was Shan-tao's understanding, obtained in his own experiences. If he did not always stress this point clearly and unambiguously, it was because of his understanding of the psychology of his followers: not all were ready for this supreme experience. A gradual preparation was necessary for the simplest forms of devotion (invocation of the name) passing through a strict discipline of ethics and meditation, until the peak could be reached in the *kuan-Fo-samādhi*.

2. Oral Invocation vs Christian "Prayer"

That Shan-tao believed in the effectiveness of oral invocation of Buddha Amita's name is beyond question; the confusion that exists in this regard concerns his true appreciation of the practice. As I have pointed out elsewhere,³⁶ *nien-fo* means several things and the shift in interpretation of what Shan-tao meant by it, is due to incorrect emphasis of one of the meanings of *nien-fo*. Shan-tao was not an exclusivist: he encouraged the majority of the people to recite Amita's name, hoping that some would go further and take up the more arduous task of Amita visualization and *samādhi*.

It is quite natural to believe that Shan-tao himself, while not actually engaged in the practice of the *kuan-Fo-samādhi*, used the recitation of Amita's name (or: *Namo O-mi-t'o-Fo*) quite often as a kind of short prayer formula. Whether he used beans or other small objects to count his invocation, as Tao-ch'o had encouraged his followers to do, is doubtful and, perhaps not relevant. The presently important question is about the meaning of

such short and frequent invocations, and how they compare with some Christian practices.³⁷ Anticipating the results of the study, it seems to be legitimate to state that *nien-Fo* in Chinese Buddhism (as exemplified by Shan-tao) has at least two distinct meanings with perhaps one intermediate: first, there is the simple recitation of the name (*k'ou-ch'eng nien-Fo*) an act of oral praise, reverence or taking refuge; in the second place, at the other extreme, there is what Japanese Buddhists have called *kuan-nien nien-Fo*, but is formulated by Shan-tao as *kuan-Fo-samādhi*. This is the basic message of the *KWLSC* and the highest ideal for a Pure Land 'meditator'. Not often explicitly mentioned in Shan-tao's work, but presumably considered to be important within his overall system of religious practice is the *nien-Fo* of 'remembrance' of the Buddha, i.e., the possibly or hopefully continuous consciousness of being with the Buddha, of cherishing the thought of him, of paying homage to him and being grateful to him: "When sentient beings start practicing, whenever they orally invoke the Buddha, he hears it. Whenever they worship the Buddha, he sees it. Whenever in their minds they think of the Buddha, he knows it. When sentient beings keep the Buddha in their remembrance, he also keeps them in his remembrance."³⁸

Shan-tao refers to these various activities as 'three actions,' but in fact, there are four phrases: the third and fourth both refer to mind action, but there is certainly a difference in intensity. The initial activities of a devotee (a beginner) comprise oral invocation, worship and thinking of the Buddha. When his practice becomes more advanced he reaches the point of keeping in memory or making a (continuous) remembrance of the Buddha. This is not yet the fullest achievement which comes only through intense concentration, and is a result of the devotee's desire to 'see' the Buddha: "if sentient beings wish to see the Buddha, he responds to their wish (literally their *nien*) and appears in front of them."³⁹

What 'remembrance of the Buddha' exactly means, can be explained by an analogous practice, recommended in Christian spirituality: 'the presence of God.'⁴⁰ It is an "habitual sense of God's presence,"⁴¹ which Brother Lawrence in his letters describes as walking before God, simply, in faith, with humility and love, applying oneself to think always of God; it is simple attention to and a general fond regard of Him, which may be called "an actual presence of God; or, to speak better, an habitual, silent, and secret conversation of the soul with God,"⁴² beyond which nothing is sweeter and more delightful; and which cannot be comprehended except by those who practice it.⁴³

Such a habit is not easily obtained; it requires long and continuous effort, but once acquired, it leaves the mind open for God alone, while all other actions do not interfere with it. Hours of formal prayer are only continuation of the same exercise, and benefit from it enormously: "... when I apply myself to prayer, I feel all my spirit and all my soul lift itself up without any care or effort of mine, and it continues as if it were suspended and firmly fixed in God, as in its center and place of rest."⁴⁴

