

I LOVE FAR OFF LANDS

Spiritual itinerary of a priest in China

by Jacques LECLERC

Prefaced by Jean-François SIX

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Preface

These pages written by Jacques Leclerc, appear just a few months after an abundance of manifestations and publications marking the celebration of the centennial of the death of Saint Theresa of Lisieux and her proclamation as a Doctor of the Church. Even though this small book is in its entirety an echo of the Little Way of Theresa, it is not simply another essay on Saint Theresa. In these pages, Jacques opens up to his readers his life as a priest and in so doing, he enters into the same "sacrament of brotherhood" that Theresa shared during her life, with other priests.

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Theresa encounters simultaneously two continents both equally unknown to her, that of the "souls who do not have the faith" and the continent of China.

It is at Easter 1896, after her entry into the night of the faith, that Theresa discovers China, by the means of a correspondence with Father Adolphe Roulland, a young priest sent to China.

In France there are the 'impious', those who are totally without religion ; Theresa affirms that by grace she became aware of their existence. In China, there is an immense mass of people for whom Theresa's loving God is the great Absent One. Theresa, who opened up to the first group, opens up thereby, to all who ignore this God to whom one can abandon himself in full confidence, the God of Jesus Christ whose "heart burns with love" as writes Theresa. She will speak of the Church in these same terms ; she sees in the Church a "heart burning with love".

A hundred years after this double encounter of Theresa - these two continents that she discovers -, a priest, member of the Mission of France, is himself in China - this Mission of France which was born from the heart of Theresa. The Pope underlined this fact the 19th of October 1997 when he proclaimed her a Doctor of the Church. The Church asked Father Roulland, one hundred years ago, to be a discoverer of the Holy Spirit at work in China : she asked Jacques, this priest of the Mission of France, to be as well, a discoverer of the Holy Spirit at work in the China of today.

In the missionary task there are always three "hearts" which go together : that of the Holy Spirit, that of the apostle and that of the people to whom the missionary is sent. Hearts that work together, hearts that are active not inert, never lost in the spectacular, always realistic. How hidden and ardent the work of the three hearts ;

Gabriel Marcel says that "love is an ardent and mutual interrogation"; the Chinese people, this priest and the Holy Spirit question one another.

Jacques bears witness here very simply - and it is necessary to read between lines. He has read the letters exchanged between Theresa and her brother, Adolphe Roulland with a profound understanding. He discovered there two hearts marked at one and the same time by the Spirit of Love and by the "other", those who do not share your convictions, or a people born in another culture.

I invite everyone to listen to the hymn that Adolphe, Theresa, Jacques, China and the Holy Spirit are singing, a song as tenacious as the breeze of the prophet Elias and strong like the cry of Christ who abandons himself to love, the hymn of brotherhoods so different and yet so united, a song of love for our times.

Jean-François Six
Priest of the Mission de France

Overture

Hardly a month after my arrival, following one of my classes in a university in southern China, one of my students decided to accompany me while I walked across the campus to the photography shop. When I received my identity photos, the student wanted to look at them. After having looked at them she said, "Hey, you look like a priest".

- "Have you already encountered priests ? " I asked.

- With a smile she said "No, never , but I imagine that is what they must be like".

I had never told this student that I was a priest. She seemed to know it by some inner sense, silently... Signify something in an utmost of discretion and be a sign all the same. To be a priest, a man of few signs, and perhaps even to the point where I receive from the other the sign that I give.

This episode of the photo came back to me a few months ago during the Assembly of the Mission of France¹. Some young people spoke up and said : "You priests are great, but you are too discreet, you are not sufficiently obvious".²

Paradox ? Not necessarily or only in appearance. In any case that prodded me to give my testimony, that of a priest sent to far off lands.³

Why not begin by my Chinese name, given to me by some friends during my first stay there :

It is made up of two characters. The first one was changed afterwards, but initially it was a character which is pronounced *Lü* and is expressed by painting two small rectangles one above the other. Each rectangle taken by itself represents the character *Kou* which means mouth, the organ of speech. Thus *Lü* evokes two mouths or a life lived at the crossroads of several languages. The second character *Lei* is made up of three identical small characters in pyramidal form. Taken individually each one is pronounced *Shi* and represents a stone. Thus three stones are assembled together and can evoke the three stones that the nomads collect for making a fire during the halt. They speak to me as well of the *kigoda*, a three legged stool that is offered to visitors in every African home. Lastly, they recall the three continents where I have lived : Europe, Africa and Asia.

Tongues and continents trace a route. During my agricultural studies, a two year stay as a voluntary worker in the Sahel orientated my life towards the foreign

countries and the rural life. Ordained a priest and having joined the Mission of France, I was sent immediately after my ordination to East Africa, where I participated in the work of the local church for the formation of the peasant people and rural development.

Ten years later, I took the time to learn Chinese and to prepare myself to live in China. I had in mind the call launched by a Korean priest at the time of my ordination, at the end of the encounter to which he had been invited : "During your meeting you did not speak at all of Asia, nor of the immense human density that it represents. I am shocked to see evangelical workers ignore Asia, when she is coveted by the engineers-technicians as the business men of the capitalistic economy.

During the five years that I have just spent in China I held two jobs. First, that of a teacher : professor of French and English in a scientific university. In the wake of that I held a place as professor of economics where I had to give my courses in Chinese. Secondly, I was an engineer in a business firm, in keeping with my basic formation.

The Chinese constitution guarantees a certain amount of religious freedom. But this constitution is that of a country that chose the Marxist-Leninist philosophy at the time of its "liberation" and the birth of the People's Republic of China on the 1st of October 1949.

This philosophy foresees for the society as a whole the disappearance of religious sentiment and the religious phenomena. It is perceived as a liberation from that period of history in which the Christian missionaries were identified as being servants of the foreign powers that wanted to enslave China. Thus the Chinese law was very severe towards the churches. The Chinese Catholics had to cut their ties with the Universal Church and Rome. The Communist Party organised them into a patriotic association of Chinese Catholics. Some, however, refuse to submit themselves and an "underground church" sprang up. Since the beginning of the more open political line inaugurated by Deng Xiao Ping at the end of the 70's, the contacts between the Chinese and abroad have been increased even in the religious domain. Today however, the law remains very strict.

As so many other foreign guests in China have done before me, I accepted the choice of prudence, so that none of my Chinese friends would be troubled on my account, and secondly, out of respect for the Chinese Catholics, the faithful and their pastors, who must accept the weight of the law and the suffering that it causes, out of respect as well for their responsibility as Chinese citizens and craftsmen of the Church of China. I chose to act with extreme discretion and in particular to avoid contact with the Church of China. This circumspection revealed as well the desire to live the faith and my life as a priest in China a bit like a man who finds a fresh mountain spring and who comes to drink quietly and refrains from agitating the water and trampling all about.

During all these years, I was linked to the Mission of France, to the "brothers and sisters of the chinese way",⁴ companions in friendship, prayer and reflection.

Even though I am writing in the first person singular, I am often tempted to write "us" because a priest is always related to his brother priests, particularly in our Mission of France and also because what I am relating here is the results of a brotherliness and a vital sharing that lasted throughout all these years in China.

I am a member of a small association called 'Solitude Theresa of Lisieux', which helps keep alive a discrete bond of communion between men and women whose ecclesiastical and faith life is marked by solitude and silence. Present day life makes the voice of Theresa very up to date. This voice, just as much as her "Little Way" have made Theresa a brotherly interlocutor throughout these years.

Throughout these pages, going from one sign to another, from dialog to pardon, from the encounter to the Eucharist the life of a priest is outlined. This priest does not have a parish, isn't he, nonetheless, a priest attached to a flock ? He celebrates the Mass alone, isn't it nevertheless the Eucharist of the Church ? Those with whom he lives do not know that he is a priest, does that, however, make him less of a priest ?

A man of few signs...

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A MAN OF FEW SIGNS

THE SIGN OF FRAIL SPEECH

The period during which I taught in Chinese was a time of frail and uncertain words. The great difficulty that I experienced in speaking that language, even after many years of study, made me feel as if I was groping in the dark between silence and speech. Silence was impossible : a professor must speak. Strange words, words of a stranger so limited, never knowing if they were really words for I was never sure that I wasn't talking nonsensical blather.

Between the inconceivable silence and the primeval language, there is a narrow road where we must never refuse to keep on going.

I encountered fellow travellers there : first of all the students, at least those who had enough intellectual insight to realise that their studies are an adventurous march. I have kept the beautiful calligraphy given to me by one of my students when he left the university. It was the reproduction of two verses of a poem by Meng Jiao written at the end of the 8th century in the Tang era. It evokes a mother who sewed a coat for her son with a very fine thread. The son finally leaves the family and goes abroad. He has nothing but this fine, frail thread as a link between his mother's affection and the loving thought that he himself bears her. When he offered it to me the student said : "We were not able to understand everything that you said in your courses, but what we did grasp will remain with us long after we have left the university". The two verses can be translated as follows :

*He who gives himself in frail words
will later receive an infinite light.*

On the road, I also encountered Chinese colleagues who perhaps didn't walk alongside me but they did wave to me as if to say : "Keep on going, even if we are not sure where ! What you are teaching, we could teach it just as well. However, your presence here is like the foot that keeps the door from closing".

In the end, I found myself taken up in a process that sums up the essence of existence : to receive from another, in this case from the Chinese students, the capacity to pass beyond my own immediate limits and become what I was meant to be : a teacher. And that, in the very moment that the other listens and not only at the moment that I talk. If no one had listened, I would have remained at the stage of unintelligible mumbling.

I have gone through some terrible dizzying periods of panic, during which I hid behind my large notebook, my arms propped up on the desk, my head drawn in between my shoulders, not daring and not even wanting to look at my students. At

such moments, I became conscious of the fact that there was no longer even a minimum of communication between us.

I was obliged, in such moments, to go on as if I was at the steering wheel of a jeep crossing a sand pit or a marshland : above all don't stall. You must hang on and look for the slightest solid ground that will give the wheels a grip and stop their wild turning, stop the frantic outflow of words to which no one listens and which is no longer speech.

I often left the classroom without any other thought in mind than to take up my life where I had left it in crossing the threshold of the class. Mental gymnastics, like a body falling in space that tries by all its members to regain its footing.

There were also brief illuminations, the regard of students who had comprehended something. Moments of joy that gives us the strength to keep on going.

What a desert, to experience the emptiness of our words because they have no meaning, to pass through sterility. To be nobody except in the very uncertain endeavour, the frail desire to be someone for someone else.

One morning, a few of my students came to tell me that one of their friends had hung himself in the dormitory toilet. Coming to recount the tragedy and share with me their distress they talked about the difficulty of finding their way in the present Chinese society, their confusion in the face of the immense moral void of a society fascinated by money and plagued by corruption. This sense of dilemma is often expressed by a certain anxiety and a feeling of the uselessness of life. In the end they said "Xiao Wang died of uselessness".

I suddenly became very conscious of the fact that what we say belongs to those to whom we speak rather than to ourselves. If the words we pronounce are not taken in by someone, they have no sense at all. Words are not meant to be adventurous except in poetry, love and humour. Everyday words need the refuge of their semantic nest where the fullness of their meaning can shine out. How often I risked a phrase that fell far from waiting ears ! Every listener has a predictable sense of the words that are addressed to him. When this recognition becomes too uncertain and laborious, our speech becomes useless sounds.

This analysis of teaching in such a difficult language makes me reflect on language in general, on my life, on the every life of which the framework is the Word, which accompanies the Word. Words which have a meaning sort from their silence covered with sweat, grazed by the misunderstandings that they encounter, weary of the long wait to be heard. It is there that the "professor" and he who is called to be a servant of the Word, finds himself another man. He is somebody who possesses a treasure for which he lacks the key, a sower who has no field. He recognises himself listening to others, he speaks a language common to all men of all times and places. He has already heard these words which well up from his inner being, but he hears them as if for the first time : you have been created to love... A servant who repeats what man already knows, but what he must hear again and again until he decides to

live it. This service of the Word is not a dictatorial speech, much less a worn out repetition or a verbal beating. It bears the mark of frail words, all askew, floundering, stammering, but they ring out as well clear, authentic and full of the light of the truth.

I do not speak very good Chinese and this "not very good" is very important, it is the human breach by which the Chinese with whom I work and live can rightly and happily slip in so that we can be human beings together. Without consciously realising it, not talking about it either, we were well aware that something else was at work in my presence here other than my professional competence. This something else had all the more freedom of action in the face of the fact that my competencies were not quite 'up to snuff'. Something that words cannot express, murmurs that it is better to have this foreigner, who is doing his best, even if that isn't much, than to remain strictly among Chinese. Hospitality is so important.

This road of frail speech lead me to take up the thread again of something that I had read by Antonin ARTAUD. He was speaking of the world of the theatre, but what he said is valid for other situations in life, especially in the realm of the faith, religion, liturgical rites as well as the world of education. He helped me to reflect on the reasons that had always made me attentive to the use of the word "do" in matters of faith as well as in the liturgy : "Do this in memory of me" says the priest during the Mass. It is not a question of simply remembering any old word, here it is the Word, the Word of life that enters into action. ARTAUD says, the real theatrical artist is not the playwright but rather the producer. Under his direction, the action on stage becomes a mirror of what touches us in real life, in positive or in negative.

