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# Indifference as the Freedom of Heart: The Spiritual Fruit of Apostolic Mysticism – Christian, Confucian, and Daoist Cases – <sup>1</sup>

BY

SUNG-HAE KIM 金勝惠, S.C.

## Introduction

I have presented a course entitled “Comparative Mysticism” at Sogang University for the last twenty-five years and my students have commented that it was the flower of all that I taught. That said, I would like to talk not about a flower which is beautiful yet fades away, but a fruit that lasts and nourishes people. The current interest in mysticism today is not only theoretical and practical but ecumenical and cross-cultural in its orientation. The capacity of emotion to add richness and depth to our lives has been recognized. But the quest for more intense feelings of personal intimacy with nature and life, as well as with the divine, has been most authentically realized in the mystical dimension of religious traditions. It is important for us to remember that, “Contrary to many popular images, the mystical religious mode is not extraordinary and is not for reclusive types. As James and others have asserted, there is a mystical dimension in all serious and sincere religion.”<sup>2</sup>

The fact that a mystical religious mode of life is neither extraordinary nor reclusive leads us to look at the relationship between apophatic/negative mysticism and kataphatic/positive mysticism. Janet Ruffing points out that there has been a strong bias favoring the apophatic style of mystical experience in mystical literature, and that the kataphatic way is regarded merely as a prelude to the real, true, or most authentic mystical experience.<sup>3</sup> She asserts that “The kataphatic experience is something like looking through an open window at... the divine reality... In the apophatic experience, there is no window, but the same objectless object of attention

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally presented at the *International Conference on Mystical Tradition and Autobiography as the Source of the Multicultural Spirituality in a Global World*, 20-23 October 2008, Sogang University, Seoul, Korea.

<sup>2</sup> *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Mysticism” (The Catholic University of America, 2003), 10:116. This recent conclusion modified both Henri Bergson’s assertion that true mysticism is exception and John Hick’s statement that any firsthand religious experience is mystical experience.

<sup>3</sup> Janet K. Ruffing, RSM, “The World Transfigured: Kataphatic Religious Experience Explored through Qualitative Research Methodology,” *Studies in Spirituality* 5 (1995), 232.

is disclosed in a subtle presence/absence.”<sup>4</sup> I agree with her assertion that the kataphatic experience of God, which includes symbols, meditation with imagination, incarnation, and natural images, is neither inferior nor simply the prelude to the apophatic experience. However, I would like to stress that the authenticity of both apophatic and kataphatic mysticism should be measured by the resulting purity or freedom of heart – termed “indifference” in Christianity, “absence of private mind”(無私心) in Confucianism, and the “equitable and constant ordinary mind”(平常心) in Daoism.

I will provide three examples, one from each of three religious traditions: Saint Vincent de Paul from seventeenth-century France; Cheng Yi 程頤 from eleventh-century North Song China; and Yin Zhiping 尹志平 from the thirteenth-century Mongol period of China. I chose them because they were passionately social-minded mystics who lived a very active life, leaving a lasting legacy in their respective traditions which continues on in our day.

Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) founded the Congregation of the Mission, an order of priests and brothers committed to the poor (he thought the poor should be the center of the Church) and the spiritual renewal of the Church. In collaboration with Louise de Marillac he also founded the Daughters of Charity, whose apostolic life became the inspiration for the largest number of present-day women religious. Vincent also was the inspiration for numerous social-welfare systems and charitable associations in the Western world. I was fascinated, however, not so much by his vast influence in social-welfare works, but by his pursuit of a pure quality of love or freedom of heart, something he termed the “virtue of indifference.”

For the first ten years of his priesthood Vincent was an ambitious, secular man looking for success and good fortune like many ordinary priests of his era in France. His parents sent him to the seminary as an investment, so that he could in return help to improve his family through educating his nephews. A letter to his mother, who lived in the farming village of Pouy near Dax in Southern France, reveals his filial but worldly pursuit of life: “The assurance that Monsieur de Saint-Martin has given me with regard to your good health has gladdened me, as much as the prolonged sojourn which I must necessarily make in this city in order to regain my chances for advancement (which my disasters took from me) grieves me, because I cannot come to render you the services I owe you. But I have such trust in God’s grace, that He will bless my efforts and will soon give me the means of an honorable retirement so that I may spend the rest of my days near

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

you.”<sup>5</sup> This letter of 17 February 1610, which he wrote at the age of thirty-one, contrasts sharply to the homily he delivered during his last visit to his hometown in 1623 as General Chaplain of the Galleys in Paris and Bordeaux. He celebrated High Mass for villagers and his relatives at the shrine of Our Lady of Buglose, telling them to rid their hearts of any desire to become rich, and to not expect any financial help from him as everything a priest has belongs to God and the poor.<sup>6</sup>

Vincent had experienced a conversion of heart through his acquaintance with two spiritual leaders of the French School in Paris, Pierre de Bérulle and André Duval, and also through his pastoral experience of the poor in the desolate farming estates of Madame de Gondi. André Duval, his life-time confessor, introduced Vincent to *The Rule of Perfection*, written by Benet of Canfield, from which he learned the importance of waiting for God to lead, the truth of not treading on the heels of Providence.<sup>7</sup> As he discovered Jesus in the face of the poor and committed himself to serve them as his masters, he was freed from the desire to become rich and a need to implement self-serving plans. To probe the mystical depth of his emphasis on the virtue of indifference I will use his conferences to the Congregation of the Mission and Daughters of Charity as my primary source.

Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107), one of the founders of Neo-Confucianism, established the theoretical frame for Zhu Xi 朱熹 and pursued learning that enables one to become a sage. In his memorial to the emperor he advised him to avoid mundane pursuits and follow the kingly way: “Your subject humbly suggests that the learning [of the sages] has not been transmitted for a long time. Fortunately, your subject has been able to obtain it from the Classics that have been handed down... because he took upon himself the responsibility for the Way.”<sup>8</sup> When he was appointed a lecturer to the emperor in 1086, he taught the lesson of Yan Hui, the disciple of Confucius, who never lost his joy even under impoverished circumstances.<sup>9</sup> Many consider Cheng Yi’s emphasis on principle (*li* 理) rigid and especially criticize his austere teaching against the remarriage of widows. However, while reading his commentaries on the *Book*

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Coste, C.M., ed., *Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, ed. and trans. by Jacqueline Kilar, D.C., Marie Poole, D.C., et al, 1-11, 13a & 13b (New York: New City Press, 1985-2008), 1:15-16. Hereinafter cited as CCD.

<sup>6</sup> José María Román, *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography*, trans. Joyce Howard, D.C. (London: Melisende, 1999), 159.

<sup>7</sup> *Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac: Rules, Conferences, and Writings*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Vincentian Studies Institute, Paulist Press, 1995), 16.

<sup>8</sup> *RoutledgeCurzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, ed. Xinzhong Yao (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 1:61.

<sup>9</sup> *Analects of Confucius*, 6:11.

of *Changes* and the *Four Books*, I was surprised to find how much emphasis he placed on discernment in changing circumstances. He was much more aware of the real world, which is always fluctuating and open to the Timely Mean (時中), than Zhu Xi, who focused his attention on the unchanging principle.

His strictness with his students, as well as with himself, was due to his keen awareness that there is a constant struggle in the human heart / mind between the principle of Heaven (天理) and human desires (人欲). Since Confucians used to contrast the public mind (公), representing the principle of Heaven, with the private (私), denoting disordered human desires, Cheng Yi discussed extensively the problem of the private mind and how we can cultivate the virtue of benevolence in order to overcome it.<sup>10</sup> My primary sources are the Neo-Confucian anthology, *Reflections on Things at Hand*, and Cheng Yi's *Commentary on the Book of Changes*, which is regarded as one of the most important Confucian interpretations.

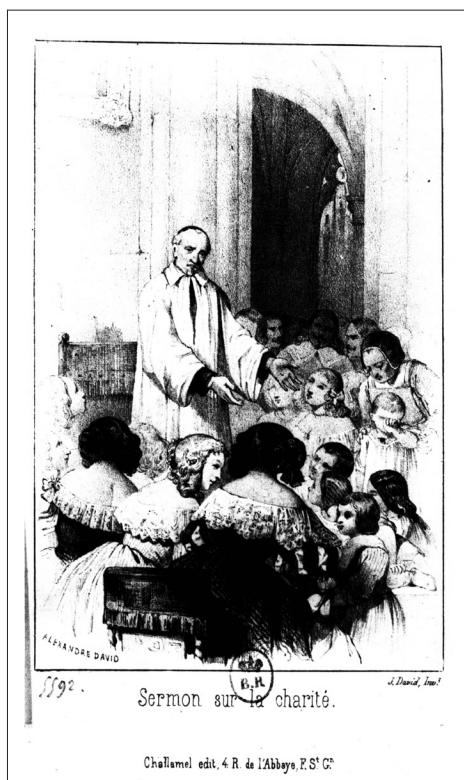
Yin Zhiping 尹志平 (1169-1251), was a disciple of Qiu Chuji 丘處機 (whose Daoist pen name was Changchun 長春), the youngest and most famous among the "Seven Perfected Ones" (七眞) of the Complete Perfection Order (*Quanzhen jiao* 全真教). Founded by Wang Zhe 王嚳, who started the successful reform movement in twelfth-century China, the Complete Perfection Order flourished and continues today as the representative community of Daoist masters, distinguishing itself from the older Daoist sect of Heavenly Masters through its strict celibate lifestyle and practice of inner alchemy. When Changchun was invited by Genghis Khan and honored as an immortal, Yin Zhiping accompanied him, with seventeen other disciples, on their long westward journey (1219-1223).

Yin Zhiping not only succeeded Changchun as the sixth patriarch of his order, but he established the basic principle of integrating inner cultivation (內功) and outer cultivation (外功). In a period of constant war and famine requiring much social work from his order, Yin Zhiping learned from Changchun that inner cultivation through non-action (*wuwei* 無爲), and outer cultivation through action (*youwei* 有爲), are intimately related, and in the end one, because both are based on the Way (*Dao* 道).<sup>11</sup> In fact, non-action can be action when one performs the work without attachment, and

<sup>10</sup> For a history of the usage of the term "private" and "private mind" in Confucian tradition, refer to my article, "The Problem of Private Mind," in *People's Religion and the People of Religion* (사람의 종교, 종교의 사람), 서강 종교연구회 엮음, 마오출판사 (2008), 49-88.