It seems that the practice of *nien-Fo* is very similar to this Christian method: the mind's attention and the heart's emotion are in continuous contact with Buddha, whereas the physical activities which ordinary life prescribes, are in nothing different from everybody else's. This consciousness of the Buddha's 'presence' can be acquired by effort, and specifically by repeated oral invocations (whether in loud or low voice, or even mentally) and if this sense of the Buddha's presence is gradually acquired, it may ultimately develop into the mystical experience of vision of the Buddha, such as explained in Shan-tao's *Commentary*. In this way, all the various ways of practicing *nien-Fo* are in fact inwardly related to each other and stimulate each other: the simple oral *nien-Fo*, if properly practiced (with sincerity, etc. ...), is ultimately leading up to a state of mystical union or

samādhi, in which no distinction between subject and object exists any longer. It cannot be expected that all devotees reach these higher stages of mysticism: each, according to his efforts and his own predispositions, will reach the degree that is appropriate to him. But all, Shan-tao stresses, are able to be welcomed by Buddha Amita at the end of their lives, even those who have hardly started on the path.

To conclude, another analog between *nien-Fo* and a particular form of Christian prayer has to be pointed out. E. Benz⁴⁵ has drawn the attention on the fact that oral invocation of Amita's name is not a unique phenomenon in religious history, but shows surprising analogies with the theory and practice of the so-called 'heart-prayer' (*Herzensgebet*), which is found within Eastern-Orthodox Christianity. Although the term 'Herzensgebet' does not apparently suggest a form of oral prayer, the facts are that it really is a form of prayer strikingly similar to the Buddhist *nien-Fo*, in almost all of its modalities and methods. The essential practice of 'Herzensgebet' consists in the invocation of the name of Jesus Christ by means of the formula: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us!"⁴⁶ Like the *nien-Fo* in Buddhism, it is essentially a lay-practice; it is recommended to repeat the formula many times a day (even methods of counting are suggested), in such a way that it becomes a part of the physiological process, in that the invocations are synchronized with the person's heartbeat: first beat: Lord; second beat: Jesus; third beat: Christ; fourth beat: have mercy; fifth beat: on me (us).⁴⁷ Although it is not clearly explained why this practice is called 'heart-prayer,' it may be assumed that this synchronization with the heartbeat is the very reason, whereas in some texts, quoted by the author, another and perhaps less misleading term is used: 'Jesus-prayer.'⁴⁸

As in Buddhism, where the practice of *nien-Fo* hopefully leads the practitioner to an ever increasing degree of meditation, even to the point of mystical experiences, so here, too, will the

invocation of the name of Jesus prepare the practitioner to the highest ecstasies and union with God.⁴⁹

The problem of historical connections between the two methods of prayer has to be answered with a question mark. Although the similarities are very striking, even to the point that breath-regulation and bodily posture⁵⁰ are recommended on the Christian side, there is no evidence to conclude to a positive influence in either direction.⁵¹

Whatever the historical links may be, the least that can be said is that the practice of *nien-Fo*, with its various gradations up to the higher levels of mysticism is not a unique phenomenon in the religious history of mankind. Although the most striking parallel in Christianity is the above discussed 'Herzensgebet,' a closer investigation will probably bring to light many other forms of name-involutions within various religions and thus throw a light on the spiritual needs of those who are not gifted enough or do not have the opportunity to practice strict meditation. It was Shan-tao's great merit to have realized this deep concern of the lay-people of his time and to have offered them a satisfying alternative toward salvation, which also is ultimately based on sound Buddhist principles. In this respect, his work and career are not isolated facts, but are linked closely together with many other similar tendencies in man's religious quest.

FOOTNOTES

1. Shan-tao's own meditation experiences resulting into *samādhi* (through 'vision' of the Buddha and his Pure Land) make it impossible to escape another comparative study: Christian and Buddhist Mysticism. However, since this topic is too vast to be included here, it appears better to leave it out altogether rather than to give it an unfair treatment. It could become the subject of a separate study.