Teacher, producer, priest... we all have the task of entering with our students , actors, spectators or our fellow men into an adventure that will be decisive in their life, where what is said is not so important, what counts is what the listener hears. The purpose of a course, a play, of giving witness or of the liturgy is that it touches the heart of man. In Africa I often heard the expression "the Gospel, it is as vital as blood". Jesus touches the sick, the infirm grasp his mantle... here we are in the performative world of an intense action This is very important for me since I cannot master neither the words of my courses nor those of my faith that I cannot express freely in public. However, even though I am more or less reduced to silence, my courses still take place and there is still a faith witness, because there is still a "being together", hospitality still exists.

I walked down this road alongside a Little Sister. I often heard her evoke the experience of the threshold in her relations with her old Chinese friends with whom she had had a long and profound dialog. The name of Jesus has often come to the threshold of her lips but it goes no further, as if the time had not yet come for them to hear it, for it to be named in dialog. It is not timidity, nor in consequence on the part of the apostle, but rather simply being there like the watchman who waits.

Slowly and silently, as an echo to my awkwardness in listening and speaking the Chinese language, my way of believing has been transformed. Just as my way of viewing life has been changed by this prolonged stay in China, so also my religious life has been thrown into an upheaval. My creed is no longer that which I believe or

that to which I adhere intellectually, it is rather a welcoming in me, the place left for the trace of what remains alive today of a love shared, like a relic of God.

Life in China has led me to discover the great missionary proximity between monks and nuns who are engaged in a life of silence, and the apostles of a word that cannot be spoken. Each of us has to turn our tongue ten times in our mouth and receive the Word of God for which we have been called or sent. The Word is first, he inhabits the world and the heart of man. The apostle becomes like the monk a man who contemplates the mystery of God in humanity.

The most difficult part is to be silent, to let ourselves be emptied out even though we know that we are rich in the faith and many other things as well, that we consider as acquired whereas they exist in reality in order to make us sense a hunger or so that we realise that it is a gift. It is not always necessary to speak in order to live out our faith, but it is essential to offer it. I remember what Father CEYRAC, an old Jesuit said 25 years ago at TAIZE, a dicton from the Wisdom of India : "What is not given is lost".

Responding to such a call or mission can take a whole lifetime. The chinese period was born from another phase of my life. I passed the first ten years of my life as a priest in Africa, working for agricultural and rural development. The eve of my departure for the route to China , a townsman came to see, regretting my departure. As a sort of summing up he said : "I 'm sorry you are leaving us. You at least didn't spoil anything".

To go towards gratuitousness, towards the dispossession of meaning. The African townspeople taught me that I am a priest, not for what I have in myself, but gratuitously. The Chinese taught me that even the meaning is useless. Here silence alone is worthy of the priest ministry. It is perhaps more a question of a mystical way than a positive theology of the ministry : of being a priest in order to receive the grace that God gives to the world in the Chinese, of being a silent earth, fallow of the faith. A subtle exercise of spiritual contorsionism serves nothing, what is needed is the conviction that we must pass by the silence and the night.

Strange fragility of speech, that uses so many words to speak of silence and to call us to it. Is it necessary to keep silence all the time ? We must know as well how to recount to each other our silent routes...

THE SIGN OF A WHOLE MAN

I remember having read *The First Man* by Albert CAMUS, during Advent time. I made my own his invitation to keep alive in us the memory of the "first man" who is each one of us. The memory of our history, earthly and earthy, is the best pledge of the development of a whole man, the only one who has some chance of recognising a brother in each Chinese person.

That is the most important reason of my life here in China : to let that spiritual or whole man grow. Man cannot be whole except in alterity and in hospitality. The Chinese are a most demanding alterity. They make me become a man in the fullest dimension, pilgriming, hungering, emptied out, authentic... in a word, a whole man. To carry in one's person the "Gospel at the level of man"⁷ means to pitch your tent here below and live in remembrance of that first man that we are, to cultivate our humanity and then, and only then, can we lift up our eyes and look about seeking the encounter of that which is afar off, the meeting with another.

Talking with one of my brothers of the Mission of France, a priest engaged in research on molecular biology, made me realise how much the question of the truth for a scientific is linked to his attitude and his way of communicating and dialoguing with others.

Having lived for several years in scientific universities in China and having followed a scientific formation myself, I can measure how much this link between truth and alterity is foreign to the way in which the Chinese society and in particular, the research world functions today. Compartmentalisation and suspicion dominate. If a true attitude of inter-communication surfaces it is immediately baptised spying or treason. One would be inclined to say that there is great suffering in the heart of the Chinese, that of the fear of others, a dizziness in the face of alterity, an absolute refusal of alteration.

From the very first moments of my stay in China, I have been intrigued by the question : who is the "other" for a China man ? I still have no response to that question. I remember an adage of the desert people whom I encountered twenty-five years ago during my stay as a volunteer worker in Niger : When you look at the desert don't say "what silence !" , say "I don't hear". I cannot say simply that there is nothing in this desert of alterity in the China of today. I prefer to say that I don't hear. The official speeches in public in China are on the wave of plenitude and filing up, rarely speaking of the dearth.

The priest-researcher proposes the outline of the researcher and theologian as sketches of a possible universal beauty precisely because they talk of the

wholeness of vision. I would like to include the artist in this same situation. Here are three figures of a subject that the China of today finds so difficult to accept.

An artist who dares to go beyond the known shores of his art, deviating from the accepted norm is torn apart interiorly. He can no longer expose his works for and among his own people. His works will be seen in New York, Paris or Berlin.

The scientific communication is the lock and key of the retard that science has accumulated in modern times in China. If Chinese researchers and artists want to do something other than just copy they are more or less obliged to leave their country. All of the big occidental laboratories and those in Japan as well, are familiar with this fact. Researcher, theologian and artist are three narrow doors opening onto the way of Truth.

Before my first stay in China, a great friend of China, the late Father Edouard Duperray said to me : "There are two doors by which one can get into China, the arts and a friend". He invited me to let myself attain the same degree of interiority and humanity as that which we find with a friend or in the arts. Let the whole man grow in us.

I discovered the Czech philosopher, Jan Patocka, in reading a commentary of one of his works written by a priest of the Mission of France⁸. His theory is that "history and philosophy are born from the upheaval of what is generally accepted as being the norm, thus opening up the road to freedom (...) leaving place for a world, uncertain but pregnant as well with mystery, thus problematic"... It is not a question of discussing without end the problematic of meaning but rather to grope forward with the problematic meaning as the only "lunch". There is more of a witness to the faith in the resonance of mankind's groping research than in the obsessional catechism of established truths.

I am far from the ordeal by fire that Pierre TEILHARD de CHARDIN, Jacques SOMMET⁹ and so many others have known, and yet I cannot shake off the intuition that my life as a Christian priest in the country of China places me in a state of torment, a letting go, perhaps an emptiness of a dark night, which is the void of tomorrow, of the freedom of God recovered, a faith that is never fully acquired, that exists only in its Advent, in as much as we are awaiting it. The place of mankind.

Yes, Jan Patocka, a thousand times, yes : "Only he who has understood that, the man capable of this conversion (metanoia), he is a whole man"¹⁰.

I recognise myself entirely in this "solidarity of the tottering" which builds itself up in stumbling uncertainty and finds its silent battlefront there, without publicity or showiness. He who prepares tomorrow is a whole man, bound by this solidarity of the tottering.

I believe that the priestly ministry, but it is perhaps better to remain in the more common vocabulary and speak of service, that was mine in China finds its place in this solidarity. Those who, by their history, culture and mental structures are kept at a distance one from the other, can recognise each other in this solidarity.

Even if, according to MALRAUX in *the Temptation of the West*, this distance between different men, peoples and cultures can go all the way to reciprocal "disgust".

Recognise oneself a spiritual, whole man, the first man !

SIGN OF MEETING

During a business trip which led me to Japan, my job was to accompany the Chinese officials invited by my company. They spoke neither English nor Japanese and their Japanese hosts did not speak Chinese. I spent six fascinating days assisting the convergence and the comprehension between these men and women of two great Asiatic nations who are far from having forgotten a past history marked by hate and war...

I had already had a similar experience several months earlier while accompanying a Chinese delegation in Vietnam serving as interpreter. This meeting had been preceded by a delegation from a university in Hanoi which came to visit my university in China. A project of twinning was to be signed but it faltered over problems of mutual comprehension. The old Vietnamese professors still spoke fairly good French, so they passed by me in order to make themselves understood by the Chinese. It is sometimes necessary to have an intermediary who comes from a far off land so that neighbouring countries speak to each other.

Alongside my regular work, I tried to work at a harmonisation between university sinologists and businessmen. There is in fact a proximity that is possible between sinologists who often have a certain view of the Chinese reality which mirrors that which business firms often have, for example, there is little difference between the experience of a sinologist who is doing a study on the organisation of the State in the 10th century and that of the businessman who is trying to do business under the present regime. It is not a shortcut or an anachronism, it is simply the meeting of two experiences of one and the same country, like a capitalisation of intelligence. I thought that this idea could interest other people and so I proposed the hypothesis of an encounter and a debate. That turned into a project with a task group working on a common axis which permitted each other to give an account of his experience and begin a dialogue.

There as well I had the experience of bringing into communication people who did not meet together and who generally did not have much to say to each other and in any case lacked a common language for such a discussion. In China, this contact is an everyday necessity. I experienced just how much this bread can be missing in a country where the language is so difficult and where the foreigner is often reminded that his place is : outside¹¹. But one is forced to admit that the Chinese themselves often feel as much as we strangers, the lack of this bread. The Chinese society is very hard and its members suffer because of it. The Cultural Revolution was a climax of that suffering.

Each day brings the possibility of a certain number of encounters even if they are short and fleeting. Because of the Chinese context these possible encounters

are perhaps more than elsewhere, laden with waiting and desire. It is necessary to be attentive to this and to live these meetings as privileged moments of our life, even if only because they are perceived as such by the Chinese. These meetings are evident times where one recreates himself, where one is created and where we become human beings. They are moments in which one escapes from the anguish of nothingness and of being an outsider.

To live to the full these encounters, to be available during it, reflect on it in your memory afterwards, pray on it, all that is a decisive part of my life in China. We have already spoken of the ministry of encounter and the ministry of friendship. It is there that I see most vividly what reconciliation really is.

The sign of meeting can be declined under very different forms. It can be a question of the encounter between East and West by the bias of a cultural, economical or technological exchange. That was the axis of my professional engagement in China.

This axis is extended by the meeting between Christianity and the spiritual traditions of Asia, a service of dialogue in the momentum of Assisi¹². It is serving the meeting of peoples and not being satisfied with sending the partners of the dialogue off back to back in the name of a so called cultural relativism¹³.

It is also the meeting of Churches in a brotherly companionship, even if it must remain very discreet, particularly in China. There is the encounter of a Church with herself in her missionary vocation, that is to say in her alterity, in this other that God gives her to recognise, to love and to serve and who belongs to other dwellings of the Most High. It is a question of renewing pastoral theology and the mission in a multiple-religion, multiple-identity context.

Lastly, an encounter is as well carrier of received and given pardon. I am thinking here of the sacrament of reconciliation and even more of all those moments and places in life where someone is reborn by a listening ear and a dialogue in which the consciousness of his fragility, of his fault or his wound is calmed by pardon and reconciliation.

SIGN OF PARDON

Between frail speech and the growth of the whole man, it is always a question of relationship to the other in whom an identity lives.

Jesus questions his disciples in a vigorous way :

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of Man is ?" And they said : "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elias, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets". He said to them : "But who do you say I am ?" (Mt. 16, 13-15)

This question concerning what men are saying precedes the call of the apostles to bear witness. It is a primary indication for the apostolic ministry : men come first because they are simply men, simply "people". It is up to the apostle to be there where he can hear what people are saying in order to be able to render an account to Jesus.

The question such as it is cannot be transposed immediately at all times and all places. Outside of the limits of Jerusalem and Palestine in the time of Jesus, there were not many people who had something to say concerning the Son of Man.

Today ! And in China ! The question is it not all the more pertinent ?

It is all the more so by the fact that it invites today's apostle to live in an interior way the questions posed by the people with which he lives and who have no idea of Jesus Christ and who sometimes have no idea even of God. At the same time it invites us to let the mystery of the Incarnation deploy itself, in a renewed way, in the reality of "here and now". It is not up to the people to know the Son of Man to be truly one of them, in an authenticity and a radicalism (in the sense of roots) such, that the words which spring up from the consciousness of man may be heard and received by the Church as being linked to the mystery of Revelation, so that they may become the very prayer and praise of the Church.

