

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 436

a different Columbia!

First I must tell you that I never thought to be a priest! I was catholic because my family was. At school I always expected I would become a veterinarian, but 'the call' happened and then everything began to change. That is a process.

Entering that process I started out at the seminary of the Archdiocese of my city. But God does what He wants, and He put the Pallottines across my path. I met the first Pallottine priest in a spiritual retreat and from then on I could see God's hand guiding the process. From the first encounter I was helped to grow up in my spiritual life. The novitiate was great because it was the moment that I really got to know the community, the charism and Pallotti himself, and it was a good foundation to enable me to persevere. To this day I remember something we were told that still encourages me to continue – the salvation of souls.



When it comes to the church itself the situation is still good – well, it depends on the region! In the interior of the country people are still religious. They are going through their own process of maturing and a

good percentage participate actively in church life. But inevitably the secularists present in the political sphere are trying to create laws to destroy the church and the values of Christians. In recent years that has created a kind of battle, with some pushing for freedom without limits. The church tries every day to demonstrate by its own actions the best possible way to reach the Kingdom. And it continually looks for new ways to call everyone to the Lord and to support the laity so that they persevere and grow.



As Pallottines our ministry is focused specifically on 3 fronts:

- **parishes**

The Pallottine apostolate in Colombia actually began in parishes. Currently we have three – one near Medellín in a city called Bello, the other two in Bogotá. The circumstances in each are different because they are quite socially distinct. We try to recognize that situation and work for the needs of that population, especially when it comes to faith and spiritual accompaniment.

- **houses for spiritual retreats and formation**

These are especially at Medellín, because it was the first city and archdiocese we came to, and it is where we have more priests. Our resources there include

- a formation house for seminarians
- a formation house for laity, with several different activities
- a formation house for members of the UAC, also for reunions, meetings, Masses, catechesis, spiritual retreats – a house where there is constant activity.

Close to the international airport we also have a farm, used for spiritual retreats. This house is becoming busier everyday! It is not for any specific group but open to everybody, anyone interested in an encounter with God.

- **Casa Hogar “Juan Pablo II”**

This is a special work of charity, something like a “Pia Casa di Carità”, but also for boys. The young people come from families with economic and social issues. And because we are trying to form them in an integral way we also involve their families in the process and so hope to get a better result for everybody. They live in during the week, but at weekends go to their legal guardians who must commit to this process.



The house has capacity for 23 children.

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the Pallottine Zen Master



There have been always confreres in our Society who have shown extraordinary ability and creativity in interpreting our charism according to the particular exigencies and circumstances of their time. One of them was **Fr Johannes Kopp sac**, a member of the *Heart of Jesus* Province, who passed away on 22 June 2016. May his soul rest in peace!

I wish I had written this article for our Asia Oceania Bulletin while Fr Kopp was still in our midst. The pity is that he will no longer be able to read it. May be today the rest of us can be inspired by his life.

Johannes was born on 9 December 1927 in Allmendingen, Germany. He was 88 years old at the time of his death, 53 years a Pallottine. Among his many academic and professional achievements it is especially worth remembering that he graduated in 1947 at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Stuttgart. He was a trained actor and this was evident even in his ordinary conversations. We would run short of space if all his qualifications and pastoral activities were to be mentioned here!

The focus of this article is the unique work of Fr Johannes in combining Zen meditation with Christian and Pallottine spirituality. In the post-Vatican II period there was increasing interest throughout Europe in eastern spirituality and meditation techniques. Thus Zen meditation caught the attention of Fr Kopp in the year 1972. In his ongoing search, he happened to meet with Jesuit Hugo Enomya-Lassalle sj, whom he had earlier encountered as a pastor in Japan. A life-long friendship ensued between them. In fact they became pioneers of the encounter between Zen Buddhism and Christianity in Germany.

In 1985, after several years in Japan, Johannes obtained from his Buddhist Master Koun Yamada Roshi a teaching certificate with the heading "Ken Houn - Cloud of Dharma", which he translated as "mystery of love". In 2006 he was awarded the title "Roshi" (Master).

In 1973, in Essen, he started the programme "Life from the Centre – Zen Contemplation" and launched a Meditation Centre, supported by numerous friends and followers.

Employing rich eastern spiritual traditions, especially with the help of Zen meditation, Fr Kopp assisted numerous people over the years to discover their inner being, leading to an encounter with the Indwelling Presence of the Supreme Being. He believed that Christ was to be experienced from within. To arrive at such a depth of being Zen could serve as a useful tool for meditation and inner journeying. Such an idea was in harmony with the teaching of the great Christian mystics like Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross and



Catherine of Siena, who all emphasised the value of self-knowledge and self-purification as necessary steps for the interior, mystical journey.



As he progressed in his contemplative way, Fr Kopp discovered increasing interest in St Vincent Pallotti, the mystic. Pallotti's work "*God, the Infinite Love*" in particular fascinated him. Having a mystical trait in his own life Fr Kopp could easily relate to the mystical aspirations and strivings of the great Roman saint.

We, as Pallottines, have a long way to go in deepening our knowledge and experience of the contemplative and mystical dimensions of our spirituality and charism. Isolated efforts from individuals in this regard have certainly been made:

- I remember the excellent study made on Pallottine mysticism by Fr Augustine Kolencherry sac.
- Fr Joe Kallani sac is another who, in recent years, has taken upon himself a contemplative way of life, always rooted in the mystical spirit of our founder.
- I am also reminded of another great Pallottine missionary of the 1980s, German professor Fr Joseph Böckenhoff sac, who took up ashram life, combining yoga with christian contemplation. I had the honour of working with him for six years in Casa Pallotti, Goa. He still remains for me an outstanding Pallottine.

These are innovative men who dared to go beyond the usual conferences and seminars, who tried to be original in interpreting our charism and in reading the signs of the times. I hope that the Pallottine artists, poets, musicians, psychologists, historians, theologians, philosophers, novelists, etc., of today will also look into ways and means of interpreting our charism in a way that is attractive, understandable and useful for the people of this generation.

We need to salute Fr Johannes and acknowledge him for being pioneering, courageous and creative in living his charism, both as an individual and as a Pallottine. May the Holy Spirit inspire many more noble souls to be different and prophetic in their vision and style of life as humans, as christians and as Pallottines.



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sac asia oceania e-bulletin

you commented...

on # 231 I wonder what the Founder would have made of such efforts being put into a museum about him in India? I keep recalling how struck I was during the 2010 UAC Congress in Rome ... how St Vincent, who didn't move much beyond one side of the Tiber for the duration of his life, could have inspired so many people from so many different countries and cultures for more than 180 years! Sounds like the Holy Spirit at work.

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