2. C. O'Neill, "Saint." *New Catholic Encyclopedia (NCE)* XII (1967), 852-853.

3. A. D. Green, "Canonization of Saints (Theological Aspects)." *New Catholic Encyclopedia (NCE)* III (1967), 61.

4. K. V. Truhlar, "Virtue, Heroic." *New Catholic Encyclopedia (NCE)* XIV (1967), 707.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. See J. L. Gonzalez (compiler). *The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II* (Boston, 1967), pp. 253-260; A. Gilbert, *The Vatican Council and the Jews* (Cleveland and New York, 1968), pp. 271-279.

9. J. L. Gonzalez, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

10. *Matthew*. 8:20.

11. C. Martindale, *What are Saints?* (London, 1945), p. 153.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 154-155.

13. Compare Shan-tao's relentless stress on the age of corruption and his rituals of confession, with Vianney's intense desire to leave his ministry "to weep over his sinful life." See J. de La Varenne, *The Curé of Ars and His Cross*, trans. J. W. Saul (New York, Paris, 1959), p. 91.

14. Compare Shan-tao's ascetic and self-denying life with Vianney's almost cruel austerities: he gave away his furniture, slept only about two hours a day, lived on one or two boiled potatoes a day, and used iron chains and disciplines to chastise his body. See F. Trochu, *The Curé d'Ars*, trans. R. Matthews (London, 1955), pp. 155-158.

15. Compare Shan-tao's refusal to look at a woman with Vianney's equally rigorous chastity: "... he refused even to embrace his mother; he did not allow himself to caress a child." (J. de La Varenne, *op. cit.*, p. 88).

16. Compare Shan-tao's efforts to spread his teaching among the people of Ch'ang-an (his biographies indirectly make one feel his amazing efforts) with Vianney's spiritual leadership: for

many years he spent as much as seventeen hours daily in the confessional. See F. Trochu, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-114.

17. T. Maynard, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

18. J. de La Varendo, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

19. F. Trochu, *The Curé d'Ars, St. Jean-Marie-Baptiste Vianney*, trans. E. Graf (London, 1927; 2nd ed., London, 1949), pp. 526-545.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 482-512.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 554-556.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 530.

23. *Ibid.*

24. T. Maynard, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

25. See, e.g., W. H. Longridge, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola* (London and Oxford, 1919; 4th ed. 1950); A. Brou, *Ignatian Methods of Prayer*, trans. W. J. Young (Milwaukee, 1949); K. Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. K. Baker (New York, 1965).

26. W. Longridge, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

28. A. Brou, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-167.

29. C. G. Jung, "Zur Psychologie Ostlicher Meditation," *Bulletin de la Société Suisse des Amis de l'Extrême-Orient* (or *Mitteilungen der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft der Freunde Ostasiatischer Kultur*) V (1943), 33-53.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 36 (my own translation).

31. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-45.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-53.

36. See my article "The Meaning of Nien-Fo in the Three Pure Land Sutras," *Studies in Religion* 7 (1978), 403-413.

37. It is beyond the scope of this essay to investigate in depth the meaning of *mantra* and the power of the spoken word, etc., of which the *nien-Fo* seems to be a concrete example.

38. Shan-tao's *Commentary on the KWLSC*, T. 1753, 37, 268, a 6-9.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 268, a 10-11.

40. See, e.g., Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God being Conversations and Letters of Nicholas Herman of Lorraine* (New York, 1958; 2nd ed. 1966); A. Brou, *Ignatian Methods of Prayer*, pp. 46-53.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

45. E. Benz, "Nembutsu und Herzensgebet," in S. Yamaguchi, ed. *Buddhism and Culture* (Kyoto, 1960), pp. 126-149.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 145. The author, p. 146, quotes from *Aufrichtige Erzählung eines russischen Pilgers* (Freiburg, 1959), p. 45: "While I experienced very intimately these and similar consolations, I noticed that the effects of the 'Herzensgebet' (heart-prayer) express themselves in three ways: in the spirit (mind), in experiences, in revelations. For instance in the spirit: the sweetness of God's love, internal quietude, rapture of the spirit, purity of thinking, the sweetest remembrance of God; in experiences: a pleasant melting together of the heart, an infusion of all one's limbs with unnameable sweetness, a joyful surging of the intellect, understanding of the Scriptures, recognition of the language of creation, being freed from all worldly vanity and recognition of all the sweetness of the inner life, certainty of God's proximity and of his love for us." (my translation).

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-40.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 148-49.