Is it not this inversion which allows us to speak of a "mystical solidarity with those who do not share our faith, even to the point where they live a profound experience of the ordeal of atheism"¹⁴ or are a part of the "solidarity of the tottering (...) those who have suffered the shock, those who can best understand what life and death is all about, and in consequence the meaning of history" ? Is it not this inversion that permits us to recognise in this night of which Jan Patocka speaks : "Not a lack of light, the fading daylight, but rather an obscure depth from which

comes all the realities in the succession in which the mind of man brings them to light (...)" ?

Theresa of Lisieux is really a sister for those who advance along this road, she who had known the night of the faith at Easter 1896 !

We must be there in the midst of the throng because the revelation of the Son of Man is not yet finished and we must receive it from "outside". To be able to respond to the first question of Jesus, heard today and hearing what "men are saying" to hear the murmurs, the songs, the words of the Revelation of the God incarnate and thus to be able to grow in the faith, that is to say, in response to the second question : " And you, who do you say I am ?"

The "preoccupation of identity" is it not like the questions of Jesus, a question of others in relation to oneself, of recognition, our existence in relation to others ? What is important is not who I am but rather that which others recognise and thus respect and accept as being me. "Every person has the right to be recognised for who he really is (...) that is the very essence of love".¹⁵

In China, I saw the importance of linking a reflection on reconciliation to that of the missionary ministry in those places and in the epochs that are strongly caught up in the question of identity. Of what use is it for a man to be the only one who is conscious of who he is ? The obstinate polarisation of a man or a group on the single question of his identity, considered outside of the question of the place of that identity in the diversity of other identities, is this obstinacy not the major risk of violence and hatred that we see spreading out with more and more force in the ethno-religious conflicts of the last ten years ?

To take into consideration seriously the preoccupation of identity, is to link it up, in season and out of season, with the preoccupation of reconciliation and to live this as a service and as a ministry. Jesus asks us again today, by the Gospel read in common, what do people have to say about who is the Son of Man. Those who respond say who they are themselves. In this response, the apostle of Jesus Christ is called to recognise the very identity of the Son of Man, a man among men, and at the same time the figure of the crucified who carries to the very heart of the human identity an invitation to reconciliation, that is to loving pardon.

All that does not seem to be far from what I searched for and discovered in China. I did not encounter any Chinese to whom I could put the question, point blank, "Who is the Son of Man ?" (that does not mean that such Chinese do not exist). Living in China, I was led to realise with greater force and necessity that the mystery of an alliance between God and the Chinese people exists, that the history of this people is inhabited by the revelation of God, even if I myself and the Church that send me have no other proof of it than the encounter with just and holy Chinese.

Advancing in the contemplation of this mystery, over a length of time, I am learning to recognise the visage of the Son of Man in his brotherhood of incarnation with the Chinese people and to hear in the heart of this people as in resonance to the suffering of the Crucified, the thirst of forgiveness.

In response to the first question posed by Jesus, it seems to me that the Chinese hurl that the Son of Man incarnated cannot be other than the brother of the sons of men who are starving to death for lack of reconciliation. In response to the second question that Jesus asks, I confess from the land of China that Jesus is the beloved Son of the Father from whom he receives forgiveness and that he calls all men, his brothers, to live of it as the very breath of their identity.

In this country where ideology tries to take the place of people's conscience, and often succeeds, in order to know who and what one should believe, where to go, how to talk and think... I have discovered that there is a lot of freedom and much peace in recognising deep inside oneself what is right and what is wrong. I read in a new light the book of Genesis which tells us that the major alienation is that which takes away from man the consciousness of right and wrong. Without this consciousness I cannot stand up and go towards forgiveness in order to receive it or to give it. Conscience alone is hell. Man pushes his sin in front of himself without any hope of being freed from it.

There where forgiveness does not exist it has become the orientation of my life. To see myself as sinner now, is to turn myself towards the face of forgiveness, the loving face, the hand stretched out in welcome. To receive it and to give it is the very heart of my life as a man of the Gospel. Going down this road, I encountered more clearly the face of God the Father. I have become more attentive to the relationship between men who pardon mutually and recognise each other as brothers.

More than in any other place and time I witnessed in China the fact that a man who has no possibility of giving or receiving pardon sees his humanity degraded, his face and his life close in.

China is awaiting the revelation of pardon.

SIGN OF THE UNHEARD OF AND THE INVISIBLE

Celebrating in China the feast of the Apparition or what is called the Epiphany elsewhere, invites us to take a different look at history and the faith. The Wise Men of the East didn't go home with the Church in their baggage. They seem to have come to Palestine in order to verify a point of astrology and they didn't leave it as Christians. Their attitude speaks to me more of human investigation in order to understand his place in the cosmos than that of an evident, definitive and universal manifestation of God in Jesus Christ. It is strange that the first witnesses who came from afar off, the first far off horizons which exposed the christian revelation to the universal should come from the East, which since that time has made its way well outside of this revelation. First historic sterility of this revelation.

We must ask ourselves what these three men were looking for when they came and did their go back satisfied. I think so. They came and they saw... what did they believe ? Here there is a letting go by the revelation of its own finality : the faith.

Perhaps here in China it is given to us to live a continuation of this strange epiphany. We can already take note of the fact that there are men of the east who are marching towards a star and who accept being neither the owner nor the producer of that which they are seeking because they leave their own country and go afar off. This adventurous march of eastern men began even before the caravan of Bethlehem.

To be aware of this is a way of being a disciple of Christ, of belonging to the Church, of being a priest.

First of all, the Wise Men invite us to walk with them, silently because the journey is long and too many words deprive us of breath, as if too much wanting to name or preach, makes us depart from the silence of the Spirit.

This silent walking changes everything. That is what is the strangest thing for me, the most difficult and undoubtedly the most necessary to live. How can we live in a reality and desire it only when it is lacking, in the face of its absence ? How can we say "I believe" in the very moment of its most adamant silence ?

How can I, each morning, approach the Table and let myself be filled with the Bread, at the very moment that hunger alone can explain why I am there, why I live ?

These paradoxes have often left me uneasy. I am not speaking of a crisis or of an inner doubt about my life as a priest. However, at the same time I cannot be recognised as a priest in China. One can say that this impossibility exists in order to leave the door open to a recognition of which I do not know neither the day nor the

hour, with the intuition that the total relinquishment in relation to what one must well call the heart of my life is the condition of truth... I do not know exactly what priest I am, and it is precisely this ignorance that gives me form as a priest, in the same way that grace alights on abjuration, denial, blindness and infirmity.

Two events might illustrate what I mean by "relinquishment".

One summer day I went from my rural university to the neighbouring city. I stopped in for a visit in the principle Catholic Church of this big city. Since I had to wait for the doors to open, sitting on a bench in the corridor with some other people, I had rapidly excited the curiosity, for it had been certainly a long time since they had seen a foreigner speaking Chinese who wanted to go into a church. The question of my possible identity as a priest was rapidly posed. I did not think it possible to tell the truth. I denied that I was a priest and the cock didn't crow. I don't feel any guilt about it. However, that denial has marked me right up today. In fact, it might have been possible to admit the truth, but I must simply say that I did not have and still do not have the criterions, the landmarks needed in order to know, where, when and how to say that I am a priest. An "unpossessing" and dispossessed" way of keeping one's identity and a silent way of living the ministry and the faith.

Relinquishment in the silence and relinquishment when it is someone else who names you.

Another day one of my students was at the house, something which happens often. It was a young man, attentive, tactful and warm-hearted. It was the eve of my departure from that university. He was melancholic, silent, sad no doubt. After a long silence, he started talking to me about an article published by a national daily paper of the Party. This article reproduced an interview given by an old French expert¹⁶ who lived in another city. My student gave me enough indications about this article which was very warm and even enthusiastic towards this elder man, an old friend of China, motivated by the service of mankind, particularly for young people... I knew enough to be able to say to this student that I knew this man, that I had received a letter from him that very morning, which I showed to him, and told him that I had visited this man a few weeks earlier. The next day, the student brought me the article : a big photo of the man of whom I had guessed the identity and a really well done article. My student did not know that I am a priest, nor did he know that I knew this man, who is also a priest. When I asked him why he had spoken to me about this article, he smiled and said : "We could write article like that about you".

An intersection of lives by the meaning given by Chinese friends.

In this particular situation of China, I feel that there is a call towards a lack of mastery, a dispossession of the possibility to decide the expression of the priestly identity. There is a conversion to a life in the faith that is like a thirsting, a waiting, a silence. It's a bit like saying that there are the words of the faith, of its public witness, of its explicit announcement, and then, before and after, there is a silence between the words. If there is no silence, there cannot be speech.

Would it be too much to say that in this way of living the faith and the ministry, that of all the baptised as well as that of a priest, there is something more than a simple personal or circumstantial experience. I don't live this way by mischance, while awaiting something better or because I can't do otherwise. No, I go forward like someone who has been sent and who sees far ahead forcefully, with a sort of evident necessity, that the Spirit is shared by humanity, there where God has no name and that, in one way or another, must mark the Church, must be a part of her life like the hole in the middle of the hub is part of the wheel, as it is said in Dao De Jing¹⁷:

*We join spokes together in a wheel
but it is the centre hole
that makes the wagon move.*

*We shape clay into a pot,
but it is the emptiness inside
that holds whatever we want.*

*We hammer wood for a house,
but it is the inner space
that makes it liveable.*

*We work with being,
but non being is what we use.*

Should I have taken the steps that would permit me to live openly and publicly my identity as a priest ? Should I, no matter what the cost get my word in, have something to say in the phrasing of the Church in China ? The question in regard to the Church in China is the same as that in regard to the Church as a whole, in France or elsewhere : how does she receive that which come from silence, from the inconceivable, from mystery ? What happens to her, how does she pray, how does she celebrate the Eucharist, how does she theologise, how does she announce the Good News when she recognises that she has been preceded, even though a silence envelops the name of God, even though there is a stolid religious silence, by the mystery of an alliance between humanity and God, by a trail of just and holy men ?

The reason for my being sent is there : to manifest to the Church her insufficiency, her hunger, her hope which she will receive from this people. It is a question of a ministry of witness, of testimony, not so much that of the Church "for the world" as one says, but rather the testimony that comes from the throng and that I carry to the Church. The Chinese throng is the people of just such a priest !

That is why my heart is gripped when I am in the midst of the crowd on my bicycle going to work in the morning, and that is why I was seized with joy, right down to the bottom of my guts when I found myself in the midst of a throng of curious and fervent young people on Christmas Day at Bei Tang, the Northern Church : I am then, exactly there where I can live the ministry which has been confided to me, just to be there in the midst of the throng.

THE SIGN OF THE FRIEND

"May Jesus live with you !" Those were the last words of the letter that Jean-Marie, vicar-general of the Mission of France, wrote to me the eve of my first departure for China.

A phrase with a double meaning : may Jesus accompany you throughout your life and may your life be that of Jesus, so that, by your life Jesus may live.

I have often prayed, and my prayer was like holding the hand of a friend : hold me firmly by the hand and guide me along the road where I will learn to love.

When I think of, speak or write about the Christ, I often use the name of Friend. The vigilant censoring of the mail obliges a discreteness that had led me to a thorough examination of this name. Christ at the very roots of my life, the companion who brings peace to me and who teaches me how to love. He is the -other- in this particular type of solitude that is given me to live.

The second entrance of the phrase calls for another view. Christ, totally unknown by the majority of the Chinese people, at least such I know them myself, is a mystery of silence. I said mystery, because I don't dare say that the Word of God is silence in the heart of the Chinese. Christ is that very same mystery as are the Chinese. He is that face of God, in his image and who bears the name of Chinese. Christ is the secret of God.

In my life as a priest who participates in the mission, there is a birth labour between the companion Jesus, and Christ the secret of God. The mission is not a deployment of troops or the carrying of a strategy : it is a wearisome waiting, it is a stripping down, a being reduced to silence.

My gospel here in China is that of Saint John.

Then Peter and the other disciple went to the tomb together. The two of them were running together, but then the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived first at the tomb. He bent over and saw the linen wrappings, but he did not enter. Simon Peter came behind him [...]. Then the other disciple [...] went in [...] ; he saw and believed (John 20).

He saw and believed. He saw the empty tomb ; the absence, the hollow, the silence... and he believed. He is the beloved disciple. He is the friend of the Friend. Where does John's faith come from ? How is it that he is capable of believing when he sees nothing ? It is by the love that exists in him and in Jesus. A friendly attachment to Jesus is a source of faith and permits one to see the invisible. It is in

no way a screen which could hinder us from recognising the revelation of God in its most decisive newness. The resurrection is assuredly this novelty of which I so much experienced the thirst while living in China, where the mystery of God's revelation seems more opaque.

John, in spite of this friendship, does not see something that Peter cannot see. He sees nothing more, but he knows that it is in hunger, in waiting, in a time of Advent that he is henceforth a believer.

Friendship with Jesus Christ is not consoling, it is hollowing, hungering, but it is also sustaining for who believes without seeing and who walks in the night like a blind man led by the "pillar of fire that lights up the night...".¹⁸

As the impassioned humanity of Christ has swept God onto the breach of universal love, so my friendship with Christ, I believe, can carry me into the same breach. That gives meaning to my pilgrimage in China. To be there and not consider that I am exempt of suffering because of some supposed christian immunity or expectation, but rather all grubby and sweaty from his toiling in me, in my kindred by blood or by history.