<sup>11</sup> 師父曰：有爲無爲一而已，於道同也。 *The Records of Conferences during the Northern Journey by True Man Qing He* (清和真人北遊語錄, 中華道藏) [1633] Volume 26, p. 731, section 1. Disciples began to gather his conferences around 1237 and wrote the preface in 1240.

through timely action one can achieve a state of non-action.<sup>12</sup> Therefore he emphasized cultivation of ordinary life, that we should practice moderation and harmony while faced with the emotions of happiness, anger, sadness, and joy. He called this state of mind “Ordinary Mind” (平常心). Yin Zhiping adopted the term from Zen Buddhist circles but he gave it new meaning. He asserted we have to maintain a constant mind while experiencing human feelings: “When we govern our mind and attain the state of equity and constancy; then the Way springs up naturally.”<sup>13</sup> Yin Zhiping’s conferences given during visitations to various Daoist monasteries in the Northern Region (北遊錄) shed light on his concept of the Ordinary Mind, which integrates contemplation and action into one.



Vincent de Paul preaching about charity. Period etching by Alexandre David.  
Image Collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute

<sup>12</sup> Zhang Guangbao 張廣保, *Studies on the Mind and Nature of Inner Alchemy in the Complete Perfection Order of Jin and Yuan Period* (金元全真道「丹心性學」) [Beijing: Sanlian Publishers, 1995], 98.

<sup>13</sup> 治其心得至於平常，則其道自生。 *Ibid.*, p. 737, third section.

## 1. The Virtue of Indifference in the Conferences of Vincent de Paul

Vincent de Paul did not write an autobiography or theoretical treatises on mysticism. Therefore, his conferences to the priests and brothers, and the Daughters of Charity, along with his letters, are the source for his intimate thoughts. While his letters (3,000 preserved) are personal and concrete responses to particular circumstances, his conferences are public and oriented toward the spiritual formation of his male and female communities. Even though he delivered a conference every Friday evening to the Congregation of the Mission only thirty-one, presented during the last three years of his life (1657-1660), are preserved, as Vincent did not like his talks to be recorded. However, we do have 120 conferences (1634-1660) to the Daughters. Louise de Marillac persuaded Vincent that poor country girls without proper theological education needed to read his talks over and over again. His conferences were typically conversations on a subject Vincent announced beforehand. The missionaries and Daughters were to contemplate the given theme and share their reflections, at the end of which Vincent would affirm and encourage their thought, offering his own thought which thereby formed the core of the conferences. The themes were varied: explanations on the rules, love and service for the poor, conviction for vocation, total surrender to God, and cultivation of virtues. While trusting in the providence, mercy, and grace of God, Vincent was also convinced that we must cultivate our virtues in readying to perform the works of God properly. He repeated that a person who has both wisdom and humility is the treasure of a community.<sup>14</sup>

In a Conference of 6 December 1658, Vincent explained the purpose of the Congregation of the Mission. He emphasized that all should have freedom of heart without personal attachment to one work or another:

Such being the case, those break the rule who do not wish to go on missions or who, having gone on them and suffered some inconvenience, do not wish to return to them, or who, taking pleasure in working in seminaries, do not wish to leave them or who, taking pleasure in some other work, are reluctant to exchange it for that of the missions, which is so necessary.... Something which will greatly help us toward this is to render ourselves indifferent to the kind of work we do.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Román, *Biography*, 284-288.

<sup>15</sup> *Rules, Conferences, and Writings*, 142-143.



It is clear that for Vincent the virtue of indifference is very practical, and manifests itself through one's willingness to go wherever they are sent to do the work. Vincent presents Jesus as the model, saying that the Son of God was always open to the will of the Father. However, Vincent knew that the virtue of indifference was achieved only through self-surrender and self-emptiness. When the local superior in Rome told Vincent they should compete with other congregations and sent him a detailed plan of development, Vincent wrote to him: "Please have greater confidence in God and let him steer our little ship."<sup>16</sup> It is interesting that he did not think acquiring this freedom of heart required much in the way of acquired knowledge or social status. For instance, Vincent encouraged the missionaries to direct women to render service to God and the public in the best possible way that poor young women were capable of doing. Vincent's conclusion was concise: "In this way, both sexes served God equally."<sup>17</sup>

Among the 120 conferences to the Daughters of Charity we find five which include the title "Indifference." In Conference 25 (1 May 1646) Vincent delineated the disposition of inner freedom Daughters should have concerning their places of residence, their ministries, the qualities required for Sisters sent to them, and the means of carrying out their obligations well. Vincent was not afraid to state that indifference was the foundation of their life: "We'll begin with the first point, which is indifference, and so necessary to your Company that when it is no longer found in it, that will be a sure sign of its downfall."<sup>18</sup> In Conference 48 (14 July 1651) Vincent restated that indifference should characterize the disposition of a Daughter of Charity in going to any place, whether she be sent or called there, with any Sister, and as a means of keeping themselves from yielding to the weaknesses that could make them want to leave.<sup>19</sup> In Conference 73 (6 June 1656) Vincent explained the content of attachment as a disordered affection, as for some creature that is loved, not for the love of God but some other motive. He distinguished two kinds of attachment: one for what we have, the other for what we desire.<sup>20</sup> Then he offered a vivid image of the state of being attached: "To understand better what's meant by an attachment, dear Sisters, picture a man tied to a tree by a rope, his hands and feet bound in chains, with the rope well knotted

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<sup>16</sup> Louis Abelly, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God: Vincent de Paul*, trans. William Quinn, F.S.C., with additional annotation by Edward R. Udovic, C.M., vols. 1-3 (Vincentian Studies Institute, New City Press, 1993), 3:27.

