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Between Śūnyatā and Pléroma:

Fr. Yves Raguin and His Contribution to Dialogue with Asian Spiritualities

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Abstract

In the context of contemporary China several Jesuit missionaries were particularly active in the field of dialogue with Buddhism and other religions. One of them was a French Jesuit Fr. Yves Raguin S.J. (1912-1998), sinologist, buddhologist, theologian and the founder of the Ricci Institute in Taipei. He greatly contributed to the research on the Chinese spiritual traditions as developed in Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. His teachings and publications helped many Christians to understand and respect other religious traditions.

In this presentation we would like to offer a critical reflection on contribution of Fr. Yves Raguin to the dialogue with Asian Wisdom traditions, especially with Buddhism. We want to discuss how his personal relationship with Buddhist monks, doctrine and practice especially in Taiwan, China and Southern Asia shaped his own personal spiritual itinerary. His scholarly publications continue to inspire people in the promotion of friendship, mutual understanding, dialogue and the practice of contemplation among Christians.

Fr. Raguin was not only a scholar, but above all a missionary deeply rooted in his Ignatian spiritual practice, at the same time remaining faithful to the Christian tradition. He aimed at authentic spiritual encounter between spiritual traditions of the West and the East. Drawing his experience from Taoism and Buddhism Chan he practiced and promoted the contemplation in terms of an “apophatic” or “kenotic” insights and a meditation “without an object”. For him this could provide a privileged place for interreligious dialogue and an opportunity to deepen an experience of individual’s spiritual tradition. Specifically, the encounter with Buddhist symbol of *Śūnyatā* (Emptiness) brought him closer to a personal realization of Christian *Pléroma* (Fullness) found in Christ.

Many contributions of Fr. Raguin either through publications or through his less known efforts to adapt Asian forms of prayer to Christian spirituality, continue to have impact until today. Raguin’s original and pioneering synthesis of spiritualities transcend as well as take us far beyond Ricci’s original “Confucian limited” vision and “rejection of Buddhism”. While Ricci had very serious reservations concerning Buddhism, Raguin found in Buddhism a source of profound inspiration. Last but not least, by focusing our reflection on Raguin’s research on Buddhism, we would like to critically assess his contribution to Buddhist studies. This dimension of scholarship on Raguin in our view still remains insufficiently evaluated.