Don't be proud. Do not despise those who were broken off like branches ; you don't support the roots - the roots support you (Rm. 11, 18).

To be there humbly beside my brother who does not have the faith. To be there at the foot of the lofty timbers of human suffering where God and man together, draw like scions, at the desire to love and give themselves up to it passionately, even unto death, whether they have recognised each other in this mutual desire or not.

I like the feast of the Visitation and the meeting of the two women. I like the intimate, physical, discreet, one could say, secretive echo, that the coming of Mary evokes in Elizabeth. That speaks so well of the thoughtfulness of God, in the depths of man long before any spoken words. This meeting outlines an attitude that one can call "missionary" ! Being seized by the inner necessity of recognising the Word of God long before He has been named.

[...]and Mary went in haste [...] she entered the house of Zachary and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe in her womb leapt for joy ; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she cried out in a loud voice : Blessed are you among women [...] (Luke 1, 39-42).

There is in the "ministry to the pagans" a need for an attitude similar to that of Elizabeth. The Word comes to me incessantly, concealed and vibrant in the other's expectation, here that of the Chinese, and this expectancy invades my own expectation. The two women recognise each other in their respective and mutual awaiting. The new expectation awakens already that which has matured. The question is to awaken oneself, to be reborn to this other, yet similar awaiting.

THE SIGN OF THE EUCHARIST

The story of the widow of Sarepta is another parable of my life as a priest in China (1 K 17). The believer receives from the other, the pagan, the necessities of life.

Moreover, one must be hungry and even more one must want to live in a pagan land ! Does the Church still have hunger and thirst ? Probably, but this hunger and thirst are they ready to abandon themselves to men ? A hungry man does not choose the provenance of what he is eating, he receives it as a gift.

Yes, once again and forever, one must pass by hollowness, by hunger and by thirst. One must pass by the impossibility to choose his brother guest, his companion, and give thanks when he can walk along with the pagans.

One must be really hungry so that the Eucharist offered in the silent moments of dawn, hidden, cleaned down of all ritualism might be a source, a supper. It is a question of stumbling on the possibility, for a man alone, for a small community, for the Church to take in hand vitally, the memorial of Christ : This is my body given up for the multitude...

This being torn between the one and the all, between the revealed and the mystery, this unbelievable audacious act repeated each day by poor old chaps, can be the confidence of he who lets himself be totally taken up, body and soul, in a sort of hanging and quartering, who lets himself be put aside.

A ministry put aside, for he who is hung and quartered on the pathways of God's dwelling. As a priest in China, the mission confided to me is to live apart, to take the road like a blind man, towards another dwelling of love. To be a priest in China, it is not necessary to have a reason or a meaning. Just lose yourself in a blind walking, guided by the sixth sense of the blind in the faith, all of my faith is brought together there, in this mystery of a blindman who is so sure of what he can't see and who is burnt inside by the necessity that it be true : God is love, and no one is left out of this love.

Being put aside and torn apart are not a "way of" ... It is a hungry faith, a blind faith, a faith faith !

Hunger is not a thing, it is someone who says "I am hungry". Faith is not something in itself that I am going to find in plenitude, at the end of I don't know what. Faith is a walking on, blindly, but still walking on.

The daily Eucharist requires a piece of bread and a bit of wine. This piece of bread on the eucharistic table, this "fruit of the earth and of man's labour" makes me reflect back continually to another table that I find shortly afterwards, my desk in the office of the company that hired me. On this desk each morning there were articles from the Chinese agricultural press, reports on rice cropping, reports on the means of increasing the production of rice in China, assuring the food supply for the Chinese people at the horizon of 2010. My professional life was deeply absorbed daily by what is a stake here, which is so easy to say, but so colossal to guarantee, the alimentary independence of China.

The liturgy recalls explicitly the link that exists between the work needed to make bread and the Bread of Life. A priest - agricultural engineer celebrated and lived this link each morning, each day.

In his latest book, Jacques SOMMET wrote ¹⁹ :

"Nothing escapes from the history of this world. If something of Dachau or of the Shoah was useless in my life, I have no more need to talk about it. If, on the contrary, the event has some meaning, I am obliged to accept this meaning right up to the end. I am obliged to listen, to hear, to hear anew. To catch up. Catching up is action. Action can only be realised in a re-hearing. That signifies hearing now, in my life, what I did not hear before. We can regret having missed the boat of history, but what is more important is to be a part of it today. To restore in a global, meaningful coherence that which was a failure or a success. I must hear what is being said to me about what I didn't do and what now remains to be done [...].

"What interests me is not so much God as men ! In other words : no matter what men have lived, it is the misery of men coupled with my own, it is mankind with me, it is not God [...]. I keep coming back to this point : The relationship with the past that shapes me, to hear again what God and man say to each other in the dialogue, and above all "see" there where God is not named. First urgency : rehear the history of men battling with themselves in order to live, to eat, to be. I would go as far as to say : I could do without God more easily than I could do without the rest of mankind [...].

"If God didn't think the same way, he wouldn't leave me like that, outside with mankind. He is waiting for me to go through humanity. When he hands over Jesus Christ, he hands me over ! He hands him over to me. I read him in my own way. It is not relaxing to become or to be a Christian. God is important. Mankind is even more important ! Don't try to see there a formula, a turnabout : It seems to me to be what God is asking of me. He sends me with my history to humanity [...]. In this innumerable human world, God can only be heard if we listen to him through each man, no matter what his story. Every living being attests to a dimension of humanity, of which no-one can permit himself to side-step. Such is my central point [...].

I cannot realise perhaps to what extent these words were born from the time of the great trial in Dachau... but I also believe that from their birth in this extreme situation they draw a capacity to resound in the heart of every human existence when man tries to follow the way mapped out by his conscience . Thus I dare let these extreme words resound in me. What could better express that which is contained in the "memorial act" that I celebrate alone each day at dawn. How better

render account of an existence which does not carry in itself its own meaning but must look for it outside of itself, when she dwells on hearing over and over the voices of men, in China, desirous to hear what men and God say to each other, avid to "see" there where God is not named.

SIGN OF THE CHURCH

I could give these pages another title directly inspired by Theresa of Lisieux. It would be : *Missionary inversion*. Without any contradiction, there where the christian way calls us to love those close to us, Theresa says "I love those afar off". Her desire to sit at the table of the unbelieving is not to be understood as a salutary mortification. In asking that, and along the last eighteen months of her life, she knows that he who does not believe is a bearer of grace, that the passage by the dark night has made her understand what a Carmelite nun would never have imagined : there are souls who do not have the faith.

Theresa is patroness of the missions because her genial comprehension of the mystery of God and its trail in the progression of the Church.

*The Lord comes !
New hope floods into our lives.
His mystery fecundates a silence of faith.
Let us purify ourselves !*

Thus sings the Church in one of her morning songs during Advent.

A silence of faith. The unbelief of my Chinese brothers, interrogates my faith. If I want the mystery of the coming of the Lord to fecundate my silence of faith, it is necessary that there be silence. Isn't there an experience of silence in faith which is an integral part of the faith and which should not be considered as bad faith ? It is necessary to lose the faith at the same time that, to follow Jesus and the Gospel, one loses his life. This silence of faith is the silence of the believer who finally stops talking.

If there is a theology of "cog stones"²⁰, it is not a question of waiting for a revelation of God (who would dare pick the day of his manifestation ?), nor of the expectancy of the non-believers (can we lend to someone in spite of himself an attitude so decisive ?). It is a matter of the silent expectancy of the believers, the promise of the time when they will be entirely in that silence where, perhaps, God is.

In the same time of Advent the Church sings this hymn on the feast of Saint John of the Cross :

*All forms fade away,
All form having faded away,
towards the only figure you guide our life,
John of the Cross,
across the dark night of the faith.*

Faced with the necessary renewal of the mission for our times, a call is born from the priestly life in China, inviting the Church to enter into an Advent spirituality, one could even say, a spirituality of the night or of silence. She must let herself be converted by her lack, by her ignorance of God, by the unknowing of her own faith, guided towards the figure of the fire that burns without consuming, an unseizable figure for which we must always await in expectation.

In India, Father Aloysius PIEIRIS wrote : "The Church must enter into the waters of the baptism of the poverty of the southern peoples". The Church must let herself be baptised in the power of the Spirit which gives life to the world even to that which is the most strange for her. She must enter into the baptismal waters of unbelief, into the mystery of God present in the life of those who are afar off. If the authentic and inspired Word was carried by Balaam, a pagan prophet, why can it not be so today²¹ ? Does a nomadic people still exist, who camp, a people of travellers and tents... the tribes of Juda, do they still camp in the desert ?

I remember what one of my friends, a woman who has been living in China for a long time said, "It is for my faith that I am here in China. Being here in China helps me to believe. Chosen is a trap word (an allusion to the chosen people, to an eventual privilege of a People of God). It is a mystery. The nations (the pagans) are wanting to Israel. The abrahamic promise concerns the nations. The gratuitousness of God and of his gifts exceeds infinitely what I can imagine. Outside of this type of relationship, all our images of God become idols. My own faith become a mystery for myself. I receive it permanently. For the Christian, the mystery of unbelief is a bit like the Prodigal Son and his brother. The elder brother does not comprehend the reality of his sonship until the day that he discovers an unknown brother, beloved of his father. Ruth, who was not a Jew, becomes an ancestor of Israel. It is as if China was given to the Church so that the Church might not forget that God is different."

Charles PEGUY wrote : "The body of Christ is more far flung than one might think".

We rarely see kites in the French sky. In China, however, in the springtime there are so many of them the sky at noon seems full of stars. In the parks and squares, the crowds seem to want to tear themselves away from the earth and fly towards other horizons.

My life as a priest in China is like one of those kites that dance in the April sky. The logic of a kite is to be held by a hand that becomes more and more remote and to mount higher and higher in order to play with the sun and the high soaring birds. So close to another world, another composition of air and light, the string becomes invisible and sometimes it disappears entirely. Sometimes the hand tires of being held aloft and retaining nothing. The kite, so far away and so high, changes colours and its creases fill out with another wind. He who is holding the string must start walking and go find the kite on other crests, under other skies. A kite cannot remain the dream of the hand that holds it. It shows the direction of the wind and indicates the upper currents. There comes a moment when we no longer know which end of the string is the master. And if the hand tires of its dream and goes back into

the pocket, what happens to the kite ? It continues its flight, often it is torn or burnt : sometimes it meets the regard of children far away and for a moment it rediscovers the meaning of its flight as a kite. Sooner or later it will disappear.

Thus it is in the life of a priest whose reason for being is to be cast in the high winds which torment and propels the world. His life is no more made for the inside than a kite for its box. In her act of dreaming the Church, or perhaps it is more a question of faith, recognises this reason for being. She lets her own string unwind... a part of herself flies afar off. Is there a moment of no return beyond which the faith is nourished by a new grace of light and wind ? Is there then a hand eager enough to remain outside of its pocket and which becomes searching, groping, begging, held out towards that which it can no longer grasp ?

Every life calls for a decision, not that of doing this or that, of taking one direction instead of another, no, we are talking about the decision. For Theresa of Avila, it was the decision to keep going on no matter what until one arrives at the end of the road. For the Church and those who live the ministry in China, it is the decision not to fill in the hollow. The Church is not a reality on the way to accomplishment like a pond being filled with water. We must not think of the distance that exists between the Church and China as a "not yet", a distance that exists only to be reduced. The Church does not need to be master of the situation or have a strategy ready concerning the question of the meeting between the Chinese people and Christ. This meeting is not an end in itself, a dawn, the fulfilment after an effort or the night. It is necessary that the Church by their lives, by the bodies, the hearts of men and women, experience in her most organic tissue the depth of hollowness, the wrench of being put aside, the blindness of the night. In the hollowness of life, walking in the night, in the hung and quartered lives of the priests received in China, it is the very hunger of the Chinese people that becomes our hunger and, because of the ministry confided to us, the Church's hunger ? To grow, the Church does not need to fill in the gap left by the absence of the Chinese, she must rather be hollowed out by the same hollowness that torments the Chinese. All the rest is a question of grace.

One Christmas night in China the following prayer came to me :

*Lord,
you had something to do with my coming here.
I live, as a guest of a people of whom the greater number do not feel the joy of
Christmas.
Give me the joy of this people.
I am the guest of a people who do not sense the hope of Christmas.
May I be reborn in the hope of this people.
The people who receive me do not hear the song of the peace of Christmas.
Let me experience the peace of this people.
In this way, Lord, I will be closer to your incarnation, the mystery of Christmas.*

Theresa of Lisieux was right. China has made of me a different believer, who lives his faith in a way that does not separate him from those who do not believe. The only road that we can follow in order to walk along the Chinese road, the

pathway of the ten thousand steps²², is the mystic road of love. It is as if God and the Chinese made an agreement between them in order to strip me of many things. Assuredly, there is always the possibility of walking along other pathways, elsewhere, but it is quite evident that it would be like deserting my desire.

