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## **Through Eastern Eyes** **by Henry van Straelen, S.V.D.**

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## BOOK REVIEWS

THROUGH EASTERN EYES. By Henry van Straelen, S.V.D. Introduction by Rt. Rev. Fulton J. Sheen. Grailville, Loveland, Ohio. 1951. pp. xiii-182., bibliography, plates. \$3.50.

Among the significant publications which the ecclesiological revival has given us in the last ten years are to be numbered important popular works on the missionary apostolate and spirit, of which Father Daniélou's *Salvation of the Nations* and *Advent* are perhaps the best-known. It is into the company of these books on the missionary bookshelf that we welcome Father van Straelen's *Through Eastern Eyes*.

This book grew out of a series of conferences which the author, a Dutch missionary in Japan (1935-1942) who had just completed doctorate studies in Japanology at Cambridge University, gave at the Lay Mission School for young women at Grailville in Loveland, Ohio, in the summer of 1950. The conferences were addressed to lay missionaries-in-training and they provide an engaging—even exciting—introduction to the problems of missionary adaptation in Asia. To his subject Dr. van Straelen brings a sincere devotion to the peoples of the Orient, a deep reverence for their cultures, and an infectious—if realistic—dedication to the Christian mission in the East.

The author's "thesis" may be stated thus: There are profound differences between the mentalities, customs, values, culture-patterns of the Eastern and the Western man. The missionary who wishes to help in the establishment of the Church in the East and in the formation of an Oriental Christian culture must bring with him a mind open and sensitive to these differences, a humble respect for the ancient religious, ethical and social traditions of the people of his adoption, and the flexibility and effective willingness to make the sacrifices demanded by constant adaptation to ways of thought and living different from his own.

Unfortunately, the task of patient study and preparation, serious scholarship and sympathetic understanding, which is essential in

establishing the Church in a new culture, has sometimes been obscured by the ideas of jungle, lepers, adventure and the romance of the unknown. (p. 35)

But above all there is the need of a deep supernatural love.

I would go so far as to say that a missionary can make all possible mistakes and still succeed if only he loves his people. He who does not love, understands nothing. For no one is it more true than for the missionary that there can be no deep knowledge of a country without a sincere affection for that country and its people. (p. 36)

Perhaps the most fascinating sections of the book for the Filipino reader will be those which deal with the development of an Oriental Christian culture.—Monsignor Sheen, in his introduction says:

Now the unveiling of the East is about to take place, as these countries are to show forth the power of the Incarnation, when some of the Western world mistakenly believed its force was spent. . . . We are on the verge of a great wave of apostolicity such as was seen in the first few centuries of the Church, with this difference that now the Eastern world will have its turn.

Christ is not Western. He was born in the East. When finally the East does recognize Him, they will manifest a side of Him which the Western world has not yet understood . . . The Word made flesh received in the mold of Western civilization reveals some of the beauty of the Incarnation, but when poured into the mold of Eastern civilization, it will manifest attributes which the Western World has not yet perceived. (pp. x-xi)

Dr. van Straelen is at pains to point out that the Church is not supra-national only, but supra-cultural as well. The Church is not Latin, is not the West. Her history bears witness to this truth. If the Church is to appeal to the millions of Orientals, she will not do so in Western cultural forms. She must incarnate herself in the East. How? In a clergy, first of all, that shall be native not by birth only, but by a real oneness with their people in thought and language and way of life, heirs in some measure of the permanent elements of Western culture, but not westernized, not "mental Eurasians" uprooted from the traditions of their people. In native philosophers and theologians "thoroughly acquainted with their own intellectual traditions" who shall put "the resources of Oriental thought at the service of Christian truth." In an Oriental liturgy and Christian art. In ways of asceticism and mysticism in which "the virtues will acquire an Oriental color, and particular virtues (deeply rooted in the East—filial piety and reverence for the aged, for instance) will be stressed."

When Christianity penetrates the social inheritance and spiritual traditions of the Orient, we may expect to see new expressions of Christian life. Asia as well as Europe has its testimony to bring to Christ,

and I think, *salvo meliore judicio*, that the final commentary on the Gospels cannot be written until China, Japan and India have been Christianized. (p. 51)

The temptation must be resisted, in a brief review, to dwell on the possibility of a future Christian culture in Asia and the part in that culture which, in God's providence, it may be the vocation of the Philippines to play. The Holy Fathers have consistently spoken of our country as a bridge to the vast and ancient East, have always held that our unique historical position as a Christian nation in Asia implies a vocation to the missionary apostolate. Viewed in the perspective of an Oriental Christian culture of the future this missionary vocation takes on added and challenging significance. Perhaps I should confess to a rather immoderate enthusiasm for this book and express the hope that it may be widely and attentively read by—especially—our college and university students. It would increase in them the "awareness...that the missionary apostolate is not a specialty, but an integral part of a full Christian life, a primary concern of the whole Church, the laity as well as the priests and religious." (Author's preface, p. vii) And it would challenge them to contribute each in his measure to tracing on the canvas of Asia the features of the Eastern Face of Christ.

C. G. Arévalo

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LIKE THE MOLAVE AND COLLECTED POEMS. By R. Zulueta da Costa.  
Introduction by Salvador P. Lopez. Manila. 1952. pp. 90.

EFFIGIES: THIRTY-SEVEN POEMS. By Ramón Echevarria. Manila.  
1952. pp. 44.

FURROWS AND ARROWS: POETRY AND VERSE. By Jorge Bocobo.  
Manila. 1951. pp. xiii-186.

It might be argued, with some cogency, that English is not a foreign language in the Philippines. Though not autochthonous, it might be said to have become acclimatized. The first two volumes of the three under review might be cited as proof; and, to complete the picture, we might also cite the *Prose and Poems* of Nick Joaquin, which will be reviewed later in this magazine. The third volume now under review belongs in another class entirely, and may perhaps be symptomatic.

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Mr. Zulueta da Costa's is an elegantly printed book, handsomely bound—quite different from the ordinary run of locally made books.