<sup>17</sup> *Rules, Conference, and Writings*, 145.

<sup>18</sup> CCD, 9:201.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:129.



and the chains well riveted; what can he do? There he is enslaved.”<sup>21</sup> In this state he cannot free himself nor look for something to sustain his life.

It is intriguing to note that these three conferences on indifference were delivered at five year intervals, as though Vincent, and probably Louise, who lived with the Daughters as their superior, felt the need to continually stress the importance of this virtue. The apostolic character of indifference is most clearly described in Conferences 116 (8 December 1659) and 117 (14 December 1659), his last two talks to the Daughters before the death of Louise de Marillac.<sup>22</sup> Vincent utilized the example of a mare, or carriage horse, which allows herself to be driven wherever people want:

Isn't it a great pity that senseless animals teach us this lesson of indifference, and we have such trouble practicing it! Sisters, let's keep firmly in mind this lesson of our Lord, who submitted in all things to the Will of His Father; remember that well and ask Him fervently in your prayers for the grace of being always indifferent to all sorts of ministries, in one place or another, be they important or lowly, ready for whatever pleases Him.<sup>23</sup>

Quoting Psalm 73:22, “I have become like a beast of burden.” Vincent insisted that Jesus himself became like a horse with no will but that of his Father. In all of his conferences and letters the primary example was always Jesus on earth who lived for the poor. Vincent clearly realized that it was indifference that frees the human heart to fulfill their vocation: “Here's what indifference is, Sister: it's a virtue that causes us not to refuse anything or to desire anything. To wish for nothing, to reject nothing, but to accept whatever God may send us through our Superiors; in a word, Sisters, an indifferent person is one who wants to do nothing but the Will of God. That's what is meant by being indifferent.”<sup>24</sup> Here we realize Vincent was a mystic, a selfless man who taught his followers to practice kenosis in every day and every aspect of life.

Then, from whom did Vincent learn the mystic spirituality of indifference? I have mentioned that Benet of Canfield's *The Rule of Perfection*

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 132. Vincent describes three kinds of attachment: vanity, fastidiousness, and esteem.

<sup>22</sup> Louise de Marillac died 15 March 1660. After her death, Vincent gave his final conferences on the virtue of Louise (Conferences 118 and 119), and on the election of her successor (Conference 120). Therefore, it can be said that his final two conferences on indifference were, in fact, his last words to the Daughters of Charity.

<sup>23</sup> CCD, 10:560.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 562.

greatly influenced Vincent during the initial period of his conversion. Benet of Canfield presented rules for knowing the will of God: “all things which offer themselves to be done or suffered, approved or withstood, whether corporal or spiritual, are of three kinds, namely commanded, forbidden, or indifferent. Nothing can happen which is not comprised in one of these three kinds.”<sup>25</sup> Two things are commanded or forbidden, orders to be followed. It is the third kind, those which are indifferent, that requires true discretion. He believed that God has left the greatest part of our lives to choice, to do or to leave undone, to accept or reject without sin the indifferent. He concluded, “How can something tend toward perfection which puts aside obedience and nourishes self-will, the root of all imperfection?”<sup>26</sup> Although Benet of Canfield focused on this vast realm of indifferent action and freedom of choice as a field for practicing perfection, he did not develop the virtue of indifference. However, he did expound upon an important aspect in Vincent’s spirituality, integrating contemplation and action: “This is the true active and contemplative life, not separated (as many take it to be), but joined together, making exterior works interior, temporal ones spiritual, and obscurities luminous, and finally, joining contemplation and action in the same work without prejudice or hindrance to either.”<sup>27</sup>

Ultimately, it was Saint Francis de Sales, the bishop of Geneva, who became the model of sanctity for Vincent. Vincent met him in 1618 and 1619, when going through a period of purification (1617-1625), aspiring to transform his moody and melancholic character to the “perfect equilibrium” of Francis de Sales. Vincent often said “How good must God be since the Bishop of Geneva is so good.” Several meetings were enough to knit a solid friendship between the two. Both longed for a profound reformation of the clergy and a simplified form of preaching.<sup>28</sup> Vincent learned to live in the presence of God, the virtue of detachment and indifference, humility, joy, and gentleness from Francis de Sales. Vincent’s letter to Louise (Letter 49, around 1630) offers his source of indifference: “Blessed be God that you are freed from the first attachment. We shall talk about the other one when next we meet; I mean about the one for your confessor.... Read the book concerning the love of God, in particular the one that deals with God’s Will

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<sup>25</sup> *Renaissance Dialectic and Renaissance Piety: Benet of Canfield’s “Rule of Perfection”: A Translation and Study*, ed. & trans. Kent Emery, Jr. (Binghamton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1987), 111.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>28</sup> André Dodin, C.M., *Vincent de Paul and Charity: A Contemporary Portrait of His Life and Apostolic Spirit*, trans. Jean Marie Smith and Dennis Saunders (New City Press, 1993), 26.

and indifference.... God is love and wants us to go to Him through love.”<sup>29</sup> It is clear that for Vincent the virtue of indifference is a pure disposition of heart, free from all the attachments which hinder us from perfect love. In reading the conferences, as his understanding of apostolic spirituality further deepened, his understanding of the virtue of indifference became more practical and concrete. The fruit of indifference is the freedom of heart manifested in every aspect of our life.