I am like a prisoner. How can I live already in love ? The mystical desire is not a before and after of God's love, in God. It is Love. It is like a man who emigrates, becoming a stranger, exiled in order to build the well being of his children left far behind. His exile is his love. Thus is my prayer :

*Father, I give you thanks for what you have revealed of your love
and for the experience of yourself that you give to me.
But most of all, I give you thanks for what I do not know of you
and which remains in the mystery of your love of far off nations.*

II

AN ECHO OF THE VOICE
OF THERESA OF LISIEUX

I LOVE FAR OFF LANDS

Priest belonging to the Mission of France, I know the historical proximity between the Mission and the Carmel of Lisieux. The seminary and the headquarters of the Mission of France are no longer installed in Lisieux and that since a long time. I traversed all of my formation years and the first ten years of my ministry without having any contact with the writings of Saint Theresa of Lisieux but I was not without having some contact with the Carmelite spirituality and Carmelite life. In fact, a very strong bond had been created between the seminary of the Mission of France and the Carmelite Monastery of Mazille (Saône et Loire - France) when I was in formation. I can testify here that I have received a lot from this relationship over the last twenty years and more.

It was the time when I was maturing my decision to leave the African country in which I had been living for the last ten years and to make myself available for learning the Chinese language that I began to have personal contact with the writings and the thought of Saint Theresa.

My entrance door was very simple : "I love the far off lands"²³. These words of Theresa touched me greatly and were an encouragement at a time when I had to give an account of a passion in my life underlying the ministry that had been confided to me : a passion for the human paths that are far away from the christian pathway. At the time I was living in hard conflict with the religious sisters who were working with me in Africa. We were living a community life and I had allowed two young French men to join us so that they could live a time of benevolent voluntary service helping rural development which was our field of action. The two young men were not practising Christians. Their relationship with the faith was entirely inexistant, accompanied by a certain attitude of rejection for one, and unhostile indifference for the other. Some of the sisters were not at all welcoming towards these young men. On the contrary, they manifested a certain comportment not at all in keeping with the Gospel and tinted by a type of proud violence that could not accept the fact that these young men did not take part in their religious practices. This attitude was in keeping with certain contemptuous remarks that these religious had already expressed when talking about the village people who were, for the most part, unbaptised. I had to be intransigent on the subject.

This left a profound wound and a strong inner revolt. How could one so pervert the Gospel project ?

That, no doubt, made me formulate the desire to go further down the road between Jerusalem and Jericho, there where the believer, the faithful, the Church have the calling to become the neighbour of those who are afar off (Luke 10, 29-37). This desire had a name : China.

During this time of crisis and decision, I was in correspondence with a brother of the Mission of France who was a member of the governing body. He understood quite well the polarity of my life as a priest. I summed up my life in these words of Theresa : "I love the far off". This brother always answered me by uniting this phrase to another phrase of Theresa : "Is my heart filled with pure love ?"²⁴

The question of love was thus graven into the heart of the radical missionary adventure that is to be lived out when one is sent to the far off nations.

THE ABSENT ONE OF SATURDAY

How can we avoid paying more attention to she who so masterfully anticipated on her time and on the theology of the mission ? During the Holy week of 1896, between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, during the time of absence, she avows the upheaval that seized her : "Jesus made me experience the fact that there are truly souls who do not have the faith." He who does not believe still has the wealth of a soul. This soul does not possess faith in the God of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself reveals to Theresa this knowledge about men who are not Christians.

We can't help noticing that this takes place in the heart of the time when we remember the death of the Friend and his absence from the world of the living. I don't much like the liturgical filling in, or the adoration that one sees in certain churches on Holy Saturday. Theresa points out the importance of letting this time of the Absent One of Saturday burrow deep into us and dilate our heart. Silence is needed, the darkness of the night is needed, absence is needed and probably as well, dread and doubt.²⁶

The moment at which Theresa experiences this upheaval is very significant in reference to the liturgical period of time. It is equally significant in relation to the aggravation of her malady and her suffering. The attacks that she has during the Holy Days, plunge Theresa suddenly more profoundly into weakness and the acute consciousness that neither she herself nor those around her can stem the progression of the disease.

Theresa has received from Jesus something in the order of the "senses". There is no written doctrinal revelation, no special intellectual enlightenment, just a feeling. My own experience leads me to join Theresa fully in this feeling. Reason is obviously quite necessary and we must eventually express faith experiences in theological formulas. At the same time, I believe that no one can go towards an other unless he feels some sort of attraction, a desire. Long before it is a weighed and well thought out response to the call of the Church, or to a need of the faith, the missionary way of life is first of all a question of men and women who felt the need to go towards, to enter into relationship with other human beings, our brothers, who live on other paths, than that laid out by the Gospel. It is a sort of intimate and inner necessity that one follows at the dawn of a missionary life and that is revived in the heart each morning. Is it not similar to love ? Do we ask two lovers why they love each other ?

Theresa's feeling is not a capricious, fleeting or fickle one. It is not concerned with secondary things. It is based on a serious reality. The grace that Jesus gives to Theresa and likewise the reception that she gives it in return is situated in the realm

of the truth. What Theresa feels belongs to the truth. No one can go back on what Theresa felt on that day, beginning with Theresa herself, without entering into a debate on the questions which touch the truth of "to be a man", ontological questions. This "truthfully" that Theresa felt, is it not the very thing that suffices in order to qualify Theresa as a Doctor of the Church ? Her entire doctoral thesis seems to me to be contained in this phrase of Easter 1896 !

In a different light, this "truthfully" in Theresa's phrase, relates more directly to "the souls who lack faith". The lack of faith in a soul is not the fruit of a lie that the soul tells itself. Someone who says : "I don't believe" is as honest as he who says "I believe".

What one must live beside this man who is not a Christian, is not a contemptuous ruefulness, the proud look of someone who has and has not, it is not even the anguish of leading him to the faith by thousands of missionary schemes, more or less respectful of his soul, this soul that exists in spite of its lack of faith.

What Theresa received from Christ in the heart of the Easter night of 1896, was the knowledge that the only real question between God and man is love. The soul is not an abode of faith, it is an abode of love. In the 19th century way of thought, that marked Theresa's own way of thinking, the soul is precisely the distinctive mark that differentiates man from the animals. Even more, in the eyes of the Christians, I should say the Catholics, of that time, it was the mark of a "real" man, that is to say, a Christian. Theresa discovers that the soul is the mark of all men and that the difference that exists between those who have the faith and those who don't have it opens up between them a breach of hunger, of desire, of thirst, which is the very breach of love. If the faith marks the believer with a "privilege" it is that of redoubling in himself that hunger and that desire because his faith makes him believe that that is to desire God himself.

Yes, there is a bond of meaning between the mission and love. In the midst of the colonial and imperialistic century dominated by the great Christian nations as France, a domination intimately linked to that which the Church of the time thought to be a missionary task, Theresa unveils another necessity for the believer. When I love my fellow man, I receive from him the grace that abides in him, his grace as a man : love. My faith in God, he who is this same love, makes me desire ardently the meeting with this human brother. By this encounter I receive love, I grow in love, my humanness grows, I expand my soul, that place in man where the grace of faith alights.

I like to call that the "missionary inversion according to Theresa of Lisieux" ! The Church and the faithful in their fidelity to send afar off, go to that very source that sends them. They go to a man, not so much because this man needs them, but rather because they need him. They go to this man in order to receive a greater revelation of love. Because love alone can be the very name of God, there is only one missionary task : reveal this love by loving. And what is loving if not, first of all, to leave in the depths of oneself the hunger of being loved, to hollow out in oneself the capacity to let oneself be loved, to keep alive in oneself the certainty that only the love of another can make me live ?

That is what Theresa discovers brutally at Easter of 1896 and which will mark the eighteen months that she has left to live.

While writing these lines, certain faces come to my memory, the faces of worker priests. Their adventure in the service of the Gospel has led them as well to experience this same "missionary inversion".

LETTERS FROM CHINA

In June 1896, hardly three months after Easter, Theresa receives as a brother a young man who is going to be ordained a priest and missionary. Adolphe ROULLAND is ordained at the end of June 1896. While celebrating the Mass at the Carmel of Lisieux at the beginning of July, he catches a glimpse of Theresa, speaks with her and soon after embarks for his mission in China !

Adolphe ROULLAND will spend thirteen years in China, from 1896 to 1919 working principally in the Si Chuan province where I myself have lived.

Outside of the conversation which they had at the Carmel in the month of July 1896, Theresa and Adolphe wrote just a few letters. Theresa wrote seven letters of which two were written before Adolphe left for China. One of her letters has been lost. As far as we know, Adolphe wrote about ten letters in all to his Carmelite "sister". Theresa will not read the last letter that Adolphe addressed to her, as she was dead before the letter arrived at Lisieux. In the opposite sense, Theresa, will already be dead when Adolphe reads the last letter that she addressed to him. This correspondence which remains open like an unfinished sentence seems to invite us to enter into it and continue it in another way, even though a century has passed.

China and Si Chuan of the 1990s has changed a lot in these last 100 years. In the course of this century the spiritual and missionary trail marked out by Theresa in her dialogue with Adolphe has been a sign to others. Among them, there is the Cardinal SUHARD who wanted to found the Seminary of the Mission of France in Lisieux in the wake of Theresa. Many of the brothers of the Mission since 1942 have walked in the footsteps of Theresa. I myself am one of them as I contemplate the China of 1997. There are as well other seminarians who, having crossed the path of Theresa, now desire to follow the same trail.²⁷

After having written these pages which recount my experience as a priest in China, I would like to reread this correspondence 100 years later in the light of today. Outside the strong consonance with the voice of Theresa, I do it as well with a sort of wink : with one hundred years difference between them, two "missionary" priests in China have Theresa as their companion in their spiritual journey. This rereading of the correspondence of Theresa and Adolphe ROULLAND is rooted in the upheaval of Easter 1896. When she writes to Adolphe, Theresa has in mind and in her heart that which Jesus made her feel and realise that Holy Saturday night.

The lines which follow have no pretention of being an academic study done up by a specialist peering over the old manuscripts of Saint Theresa. I prefer to consider the dialogue between Theresa and Adolphe with the heart, the intelligence and the experience of a modern day man, even if there is risk of anachronism. I

continue in the momentum of a priest of the Mission of France living in China in 1997 and not in 1897s. I have no desire to do up a didactic and exhaustive study stuffed with references more or less tied up with the writings of Theresa. Theresa is like the bird that she painted on the altar linens that were the gift offered to Adolphe for his ordination. This bird flies from one brother to another, from one life to another, from one generation to another, and each time that he alights, he sings and leaves a wisp of grace. All those who have desired to change this bird's song, restrain his flight or substitute their twigs to hers have been mistaken. This bird brings his grace. She is free to give and I am free to receive it and speak of it as my heart inclines me.²⁸

BROTHERS AND SISTERS

It is Theresa who starts the correspondence with Adolphe ROULLAND. In reality, Adolphe's first letter was addressed to the prioress. In her first letter written just a few days before Adolphe's ordination Theresa opens with, "my Reverend Father". Adolphe responds beginning by "my sister" and his second letter "my sister in Jesus". After having received her first letter from Adolphe, Theresa adopts the opening "my brother" which she will use right up to her last letter.

I have read and heard those who draw a comparison between this appellation of brother and sister and the family history of Theresa. Maurice BELLIERE²⁹ and Adolphe were a sort of compensation for the brothers that she did not have in her family. In my opinion this idea is not sufficient enough to give the full depth of the fraternity indicated here, especially when we consider that the sister in question is a Carmelite and the brothers are priests.

I was ordained a priest of the Mission of France, exactly twenty years ago. The eve of that celebration, which took place in the outskirts of Paris, the rector of the seminary told me that eight Carmelite nuns from Mazille had received authorisation to be present at the ceremony. I was very moved as were the other seminarians and priests who have frequented this Carmel over the years. The nuns' gesture gave witness to the strength of the bonds between us. But above all their presence indicated two essential things. On the one hand, there is a bond of spiritual need, a sort of mystical brotherhood towards priests which is inherent to the Carmelite monasteries. On the other hand the Carmelites have received the grace of an extraordinary comprehension of just what is the mission life. These two aspects show the exceptional fraternity between the Carmelite nuns and missionary priests. This relationship does not remain on an abstract level, it takes flesh in a bond between a brother and a sister, between a specific Carmelite nun and a specific priest. The presence of those eight Carmelite nuns at my ordination was a manifestation of all that and they wished to underline that even more so liturgically by standing together around me a moment, their hands uplifted, after the Bishop and all the priests present had made the sacramental imposition.

Carmelite sister and brother priest are two members of a mystical brotherhood. But let it be understood, mystical does not mean that it has nothing to do with down to earth life. The correspondence between Theresa and Adolphe is full of very lively thoughtfulness and affection. They call each other "my brother" "my sister" because they like to think of themselves as such, this sentiment build them up and gives them joy and confidence.

I am a witness to the fact that an identical relationship with the Carmelites of Mazille has great helped me since becoming a priest and I draw joy and confidence from it.

Theresa and Adolphe don't call each other brother and sister by chance or by habit. It is a mutual decision which has a spiritual and mystical meaning and this decision makes them happy.

We must read in the same light the exchange of anniversaries and other important dates and events of their lives. The coincidence between the date of Theresa's religious profession and the birth of Adolphe's missionary vocation is not mentioned in their correspondence as a simple anecdote. This coincidence is a supporting beam in the brotherly framework that commits or links them and which Theresa calls an "apostolic union" in her very first letter. The permission which the prioress gave to Theresa, in contradiction to the strict rule, so that she might keep Adolphe's photo, cannot be understood unless something very serious is at stake. All of this permits them to remain present to each other and to establish a similarity between the Carmel and the Si Chuan (Theresa's letter of the 19th of March 1897) so that they can be close in spite of the distance between them.

Their way of addressing one another, anniversaries, photos, maps and little souvenirs would be of no interest unless they serve this relationship of which the purpose is to allow each one to live more fully their mission of love. It is wrong to think that the "highest service" can do without a good coat of smiles, knowing winks and funny stories of lobsters on the run.

ENLARGE THE SPACE OF YOUR TENT

If we consider that Theresa's first letter (June 23,1896) is a sort of brief entering into contact, we can see that her second letter (July 30, 1896) is the real beginning of her correspondence. One cannot help remarking that Theresa puts the bar very high in proposing to Adolphe right away a meditation on Isaiah. Would Theresa have dwelled on these texts during an ordinary evening of meditation, if they had not taken on a new meaning for her after the passage of Easter three months earlier ? Would she have chosen these texts of Isaiah as the figurehead of her correspondence if the far off companionship of Adolphe did not solicit her in an adventure of faith lived largely, generously and audaciously in a universal dimension ?

Adolphe's letters lack perhaps the mystical and theological amplitude found in those of Theresa, it is rather his missionary life, in itself, that is the great letter that he sent to Theresa which made her grow and advance on her own spiritual road.

Theresa's rereading of Isaiah is not a lesson of missionary theology given to the young priest Adolphe ROULLAND by Theresa, Doctor of the Church. It is Adolphe's life that leads Theresa to a new reading of this passage of Isaiah.

*Enlarge the space of your tent;
lengthen its ropes and strengthen the pegs!
You will extend your boundaries on all sides;
Your descendants will inherit the land that other nations now occupy.
Cities now deserted will be filled with people.
Fear not, you will not be disgraced again;
You will not be humiliated.
You will forget your unfaithfulness as a young wife,
and your desperate loneliness as a widow. (54,2-4)*

A prophecy for Jerusalem, who from her youth to old age has never traversed anything else except her own sterility. And here again before Theresa's eyes are the multitude of "souls who do not have the faith". It is these souls that Isaiah calls the nations, who come and render fertile humility, shame, waiting and sterility. The missionary inversion inaugurated by Theresa in the heart of the French missionary movement which was powerful, organized and very sure of itself as long as it remained close to the colonial sword, this missionary inversion finds its most solid scriptural roots in this passage of Isaiah.

*Look around you and see what is happening:
They are all gathering together, they are coming to you!
Your sons will come from afar off;
Your daughters will be carried on the hip like children.
You will see this and be filled with joy;
Your heart will tremble and dilate with joy;
The wealth of the nations will be brought to you;
From across the seas their riches will come. (60, 4-5)*

A certain way of looking at things is needed in order to discern the coming of the Kingdom. This regard is the only one that can make the believer capable of recognising as brothers, sons of the same human brotherhood, the faces of those who are the far off. We must look around us and stop looking only at ourselves. The beauty of the Church does not stem from inside herself, she receives it from the nations, the peoples far over the seas, on the high seas of her walls.

*The Spirit of God is upon me.
He has anointed me and sent me
to preach the good news to the poor:
To heal the broken-hearted,
To announce release to captives
And freedom to those in prison.
He has sent me to proclaim
That the time has come
when the Lord will save his people
and defeat their enemies.
He has sent me to comfort those who mourn. (61, 1-2)*

The messianic figure prefigures what Theresa believed to be the real missionary. Seized by the Spirit, he is entrusted with a mission of compassion, liberation and love for his wounded brothers. What the missionary transmits is love. For Theresa, the Spirit is naturally the Spirit of Love, a communication of God - Love. Thus Theresa places at the top of the missionary program, in identifying it with the mission of Christ and giving it as the essence of this mission, to love with the very love of God.

*I am full of enthusiasm,
my heart rejoices in the Lord,
He has clothed me with salvation,
And covered me with the mantle of justice,
like the bridegroom wears a diadem,
And the Bride who is covered with jewels.
As surely as seeds sprout and grow,
Thus the Lord will make justice and praise sprout
In the face of all the nations.
(61, 10-11)*

These verses touch me by their enthusiasm. They are an echo in me of the text that I chose for my ordination, twenty years ago, a text so meaningful for the Carmelites. Elias is in the desert, he encounters the worst opposition and grave difficulties in his mission. The Angel of God comes to meet him and poses the fundamental question: "What are you doing here in the desert,...", "I am consumed with zeal for the Lord God" he says simply. Thus it will be given to him to recognize the consuming presence of God in the "soft whisper of a voice" (1 Kings 19 ; 13). Once again, we must not send reason and passion off back to back, we must not refuse the feelings of enthusiasm and zeal, which gives birth to prophets, the great lovers of Humanity and God.

BEING HAPPY

We find this enthusiasm in Adolphe's letters and this, in a very particular way. In his letter of January 1897, he feels the need to write that he was happy to leave for China and that he is happy to be there. This is not a simple common-place insistence. Theresa, would she have referred to it had it been so? This mention of the word "happy" takes on a special meaning when it is written by someone who, in the same letter speaks of tribulations, danger and the possibility of death. In any case, I believe that in 1897 as in 1997 life in China does not make a man happy in the everyday sense of the word. China was and remains a rugged country, especially for strangers. One must know how to draw deeply at the heart of the Chinese country and leave oneself open to a very great desire, the greatest of attachments, in order to say that one is happy in China. In Adolphe's insistence on saying that he is happy, there is, in addition to the sentiment of enthusiasm analogous to that of Isaiah or to that of the zeal of Elias, a sort of voluntary conjuring of a destiny which he feels already at the very moment of his first leave-taking and which will move him away from China (in 1909 he will be recalled to France to teach at the Foreign Mission's Seminary in Paris). It is as if China is one of those loves, of a passion so strong, of such a strange seduction, that at one and the same time that one gives oneself to it, one has the intuition of a separation, of a threshold that it is impossible to step over. How could Theresa not have perceived such feelings, she who knew very early, that her end was already a part of her youthful Carmelite life. We find ourselves here in the realm of fulgurant love, a love which cannot fulfill itself except in the loss of self.

A stroke of great humanness coming from Theresa accompanies this anguish that Adolphe feels at the moment of his departure and that he betrays in affirming with a certain vehemence : "I am happy". Theresa seems to humanize the words of Jesus when she writes what the evangelist did not retain: "it is impossible to leave one's father, one's mother and one's country without experiencing all the heartbreak inherent in the separation". Those who go afar off, even if their eyes are full of joy, need the delicate attention of a sister who knows that compassion for the suffering of a brother will help him more than an exaggeration of heroic sentiments. How fraternal you are Theresa, you who know how to soothe the pain while touching the wound, you who know how to fill the heart of a brother while talking to him of emptiness.

I would like to end this long digression by recalling the face of the Little Sister of whom I have already spoken. She often talked to me about what she considered to be the great chance of her life: her long friendship with different priests, her brothers. These friendships, strong, joyous and calming have made her happy. I can witness to the fact that she renders her brother priests just as happy.

A NATION OF JUST MEN

*My people will be a just people
I myself have planted them. (Is. 60, 21).*

The prophet Isaiah takes up again the image of the just man. In the light of what Theresa gives us to understand concerning our brothers who do not have the faith, this image of the just develops itself in a particular way. The just man is not, in the first place or solely a faithful of a church, the pious man of a religious creed. The just is a universal figure. The just is a man with a soul that is a source of love. It was not easy for a young Frenchman of Adolphe's epoch to free his regard from all colonialist a priori, that is to say, from pessimism or even worse, from contempt for those colonised or "missioned", in this case the Chinese. A century later, notably in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, it is possible, it is even essential, it is urgent to know how to recognize in every man, a person called by the figure of the just man. The liturgy of the Church, its thanksgiving would be in the dimensions of the geography of the heart of God, if their litany could be enriched by the names of all the just of the history of mankind, those who have fulfilled their vocation as men and women by putting their lives to the service of their brothers and the truth. The missionary, is he not the man that the Church sends to far off lands so that in return he may open up her heart and her praise by murmuring in her the name of all the Justs, the beloved of God whom the Church does not know and whom he has heard far from the christian path?

*I will spare some of them and send them to the nations
and the distant lands that have not heard of my fame
or seen my greatness and power:
They will proclaim my greatness among these nations.
They will bring back all your brother countrymen,
from all of the nations (...)
Just as the sons of Israel bring their offerings to the House of the Lord
in ritually clean plates. (Is. 66, 19-20).*

All along this way of love on which men recognize each other in their common vocation to be just, the word of the man of God can be spoken and heard. When he speaks of the glory of God to his brother, who knows nothing of this, his words will be authentic and received as such. They will not be heard as a simple catch-word formula, disdainful and disrespectful of others. It will be received as a word offered to a brother, worthy of their common humanity, precisely in the very esteem which authorizes the faithful to carry before God the offerings of the world.

THE FIRELIGHTER

Already in her first letter to Adolphe, Theresa begs him to ask Jesus, during his first mass "may he enkindle in me the fire of his love so that I may afterwards help you to light this fire in the hearts of men". This theme of fire, of enflaming, goes well beyond the correspondence between Theresa and Adolphe. It is a constant theme in all of her writings. This same demand is mentioned again even more matured in a letter to Father Maurice BELLIERE. Theresa asks these two priests to say this prayer every day after her death:

*Merciful Father,
In the name of our most sweet Jesus,
of the Virgin Mary and of all the saints,
I ask you to enkindle my sister with your Spirit of Love
and to give her the grace to make you very loved.*

Keep in mind that now that Theresa is so close to death, she does not deviate from the one and only reality that can carry away all that she is and which is the only thing "worthy of mankind", love. She asks her brother priests to join with her in committing themselves to pray that they may all be inflamed with love. Theresa speaks of a great and broad human solidarity where "souls who do not have the faith" could feel at home. This mutual help among men to enkindle the fire of love is not an old fashioned idea of a bygone era. Theresa, Adolphe and Maurice are respectively twenty-four, twenty-six and twenty-three years old in 1897 when Theresa makes this request to her two brother priests. All three of them are full of an ardent youthful desire that wants to know how to live in a manner that makes life worth living.

I well remember the response of one of my students from Si Chuan University. I had asked the students in my French class to prepare a short oral composition on a subject that was important to them (family, studies etc.). A young Chinese woman, Miss Xiao read the following text :

"There are two sorts of persons in the world: those who do not get enthusiastic about anything. They live as it were, simply to pass the time. It doesn't occur to them to ask why the time passes. Then there are those who are always conscientious, attentive to things and who hope that they are not wasting their life. But even here, only a small number manage to live as they hope to according to their conscience. The rest do not have this strength. Why?

"I find that certain have a firm spirit. They are easily enflamed, they burn and then they can offer light and warmth. There are as well certain who are

easily enflamed and have the possibility of offering light and warmth. They are not in themselves firelighters. They are like wood and coal. They need to be ignited by a match in order to give light, warmth and strength.

"The majority of men, lacking this strength, need a firelighter to enkindle them. Thus the firelighter becomes a necessary condition for success. If one finds this firelighter he can burn, otherwise he remains just a pile of wood and cold coal.

"Happily enough it is not so difficult to find this kindling. It can be perhaps, the biography of a great man, a suggestive book, a magnificent film, a few words spoken by a friend, a prominent leader, a happy voyage, a sublime symphony, a holy and pure love

"This firelighter can sometimes come automatically. But in the majority of cases we have to look for it ourselves".

A century apart, a young girl from Normandy and another from Si Chuan call upon their fellow men so that they may help one another fulfill their humanity. One is a Christian, the other is not. One of them believes in God, the other does not have this faith. They are however, so much sisters of humanity in their quest! How can we read what Theresa writes about the enkindling of love and interpret it as flight, a religious delirium, or even more so, a domain reserved for a pious catholic elite? I am, I want to become, more and more a brother of such sisters !

The image of an enflaming fire makes us look back to the experience of Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3). This does not lead us away from Theresa's idea. Moses is an emblematic figure of the believer with whom she can identify herself. The fire is there, sometimes outside of the beaten path, calling us to make a detour, to let ourselves be diverted. To go towards this fire is the sacred moment in a lifetime. No one can go without first having stripped himself down, taken off his shoes and completely bared himself. From this fire which burn without destroying, springs forth the name of man and each man responds with the same words as did Adolphe the day he was ordained: "Here I am". It is then that God reveals his name. What, but I should rather say who embraces with out breaking, who calls man irresistibly and who finds him totally ready. Love.