Statue of Zhu Xi, White Deer Grotto Academy, Jiujiang, Jiangxi province, China.  
*Public Domain*

## 2. Absence of Private Mind in Cheng Yi

*Reflections on Things at Hand* (近思錄), edited by Zhu Xi/Chu Hsi and Lü Tsu-Ch'ien in 1175, is a Neo-Confucian anthology of the four most

<sup>29</sup> CCD, 1:80-1. Francis de Sales talks about the loving, pure, or holy indifference in his *Treatise on the Love of God*, Book 9, chapters 4-9.

famous Confucian scholars of the Northern Song period. They initiated a new trend of Confucianism and the book became a standard introductory text for generations. Among the 622 articles compiled in this anthology half are regarded as the words of Cheng Yi, the philosophical mentor of Zhu Xi. He insisted that Confucian learning should be a guide toward becoming a sage, wanting to distinguish it from the prevalent Buddhism. Cheng Yi stated that a Confucian should not talk about the absence of mind (無心), but rather the absence of private/selfish mind (無私心): "Someone advocated the doctrine of the absence of mind. I-ch'uan (pen name of Cheng Yi) said, 'The absence of mind is wrong. We should say only the absence of a selfish mind.'"<sup>30</sup> The absence of mind is a Zen Buddhist way of cultivation which negates any permanent principle, or norm of good and evil, in itself. Cheng Yi wished to make clear that the principle of Heaven (天理) is innate in the human heart/mind, and one must get rid of the private mind which seeks disordered personal benefit. In Confucian tradition, wherein socio-political concerns are the ultimate good, the public, or impartiality (公), stood for the principle of Heaven, while the private (私) represented selfish desires that divert a person from realizing what is right.

Therefore, in Neo-Confucianism impartiality is esteemed as the chief character of benevolence (*jen/ren* 仁, also translated as humanity), the perfection of all virtues:

"Essentially speaking, the way of humanity may be expressed in one word, namely, impartiality. However, impartiality is but the principle of humanity; it should not be equated with humanity itself. When one makes impartiality the substance of his person, that is humanity. Because of his impartiality, there will be no distinction between himself and others. Therefore a man of humanity is a man of both altruism and love. Altruism is the application of humanity, while love is its function."<sup>31</sup>

Then what constitutes the "private mind?" Cheng Yi believed it to be not only when a person's intention is oriented toward private concerns, but when it is out of proportion with the balance of one's original nature (本然之性):

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<sup>30</sup> *Reflections on Things at Hand: The Neo-Confucian Anthology*, compiled by Chu Hsi and Lü Tsch'ien, trans. with notes by Wing-Tsit Chan (Columbia University Press, 1967), 71 (II-76).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 62 (II-52).

When one is activated by Heaven, he will be free from error, but when he is activated by human desires (人欲), he will err. Great is the meaning of the hexagram, *wu-wang* (無妄, absence of falsehood). Even if one has no perverse mind, if he is not in accord with the correct principle (正理), he will err, and that amounts to having a perverse mind (邪心). If one is free from error, he will not go away from the correct principle, for to go away means to err.<sup>32</sup>

In his commentary on Hexagram 25, Cheng Yi compares *wu-wang-zhe* (無妄者), or absence of falsehood, with *wang-zhe* (妄者), falsehood. He explains that a person who follows the principle with utmost sincerity is free from falsehood and united with the life-giving power of Heaven and Earth. Everything in the natural world is without falsehood, so that in watching images of nature the sage nurtures all things according to their proper place and time. But when the human heart follows its own desire and falls into excess, one falls into falsehood.<sup>33</sup> What rises above the mean (中) is wrong and private. In his commentary on Hexagram 13, *Tongren* (同人), or Fellowship, Cheng Yi states that sages possess a heart of great impartiality (大公之心) and public appeal, while ordinary people appeal to those with private considerations (私意) benefitting only a few. It is when a leader fulfills the principle of Heaven that a community of great unity (大同之體) is formed, and its fragrance spreads far and wide.

Cheng Yi offers concrete examples of how we can overcome our private mind. First, he advises us to learn to share what we have with others. In his commentary on the Fifth Yang line of Hexagram 9, *Xiaoxu* (小畜), or Lesser Domestication, he writes: "The Fifth Yang means to help and deliver each other, as the rich assisting their neighbors. The Fifth Yang is the position of the prince, and so it is like the wealthy man who shares his riches." Sharing our riches is the beginning, something which moves the hearts of people. Then, we must go further and learn to listen to others. In his commentary on the Fifth Yang line of Hexagram 19, *Lin* (臨), or Overseeing, Cheng Yi focuses on the importance of listening: "If one trusts their knowledge, they will not become wise. Only if one is able to gather the good people of the whole world and entrust to them the works of the world, every concern will be taken care of. When one does not trust one's

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 44 (II-8). Confucian scholars generally agree that this entire passage is Cheng Yi's interpretation of Hexagram 25.

<sup>33</sup> Hexagram 25; Commentary on Top Yang (過於理則妄也).

own wisdom, then their wisdom will become great.”<sup>34</sup> When we overcome our attachment to our own ideas, we are not only freed from our private mind but we open to all other ideas for the benefit of the whole. In other words, freeing oneself from one’s private mind possesses a social or apostolic character in itself.