THE LANGUAGE OF A CHILD

In her first long letter to Adolphe (July 30th 1896) after having meditated on Isaiah, Theresa concludes by an allusion to a "warrior" verse of Saint Paul (Eph.6; 17), which is in itself an echo of the prophetic tradition "[...] your sword is that of the word". Theresa leaves us here in uncertainty. Was she thinking of the word of God as mentioned by Saint Paul, or that of the missionary as teacher and preacher? Theresa probably realized that the Chinese language presented enormous difficulties and demanded a real effort for those who wish to learn it. She had read the lives of saints and the stories of missionaries brought back from China or Asia, like the correspondence of Theophane VENARD, a missionary killed in Vietnam. How can we believe that the words of a newcomer to China could be likened to a sword, before he even began to study the language!

The next part of the correspondence is enlightening. In January 1897, a four year old child accompanies Adolphe in his first babbling in the Chinese language! Adolphe laughs at himself: "When will I celebrate my first baptism, my first conversion? Alas! I am reduced to the state of a baby, I can't say a word".

Theresa, a real sister to Adolphe, takes note of this short passage. She who knew that "the only weapon is love" (letter of July 30th 1896) leaves off the warlike references and takes up the theme of the frail speech of a child proposed by Adolphe: "I am like a child who wants to read a book while holding it upside down", wrote Theresa after having tried to decipher the characters of Adolphe's Chinese visiting card. (letter of March 19th 1897). She seizes this perch of childhood offered by Adolphe to reveal to him that she herself is on the same road of childhood, "taking nothing but milk ("lolo", *sic*) before returning to the Father".

Faced with the Chinese language, no stranger escapes from this feeling of being like a small child. Adolphe comes back with the idea in April 1897: "Here I am nothing but a baby trying to learn the language and not being able to spout out a word (...). Theresa once again takes up the comparison, this time in order to show Adolphe that this way of childhood is the Royal Road, the same road taken by a comrade of Adolphe who had just been killed by bandits: "Father MAZEL who was ordained the same day as you, didn't know how to talk either; nevertheless, he has already received the palm³⁰ (...)"! (letter of May 9th 1897).

We must not see any infantilism or complaisance in this exchange. The "little way" of Theresa is not a childish way in the sense of immaturity or adolescence, it is rather a way followed by those who know that they do not have many means and who cannot hoist themselves .. up to Jesus³¹ on their own. These words must be taken in the same sense as the words of the Gospel on the primacy of children. As a faithful adult, to start down a road which makes us experience the frailty of our own

speech and to know that it shall always be like that, belongs to the missionary image. To use the image of childhood is a way of reminding us of the words of Jesus to Nicodeme :

How can a grown man be born again?...

Jesus replied: (...) "we must be born again.

The wind blows where it wishes, you hear its voice,

but you do not know where it comes from nor where it is going.

Thus it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John. 3)

Being reborn by another to the point where the other is himself a four year old child ! That is "the way of love and confidence".

WALKING WITH THE FRIEND

In his letter of April 29th 1897, Adolphe shares with Theresa a surprising confidence: "I began my ministry by carrying the good Lord to the dying. I was glad to walk with Jesus in the midst of the pagans who certainly didn't realize that I had a treasure pressed to my heart". Surprising indeed this 180° turnabout in the heart of a missionary. Adolphe could have moaned over the necessity of this camouflage, in order to carry Christ to others, he who was so sure that he was accomplishing the will of God. He could have been furious against these pagans whose hearts were still closed to the truth and who obliged him to commit an act that seems rather blasphemous, to hide the light of the world... . No, he seems to have been seized as well by the "missionary inversion according to Theresa"! He is happy. He's not happy about the pagans' ignorance. He is however, content to simply walk with Jesus, leaving to Him the care of making Himself known to the pagans, when and if He wants to. In her letter of the 19th of April 1897, which will cross in the sea mail Adolphe's letter of the 29th of April, Theresa writes "Jesus doesn't need anyone's help in order to accomplish his work".

One hundred years after Adolphe, I myself have often experienced this joy, particularly during the daily celebration of the Eucharist. No China man has ever assisted at these Eucharists celebrated behind closed doors in the lodging that the university put at my disposition as a professor, or in my two room flat in an apartment house in Beijing. Naturally my joy does not stem from this hidden character or the necessity of secretness to which the severity of the Chinese Law obliges us, just as Adolphe's joy did not have its origin in the hostility that the Chinese people showed towards foreigners.

Carry Christ without brandishing him like a banner. Be Christlike without boasting. Be a witness of Love without being arrogant. Talk about God without deafening the other. Love those who are afar off and start by discreetly seeking their love.

As a priest sent to China, I am often questioned about the need of discretion. Sometimes I would like to be able to be more openly a priest among my Chinese friends. When I come back to France I am happy to live more frankly my identity as a priest for a few weeks. But there is no real opposition between being very discreet in China and living openly elsewhere. They are two different ways of serving the mission. I believe that both ways are necessary in the Church. At the same time that the mystic of the worker priests hidden in the dough existed, there developed as well, the need of a greater visibility in witnessing to the love of God and the recognition of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Now that we are in a time of intense mediatisation of religious events, sometimes overflowing with spontaneity in the expression of the religious feeling,, it remains necessary to witness to the fact that

God can reveal himself to man in the extreme delicacy of an intimate venture and that disbelief will not necessarily disappear like magic because the faithful confess their faith publicly. Between the soul of a believer and "a soul who truly does not have the faith" the language that passes is that of love.

I imagine that Adolphe's guts were knotted with joy when he found himself surrounded by the Chinese, the pyx³² pressed to his heart ! It must have been a bit like the pilgrims of Emmaus and their hearts that burned within them. In order to experience such a profound and intimate joy, you have to be very close to Jesus, he who in China, I took to calling "the Friend". Theresa wanted to make Jesus loved, particularly by the priests. Making Jesus loved is not a cozy little occupation, that can be understood simply by a few specialists of pious language. According to Theresa, making Jesus loved is the same thing as making goodness loved, making love itself loved. How can a priest be a missionary if he himself does not love Love and does not have a great hunger of it? How can a priest in China live if he does not go each morning and seek this love from this Friend at the Eucharistic table, just as he goes everyday at his work to the little Chinese restaurant that serves as a canteen, and everywhere else where life brings him to "the table of the non-believers"!

This reminder of the Eucharist is like a well defined trail throughout the correspondence of Theresa and Adolphe. It is not a simple reflection of the spirituality of their times. It is putting at the center, in the hearth, in the very heart of the human adventure, the act of the memorial of love. The Eucharist is not an exotic moment of an esoteric doctrine. It is the enacting of the memory of the adventure of a God who so loved the world in which we live that he makes each day the time of his coming. A God who is here with mankind in the silence of suffering.

Since my adolescence I have loved the celebration of the Mass. I can even risk saying that in my youth, the lung that first gave oxygen to my life as a believer, was that of the Eucharist, the lung of familiarity with the Word of God came later. In China, the words by which I express my faith come rarely to my lips in public. Under such circumstances, prayer becomes ever so much more a source for strengthening the faith, along with an everyday practice of the Gospel.

For the first visit of the brothers of the Mission in Si Chuan, where I was living, I wrote the Eucharistic Prayer of the Rice Fields. The Carmelites nuns of Mazille had invited the priests of the Mission to climb the Burgundy hills in 1996 for an encounter dedicated to the memory of Saint Theresa and to give thanks to God in the presence of her relics. In preparation for this encounter, while I was still in China, I wrote the Eucharistic Prayer of the Relics: "Give thanks for the Holiness that Remains". These two prayers are another way of saying what has been written in this book and above all what I have experienced in China.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER OF THE RICE FIELDS

On the mountains chiseled like the frames of a mirror,
 where lies the waters still and fecund,
on the terraced slopes with their groves of oranges and tea,
by the greens and the yellows and the red of the earth,
in the whispers of love coming from the bamboo refuge,
by the calls and the songs resounding from the rice fields,
we are filled today with beauty.

We wish to give it back to you, God our Father, in thanksgiving.
From this land the dwelling place of man from time immemorial, we praise you,
You were already present in the beginnings of man's trail,
You walked with them all over the earth,
and here, on the paths of countless steps.
You are the companion of each man's ways.
We give you thanks for your mysterious and faithful presence among all the peoples
 of the earth.
We give you thanks for the knowledge that you give of yourself,
and above all for what we do not yet know of you,
and which will perhaps remain forever in the mystery of your love of far off lands.
In the surprising silence of your way in the land of China,
We believe in the holiness of men, your beloved, which is in harmony with your own
 holiness.
In this faith we praise you: *Holy, Holy, Holy...*

In our faith, the words describing our history with you come upon our lips.
We like to go apart to whisper them, each day, like today,
 on the threshold of the Chinese land.
Created by your love, to love,
we wish to live this grace of sonship,
discover it and recognize it in the secret resemblance that each face bears to you.
In the tradition of your covenants we are one of your dwelling places
and we know what is your faithfulness to each of your families.
We have no other trace of your wisdom except the long march of a millennial people;
We have no other sign of the Spirit than that which entrains men and women of the
 Yellow Land to the front lone of the truth.
We have received the witness of your loving passion for humanity.
Teachers, prophets, saints and disciples, the poor of a "Hundred Names" are the
 milestones of your revelation.
You became part of our history by your birth among us, undergoing suffering.

Jesus is your Christ.

Having committed his Spirit, he confirms us in our life as sons and brothers.
You have so loved the world in which we live,
that you make each day the hour of your coming among us.
Here, among men, you are silent, respecting the silence of suffering.
You are there, at the foot of the painful crosses plunged into this land.
With mankind, you draw like a graft at the desire to love.
With him, you give yourself in love, passionately even unto death,
Whether or not you have recognized one another in this desire.

It is the memorial of this common vocation that we celebrate today,
as we often whisper at dawn silent and hidden.

We pray you God our Father, open us up to the presence of your Holy Spirit when
we gather together that which comes from men's lives.
Long before our offering, this life is worthy of you.
You had no other life in which to become man,
and Jesus, the Christ, had no other bread or wine,
to turn into his body and blood,
love given and shared.

During the supper that he ate with his disciples,
he took the bread,
blessed it and gave it to his disciples saying :

*"Take this, all of you, and eat it.
This is my body which will be given up for you".*

When supper was ended, he took the cup.
again he gave you thanks and praise,
gave the cup to his disciples and said :

*"Take this, all of you and drink from it : this is the cup of my blood
the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.
It will be shed out for you and for all men so that sins may be forgiven.
Do this in memory of me".*

Let us proclaim the mystery of the faith...

In this memorial of the death and the resurrection of Christ,
the very heart of our faith,
keep us, O Lord, from being arrogant.
May we remain earthy and moist in the throes of human trouble,
side by side with our brothers whose suffering has dried up their faith,
in the midst of the throng who are known to you in the Silence of your Name.

By the Holy Spirit, may the small number united for this meal suggest the multitude,
and not lock in the grace that you grant them of being united.
May this grace reach out to all the continents, nations and human communities.

May it vivify all the men and women who aid and serve the peoples of this country.
May your Spirit enflame those who have the charge hidden or public, of your people.
Here in China, our thoughts go first to the Tibetan monks still living in exile ;
to the priests, pastors, and bishops in their prisons or their clandestine life,
to all the faithful and those who fight for justice and the truth and who are forced into
silence.

We pray for our brother Christians who belong to the Church of China,
for the bishops who suffer for their fraternity with the Bishop of Rome,
for the bishop of this diocese.
Keep us in brotherly communion with our bishop
and with all those who have served our common life,
with all our brothers of the Mission and the young brothers in formation.

How can we celebrate the memorial of the Passion of Christ and his Resurrection,
without keeping alive the memory of those who have gone before us,
in hope and in confidence, or in doubt and in fear,
at the moment of death.

You alone know them, as you know the names of all your beloved children,
holy men and women among the Chinese people following along the ways of
Wisdom and of brotherly love,
apostles and disciples in the friendship of Jesus Christ.

Like Mary, the mother of Christ, they have received life from you and have shared it
with us up until today.

Grant that we may not retain it but rather let it overflow onto this land of your
mysterious presence,

There where the Spirit is leading us, the Spirit of Jesus Christ our companion.

Through him, with him, in him...

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER OF THE RELICS

Give thanks for the Holiness that remains

Living God,
We bless you for the holiness that remains among us.
You are so present in your creation,
that all is or can become a relic of your holiness.

Yes, you remain in the beauty of things and people,
in the intelligence of the universe and in the bonds that men weave.

Yes, we know your dwelling places in the history of men, covenants, revelations and
prophecies,
Holy Scripture and sacred texts,
the sacraments and the communion of the faithful.

Yes, it is you that we contemplate in the transfigured faces of the saints.
We stand even more on the threshold of this mystery when your presence is
withdrawal, when your power acts in humble discretion in the silence of your
Name.

It is then that the litanies of holiness sing the names of men,
brotherly men, the just ones, honest men,
men of wisdom, gentle men,
those who seek the truth, who fight for the rights of man,
creators of beauty...