Cheng Yi utilizes an image of a mountain, depicted with fire at its base, as a perfect model for our effort to overcome the private mind in Hexagram 22, *Bi* (賁), or Elegance. He states, “The mountain is a place where plants and hundreds of things live together. At its bottom a fire burns, beautifully adorning the mountain in its brilliant light. The noble person, looking at the mountain and the light of the fire, makes an effort to order political affairs brightly. He accomplishes cultural governance, but dares not pass fast judgment on legal issues. In making judgments on legal matters, rulers must be careful and prudent.”<sup>35</sup> Cheng Yi also mentions the serious nature of legal affairs in Hexagrams 21 and 6, wherein he asserts that to settle legal suits impartially, without being too harsh or too weak, one has to hold to the Middle Path (中道) without private mind.

It would be ideal to govern the state so as not to face legal problems, but a leader must be ready to tackle the rough and dirty problems of a nation in order to rectify corruption. Therefore, a leader has to learn “the constant principle of stretching and shrinking, coming and going.”<sup>36</sup> Generosity, moreover, has to be practiced properly. Knowing the right time to act is the highest wisdom in Confucian tradition, and this involves discernment (Hexagrams 17, 30, 64). In the end it is only through cultivating such virtue that we learn to overcome our private mind and falsehood (Hexagram 29).

Cheng Yi presented three stages of self-cultivation:<sup>37</sup> first is receiving the norms of propriety which frees us from bad habits and unworthy values; second is transforming our temperament by overcoming disordered desires; and third is striving to reach a state of mind empty and free from selfishness (虛中無我). When we maintain this state of mind, we are capable of responding to every event with the Timely Mean (時中). Since Cheng Yi and other Neo-Confucian scholars demanded constant human effort, and

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<sup>34</sup> 故自任其知者，適足爲不知。唯能取天下之善，任天下之總明，則无所不周，是不自任其知，則其知大矣。 These English translations of Cheng Yi’s commentaries on the *Book of Changes* are mine.

<sup>35</sup> Cheng Yi’s commentary on the image of the mountain (山者草木百物之所聚生也，火在其下而上照庶類，皆被其光明，爲賁飾之象也。君子觀山下有火明照之象，以修明其庶政，成文明之治，而无果敢於折獄也。折獄者，人君之所致真也)。

<sup>36</sup> Hexagram 11, *Tai* 泰 Peace, Cheng Yi’s commentary on the images of the Third Yang (屈伸往來之常理也)。

<sup>37</sup> *Reflections on Things at Hand*, 45-50 (II-9, 10, and 21).



encouraged us to transform our temperament, we might presume they taught that we can attain an absence of private desires with will-power. However, they warned that in this stage of self-cultivation we must be passive: “People say we must practice with effort. Such a statement, however, is superficial. If a person really knows that a thing should be done, when he sees anything that should be done, he does not need to wait for his will to be aroused. As soon as he artificially arouses his will, that means selfishness / private mind (私心). How can such a spirit last long?”<sup>38</sup>

From Confucius on, Confucians knew that if we really know something we love it and find happiness in it, so that things come naturally without arousing self-will (which can easily become selfish pride). It is noteworthy that even though Confucians have no notion of grace, the authentic state-of-mind unified with the principle of Heaven is to be achieved without self-will. Cheng Yi praised humility and gentleness as the most important human virtue. In his commentary on Hexagram 14, *Dayou* (大有), or Great Holdings, and 15, *Qian* (謙), or Modesty, Cheng Yi states that humility is the utmost virtue – a humble person always attains the mean and never surpasses the norm. If leaders maintain gentleness, the hearts of the people return to them.



Line drawing of Cheng Yi (1033-1107).  
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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 63 (II-54).



Finally, in his commentary on Hexagram 27, *Yi* (頤), or nourishment, Cheng Yi describes the fruit of emptying the private mind. Here again Cheng Yi adopts the symbol of the mountain, which provides life and nourishment: “The image of this Hexagram depicts a mountain at top, thunder at its base. As the bottom of the mountain shakes, all the roots of the trees vibrate and the buds of life emerge. In a word, it is the image of nurturing.... Looking at this image, the noble person cultivates themselves: by being prudent in what they say, they nurture virtue; by being moderate in what they eat, they nurture the body.”<sup>39</sup> And, in beginning his commentary, Cheng Yi encompasses the four areas of human need within the context of nourishment (頤養之道): the nourishing of life (養生); nourishing of body (養形); nourishing of virtue (養德); and nourishing of people (養人). When we cultivate ourselves in overcoming our private mind, we gradually attain a freedom of heart that enables us to nurture the human world (萬民), and also understand how heaven and earth nurture the natural world (萬物). Cheng Yi’s absence of private mind, therefore, can be seen to resemble Vincent de Paul’s indifference in their social and apostolic influence.

### 3. The Daoist Interpretation of the Ordinary Mind (平常心) in Yin Zhiping

The term “Ordinary Mind” is used in all three traditional religions of China, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, with a common emphasis on daily, mundane life.<sup>40</sup> Yet the distinctive colors and nuances within each tradition make it important to perceive its unique meaning. In Neo-Confucianism it is the moral mind cultivated in ordinary political life (social responsibility in the family, local community, nation, and international world), overcoming one’s private desires and thereby achieving an all encompassing virtue of benevolence. In Zen Buddhism it is the enlightened mind performing ordinary daily activity (walking, eating, sitting, and sleeping), eliminating attachments which cause suffering and anxiety. In the Complete Perfection School of Daoism it is the mind of equilibrium (emptied of private inclinations and evil thought), responding properly to worldly change.

<sup>39</sup> Hexagram 27, Cheng Yi’s commentary on the image of the mountain (以二體言之山下有雷, 雷震於山下山之生物皆動其根莖, 發其萌芽爲養之象. …故君子觀其象, 以養其身, 慎言語以養其德, 節飲食以養其體).

<sup>40</sup> Gu Jae-hye 具載會, “Studies on the Theory of Cultivation by the Longmen Branch of Complete Reality” (전진교 용문파 수행론에 대한 연구) [master’s thesis, Sogang University, 1997], 57. As an appendix to his thesis, he translated the complete text of Yin Zhiping’s conferences into Korean, pp. 84-168.

Yin Zhiping attempted to integrate the three religions with his use of the term “Ordinary Mind”:

Since worldly people did not attain “Ordinary Constancy (平常者)” and have no controller for their heart/mind, their feeling chases after things of fashion and their life energy is wasted in various holes of their body. Mencius stated that the purposeful will (志) should be the master of life energy (氣). When a person is capable of governing life energy with a purposeful will and letting it not be wasted, the life energy transforms itself into the bright light, and when it is accumulated, it becomes the Great Brilliant Light. My teacher Changchuan used to say that the Great Brilliant Light wraps the purple golden lotus which signifies our heart. In order to let the brilliant spiritual energy stay within our heart, we have to first attain ordinary constancy, and after that we can reach this state of light. Confucius talked about the Middle Path (中道), by which he also meant ordinary constancy. And there is a Buddhist saying that Buddha nature originally has no enlightenment and all sentient beings are not dismayed. The mind people ordinarily use is the enlightened mind. If we do not know constancy, there will be disorder and disaster, while we know constancy (常), there will be brightness (明).<sup>41</sup>



A portrait of Confucius (551-479 BC).  
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<sup>41</sup> *The Records of the Northern Journey*, 26:727, third section. 世人所以不得平常者，為心無主宰，情逐物流，其氣耗散於衆竅之中。《孟子》之說為志，云志者氣之帥也。人能以志帥氣，不令耗散，則化成光明，積之成大光明。師父有云。大光明罩紫金蓮。蓮喻心也，神明處焉，必先平常而後能致此。孔子說中道，亦平常之義。又有云。佛性元無悟，衆生本不迷，平常用心處，即此是菩提。不知常，妄作凶，知常則明。

This very clearly states how Yin Zhiping conceived the concept of Ordinary Mind. There are two layers of meaning: one denotes daily ordinariness, which all three religions take seriously; the other denotes knowing constancy, which is the Dao, the unchangeable way embedded in ordinary affairs. Even though he accepts the priority of moral will over life energy, as suggested by Mencius, and identifies the Confucian Middle Path with Ordinary Constancy, he cites the uniquely Daoistic dual cultivation of mind and energy. And although he quotes a Zen Buddhist saying on Ordinary Mind, he interprets it with *Daodejing*, chapter 16, which teaches knowing constant Dao will lead to immortality.

As the sixth patriarch of the Complete Perfection Order (1228-1238), and during the most prosperous period under early Mongol reign, Yin Zhiping 尹志平 took a long journey through the Northeastern part of China giving evening lectures to Daoist masters and lay people. In his words we grasp what he meant by the Ordinary Mind, how one achieved a state of ordinary constancy, and what was the effect of attaining it.

First, what did he mean by Ordinary Mind? Yin Zhiping describes our mind as the bright moon (心月) which shines on everything, so long as it is not obscured by private feeling (私情) and wrong thought (邪念) which float like clouds.<sup>42</sup> If we clear away our private thoughts and feelings, our mind can shine on every event as brightly as the moon in the sky. Therefore, we have to cultivate our mind in order to reach ordinary constancy: "The Dao originally does not act, therefore we have to realize our mind. If we govern our mind (治其心) and attain the state of ordinary constancy, the Dao will come to life by itself.... Even though the Seven Perfected Ones received the teaching from their Master Wang Zhe, they controlled their minds (制其心) hundreds and thousands of times."<sup>43</sup> He also states that through the mind of equanimity (平心) we transform our body and life energy and return to our heaven endowed nature.

Then, what is the effect of attaining the state of ordinary constancy? Yin Zhiping explains three stages of the Daoist transformation: when our heart/mind is balanced and constant, our spiritual energy (神) is settled and calm; when our spiritual energy is calm, vital energy (精) is congealed; and when vital energy is congealed, all life energy (氣) is harmonized. This harmonious calmness is reflected transparently on our face and discernible

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 734, third section. 又提月曰，此物但不為青霄之下，浮雲障蔽，則虛明洞蔽，無物不照，人皆見之。見殊不知，人人有此心月，但為浮雲所蔽，則失其明，凡私情邪念即浮雲也。人能常使邪念不生，則心月如天月之明，與天地相終始，而不復昧矣。

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 737, third section. 道本無為，惟其了心而已... 豈不見諸師真，親授教於祖師，然猶千磨百鍊，以制其心。

in our four limbs.<sup>44</sup> It is crucial to observe that every level of our life energy is purified and transformed through our daily actions. Yin Zhiping describes this world as his retreat “hut” (環堵: a tiny room with walls), where he can wander and mingle with everything while enjoying freedom of heart.<sup>45</sup> A person who has attained the constant ordinary mind can freely choose non-action or action. “The ordinary constancy is the true constancy. The heart / mind responds to all kinds of changes, but is not affected by outside things; it always responds, but it is always quiet. Gradually it enters the true Dao. The ordinary constancy is the Dao.”<sup>46</sup> Therefore, Yin Zhiping confidently concludes that only the Ordinary Mind can last long, and that purity of heart is not evident only through inner cultivation but through external activities, i.e., both in non-action and action. In other words, the Ordinary Mind leads a person to become an apostolic mystic who keeps their heart bright as the moon in the midst of the ever-changing events of life.