Often it is far from religions,
in the un-knowing, in doubt, in the night of faith, that man is fulfilled in his humanity,
and that holiness lets itself be seen.

We praise the life of mankind, the dwelling of holiness,
we praise you, God present in man, relic of your holiness.

Holy, Holy, Holy... .

Most Holy Lord,
in order to praise you, we must know how to be silent,
For the creative word is born from silence,

in the same way that our faith comes from patient waiting passes through the trial of
the night,
and suddenly bubbles up in the murmur of a subtle silence.
It is in such a quest, O God our Father,
that we experience to the full our solidarity with our brother men.
The multitude is silent, leveled down by the desert sands of poverty or violence.
Our brother men are silent.
It is in the hollow of this great story that the real sense is revealed, welling up from
the silence.

It was night,
You became word, your Word became flesh.
Jesus walked among the crowds, true man.
He took upon himself all the human quest,
vibrating with joy, and experiencing suffering.

Overwhelmed by the centurion's answer,
He made Theresa understand that there really are "souls who do not have the faith".

We give thanks to you, Father, for his Incarnation
even into the mystery of man's conscience and his freedom.

With Jesus, we address to you, the prayer of solitude and of the night,
That which wells up from the heart of the faithful
when the faith is no longer what he believes,
but the remains, your relic in him, in his life breath,
in his conscience and what he desires as a just man.

Even though we are held by restlessness
to found our faith there where God is not named,
the Spirit succors us and pronounces in the face of mankind,
the name of Jesus,
and testifies that he comes in the name of the Lord God,
he who is the Christ of God.

We beseech you, O God our Father, open us up to the Spirit of holiness,
May he gather us together in the memorial act of the life of men,
the dwelling place of holiness, memorial of your holiness,
You O God who is not named,
but who can be heard speaking through every human history.

May this same Spirit broaden our faith as we prepare the bread and wine.
They come to us from the life of men,
they are already the life of God,
long before the Spirit makes us discern the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

During the supper that he ate with his disciples,
he took the bread,
blessed it and gave it to his disciples saying :

*"Take this, all of you, and eat it.
This is my body which will be given up for you".*

When supper was ended, he took the cup.
again he gave you thanks and praise,
gave the cup to his disciples and said :

*"Take this, all of you and drink from it : this is the cup of my blood
the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.
It will be shed out for you and for all men so that sins may be forgiven.
Do this in memory of me".*

Let us proclaim the mystery of the faith...

While we accomplish this memorial,
the very heart of our faith and our hope,
keep us Lord, from being arrogant.

Invited to this table, we come to eat from your hand, God our Father,
as do the poor of the earth.

Sharing the bread and wine, it is Christ himself that we let live in us,
and lead us into the love of far off lands.

On this road where we welcome the Salvation that you bring us,
we are always the brothers of those,
whose suffering has dried up their faith, watchmen longing for dawn,
and untiring seekers of that "crucial region of the soul where absolute evil fights
against brotherhood".³³

We beseech you, O Lord, may the Spirit of holiness cover the whole earth.
May he orient towards the truth all of men's quests,
may he guide the nights of doubt and fear to the dawn.
May he keep the Churches and Communions, of the faithful in holiness,
thirsting to contemplate it and to receive it from the life of all those whose names,
like that of Theresa,
have already been taken up in the mystery of your life, You who are our Father.
They are the relics of your holiness,
the just of history, men of upright conscience,
wise and beloved by God,
Mary, the mother of Christ,
all the friends of Jesus Christ and the bearers of the Gospel.

May this same Spirit enlighten and straighten those who have the charge of guiding
and encouraging their brothers in the faith or on their road to the truth.
Jean Paul, Bishop of Rome,
Georges, our bishop,
Fu Tie shan, Bishop of Beijing,

all the Patriarchs, pastors of communities throughout the world.
All those who have the public or hidden charge of your people.

We beseech you, God of tenderness,
in the vibrant memory of those who have died,
all those men and women who have passed away,
inhabited by hope,
or seized at the moment of death by doubt and fear,
may they know peace and live in enlightenment.

Gathered together on this day before you, our Father,
we come from and we return to the solitude of our own interior journey,
as in a desert.

There, give us the grace to remain close to those men and women
who are not able to believe or who cannot hear the name Of Jesus.
That is the grace that you give us to live,
together with those in whom your holiness dwells.

It is your Spirit who guides us,
Spirit of love, Spirit of Jesus Christ our companion.

Through Him, with Him and in Him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honour is yours,
almighty Father,
for ever and ever.

THE COMPANIONS OF ELIAS

During the night office at the encounter in honor of Saint Theresa, that took place at the Carmel of Mazille in August of 1996, one of the nuns recited this prayer. The Carmelite nuns never cease praying for priests.

*O Lord,
It is in the continuation of the presence of Theresa,
that we pray this evening for these brothers of the mission of France that you
gave to her,
in response to her desire to carry your love to the most far off lands.
Bless them all in the diversity of their ministries and the force of the Spirit that
makes them one body together.
Preserve in them the original inspiration, for the Church has no other reason
for being outside of the mission.
Make of them the companions of Elias,
in their zeal for defending your cause as the Living God in the midst of so
many idols.
Brothers of Moses, who take off their sandals in front of the Burning Bush
which burns in the heart of the most foreign of men.
Disciples of Christ, in his thirst for justice, in his desire to discern the evidence
of you in all men,
and to share your love, as one breaks the bread of his life.
Let us be encouraged again by one another, to be listeners of your word, in a
subtle murmur, in this unique place to which we draw near by an authenticity always
striven for.
Long quest... where your Spirit draws us along,
for our bliss and your greater glory.*

Amen!

Pontigny, October 1997

NOTES

1. *Founded in 1941, the Mission of France has, in the Catholic Church in France, the statute of a special diocese: its "territory" is the village of Pontigny in the Department of the Yonne, a village built around its abbey dating from the 12th century. With the Bishop Georges Gilson at its head, it counts 240 priests and deacons who consecrate their life to dialoging with those who do not partake of the Christian faith, in France and throughout the world. They are present in different social environments, and disadvantaged persons. Christian lay persons participate in this same mission in the context of the Galilee Association.*

The Mission publishes a bi-monthly magazine, *Letter to the Communities* and a monthly *Information Letter*. Mission of France, BP 101, 3 rue de la Pointe, 94170 Le Perreux-sur-Marne, France. Tel: 00 33 1 43 24 95 95. Fax: 00 33 1 43 24 79 55.

2. On several occasions I have heard the question posed by my friend priests and even by some in the Mission of France: "Why be a priest to live what you are living, you and those who are in this same type of insertion? Our baptism is sufficient enough to animate this type of existence. If you were a religious, or a hermit in China I could understand. What does your being a priest add in this case?" The dialogue to which this question invites us is linked to the question of the ministries in the Church. concerning the fact that the mission is the major exigency of the life of the Church. The Mission of France is engaged in a missionary adventure where the priests travel along with the permanent deacons and lay partners in the context of the Galilee Association. Such a dialogue cannot be successful without benefiting from the existence and the experience of different persons and groups. An indispensable inductive theological method which is required in order to encompass a vital question for a Church who wishes to remain "in the heart of the world".

3. This incitement to witness is fortified by the fact that these last years, each time that I returned to France, I had the feeling that, in the domain of the reflection on the mission and the priestly ministry, it is considered that a certain type of priestly ministry has "seen its day". I am speaking of the mission of priests immersed, as much as is possible, in human realities that are often socially and culturally far removed from the Church.; priests with out visible parishes or assemblies where they can celebrate the Eucharist. I am not thinking strictly of the worker -priests, but of those as well who, in China, in the Islamic countries and in new professional implantations... are "in the front line" in those countries, milieux, cultures or societies where faith in Jesus Christ is unknown, or cannot be spoken of. I do intend to make an apology of the lives of these priests. I would simply like to bring attention to the fact that, if it is necessary to evaluate the models of priestly life in the mission, it would be a crime to throw out the baby with the bath water. In the

recent past (today as well, less obviously because they are fewer) these priests have pointed out what is at stake and which has renewed and served the missionary life of the Church, particularly in France. Today the times have changed, we mustn't keep our eyes fixed on old models. Today the times have changed, we mustn't keep our eyes fixed on old models, but we should take a look at that which gave and still gives to these priests impetus needed in order to meet up with their fellow humans who are far from the Christian faith. The reflection on the mission life and how to implement it at the juncture of two millennia has much to gain by listening to those who have been sent on mission. The recent book of Christophe Roucou, *La Foi à l'épreuve de la mondialisation* (Editions de l'Atelier, 1997) illustrates this. The author, a priest of the Mission of France living in Egypt, gives his testimony and situates himself in the present theological reflection on the mission.

4. The priests of the Mission living in Egypt chose this expression "brothers of the way" to identify themselves, fearing that the title "priests of the Mission of France" would not mean anything to their Egyptian friends or would recall an enterprise inherited from the colonial tradition... .

5. Association Solitude Thérèse de Lisieux (STL) 127 rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, 75006 Paris.

6. The "way" is a word that we often encounter with regard to Thérèse of Lisieux, particularly in reference to her expression "the little way" which is a path of great confidence in the Love of God, merciful Father.

7. The Mission of France sometimes uses the expression "the Gospel at the level of man" in order to explain its project, why we are sent by the Church. This means that the priests of the Mission are sent in order to live the Gospel and carry it to men by living, working and residing in the midst of them.

8. André BOUSQUIE in the *Lettre aux communautés (Letter to the Communities)* n°168 about Jan Patočka, *Essais hérétiques sur la philosophie de l'histoire*, Ed. Verdier, 1981.

9. Jacques SOMMET, French Jesuit gave his testimony about the deportation, especially in his book *L'Honneur de la Liberté*, Le Centurion, 1987. (The Honor of Freedom).

10. See note 2.

11. A foreigner in Chinese is *wai guo ren*, *wai* is the character that means "outside of".

12. The impetus of Assisi is a reference to the meeting of October 27, 1986 where the Pope Jean-Paul II had invited the religious officials of all the known confessions to come to Assisi to pray for peace.

13 See the article of Paul VALADIER "La fausse innocence du relativisme culturel" in *Les Etudes*, July-August 1997.

14. D. FONTAINE in the *Lettre aux Communautés*, n°181, p. 53.

15. In a commentary of Mathew 16 by Father G. GILSON, Bishop of the Mission of France.

16. The term "expert" refers here to the status foreigners have when they are "invited" by a public Chinese body, to work in China.

17. Lao Zi, *Dao De Jing*, translation by Claude LARRE, Desclée de Brouwer, coll. "Les Carnets" 1994.

18. Saint John of the Cross.

19 Jacques SOMMET, *L'Acte de mémoire (The Memorial act)*, Editions de L'Atelier, coll. `Débattre" 1995.

20. In the French text the "Théologie des pierres d'attente" signifies that like cog-wheels, each small part of the truth sets in motion another part until the entire mechanism is in full movement. In this perspective, the definitive and total revelation of God in Jesus Christ is preceded by partial revelations which milestone the road towards Christ. Those who put their faith in these revelations do not live in error, but a veil keeps them from seeing clearly.

21. Book of Numbers Chap. 23, 24.

22. According to the expression of the novelist Lucien BODARD.

23. Expression used by Alain CAVALIER in his film *Thérèse* taken from the manuscript A 11v°.

24. Manuscript B 4v°.

25. Manuscript C 5v°.

26. During several years the Mission of France animated for young people, at Easter, sessions that they chose to call "The Absent One of Saturday". It was a way of revealing to young people, that the lack of faith and the non-evidence of God that surrounds us, are not a threat to their faith, but rather the basis of a fascinating spiritual adventure as they follow Christ.

27. To learn about the actuality of this bond between Theresa and the Mission of France two tape recordings have been edited recently by the Atelier du Carmel (L'Hermitage, 14380 Saint-Sever, Calvados France) one is entitled *Thérèse et les incroyants (Theresa and the unbelieving)* and the second, *La Mission de France et Thérèse de Lisieux (The Mission of France and Theresa of Lisieux)* (in French). One

can read as well *Lettre aux Communautés* n° 181 of Nov.-Dec. 1996 entitled, *La nuit de la foi. L'Expérience de Thérèse de Lisieux et l'aventure de la mission.*

28 To become acquainted with the writings of Theresa, I used the three volumes that Jean-François SIX has just published entitled, *Therese de Lisieux par elle-même*, Grasset / Desclée de Brouwer, 1997. The correspondence between Theresa and Adolphe ROULLAND has been gathered together in a small book with a Preface and Introduction by Msgr. Guy GAUCHER: *Thérèse de Lisieux - Lettres à mes frères prêtres*, Le CERF, coll. "Foi Vivante" 1997.

29. Seminarian and afterwards missionary priest in Africa, with whom Theresa had also corresponded.

30. For Theresa it is a question of the martyr's palm.

31. Manuscript C 2v°.

32. Small box in which one puts the Hosts for carrying the communion to the sick.

33. André Malraux in *Le Miroir des Lirnbes*.

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