### Conclusion

We have discussed the virtue of indifference in Vincent de Paul, the absence of the private mind in Cheng Yi, and the state of Ordinary Mind in Yin Zhiping. Their commonality resides in reaching the state of a human heart freed from selfish desires, attachment to personal plans and benefit, and from self-image. This freedom of heart leaves a person totally open, imbued with a “passionate passivity” that enables complete commitment to apostolic mission or sage governance. I call this the fruit of apostolic mysticism and argue this to be the only verifiable proof that one’s mystical spirituality is authentic and healthy.

That said, we must admit that according to whom their conferences were directed there is a definite cultural difference among the three mystics. Vincent de Paul was talking to his companies of religious men and women to be sent about the world in service of the poor. Their virtue of indifference was to be made manifest through their acts of obedience. He knew very well that this kind of obedience would not last long unless rooted in the love of God, and in the spiritual maturity which comes from an inner freedom of heart. Cheng Yi was talking to Confucian students and intellectuals who were either government officials or preparing to be. Therefore the absence of the private mind bears a strong political tone, examples being the use of one’s riches for neighbors, listening to people’s opinions, and the

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 736, third section.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 734, second section.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 727, second section. 平常即眞常也。心應萬變，不爲物遷，常應常靜，漸入眞道，平常是道也。

handling of lawsuits impartially. The cultivation of humility, gentleness, and generosity was connected with the practice of the Timely Mean in knowing the appropriate time to take proper action. Yin Zhiping was talking to Daoist masters and the lay leadership of his order, wherein the Ordinary Mind was presented as the foundation through which to integrate inner and outer cultivation, purification of mind and life energy. That we must keep a constant mind despite the feelings of happiness, anger, sadness, and joy is something shared by all three apostolic mystics.

The conflict between human attachment and the will of God in Vincent, between the private mind and the principle of Heaven in Cheng Yi, and between the Dao as a shining moon in the heart and private feelings as clouds in Yin Zhiping, creates an overarching theme. As Evelyn Underhill writes, this experience of opposition and inner conflict requires a long process of purification:

We will begin, then, with the central fact of the mystic's experience. This central fact, it seems to me, is an overwhelming consciousness of God and of his own soul: a consciousness which absorbs or eclipses all other centers of interest.... Reviewing the firsthand declarations of the mystics, we inevitably notice one prominent feature: the frequency with which they break up their experience into three phases.... Sometimes they regard them subjectively, and speak of three stages of growth through which they pass, such as those of Beginner, Proficient, and Perfect....<sup>47</sup>

We identify Underhill's observations in our three mystics as well. Moreover, she affirms my contention that apostolic fruit verifies the authenticity of the mystics' spirituality. A genuine sublimation of consciousness, i.e., the mystic way, is the proportion of life itself. "What fruit doest thou bring back from this thy vision?" is the final question which Jacopone da Todi addresses to the mystic's soul. And the answer is: "An ordered life in every state."<sup>48</sup> I would add that an ordered life comes from indifference, the freedom of heart. Yin Zhiping also teaches us that Ordinary Mind can respond to change while remaining quiet, therefore only those who achieve ordinary constancy last. Steven Katz is partially correct in insisting

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<sup>47</sup> Evelyn Underhill, "The Essentials of Mysticism," in *Understanding Mysticism*, ed. Richard Woods (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 27, 30.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

that mysticism is deeply tied to its root tradition, world view, and language,<sup>49</sup> but we cannot deny the fact that its result shares characteristics as seen in three mystics from three very different traditions.

Finally, notice that all three mystics employed central symbols from the natural world. Vincent de Paul used a mare which pulls a cart following the will of her master; Cheng Yi chose the mountain, nurturing all forms of life according to a proper time; and Yin Zhiping envisioned a bright moon which shines upon the world, though occasionally darkened by fleeting clouds. They probably chose natural examples due to their innate lack of artificiality or falsity. Cheng Yi warned as superficial the notion of practice with effort, believing that as we artificially arouse our will it becomes selfishness. Yin Zhiping asserted that preserving a constant mind and accumulating worldly merits derives from the person, but the manifestation of the Dao, and the sages leading you, belong to Heaven.<sup>50</sup> Paradoxically, it is in this entrusting passivity that the most energetic passion for apostolic outreach is born and preserved.

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<sup>49</sup> Steven T. Katz, "The Conservative Character of Mystical Experience," *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (1983), 3-60.

<sup>50</sup> *The Records of the Northern Journey*, 736, second section. 先保此平常，其積行累功，皆由乎己，是在我者也。道之顯驗，聖賢把握，是在天者也。當盡其在我者，而任其在天者，功行既至，道乃自得。