

In memoriam *Father Yves Raguin, S.J.*

by Gianni Criveller

The French Father, Yves Raguin, S.J., died on December 9, 1998, at Tien Educational Center, Taipei. He was born in 1912, entered the Society of Jesus in 1930, and was ordained a priest in 1942. Father Raguin studied at the Harvard-Yenching Institute from 1946 to 1949 and lived in Shanghai from 1949 to 1953.

After his arrival in Taiwan, he took on the direction of the Jesuit Dictionary project, which is presently nearing completion.

A leading authority on Chinese religions, the history of Christianity in China and spirituality, East and West, Father Raguin wrote more than 20 books and countless articles on these topics. Many of his writings were translated into Chinese and several other languages. The mission to which he dedicated his life was twofold: to gain a better understanding of the workings of the Holy Spirit within Chinese culture and to foster a deeper understanding of the contribution of Chinese spirituality to the broadening of Christian thought.

In 1966, to achieve this purpose, Father Raguin, with other Jesuits, founded the Taipei Ricci Institute. He remained its director until November 1996. Father Benoit Vermander S.J., Raguin's successor at the Taipei Ricci Institute, vows to continue the work of the Center along the same lines as those of the founder.

The name of Ricci was certainly not chosen by chance. Jesuit Matteo Ricci, the founder of modern Christianity in China, is universally honoured for his innovative and courageous evangelization method, based on the principle of *accommodation* (inculturation in modern theological terms). Ricci was Father Raguin's inspiration, and in several of his writings, Raguin praised Ricci's achievements, showing how he remains a model for us today. Raguin can certainly be considered a worthy successor of Matteo Ricci and other great China missionaries who shared the same ideal of a deep encounter between the Christian Gospel and the Chinese heritage. Raguin, however, went beyond Matteo Ricci's method. The most obvious difference between the two is that Ricci chose Confucianism and re-

jected Taoism and Buddhism. On the contrary Yves Raguin showed little interest in Confucianism, and focused many of his studies on Taoism and Buddhism. I once asked him about Ricci's method and the outcome of the "Chinese Rites Controversy." I was surprised by his answer, which was (not his exact words), "If Ricci's method had prevailed, Christianity might have become a 'prisoner', a branch of Confucianism." Of course Raguin's interpretation might be open to question. We have to keep in mind that Ricci was a child of the "counterreformation", Raguin of the Second Vatican Council. Since the contemplative dimension played a prominent part in Raguin's life, the meditative and contemplative dimensions of the two religious traditions, Taoism and Buddhism, attracted him.

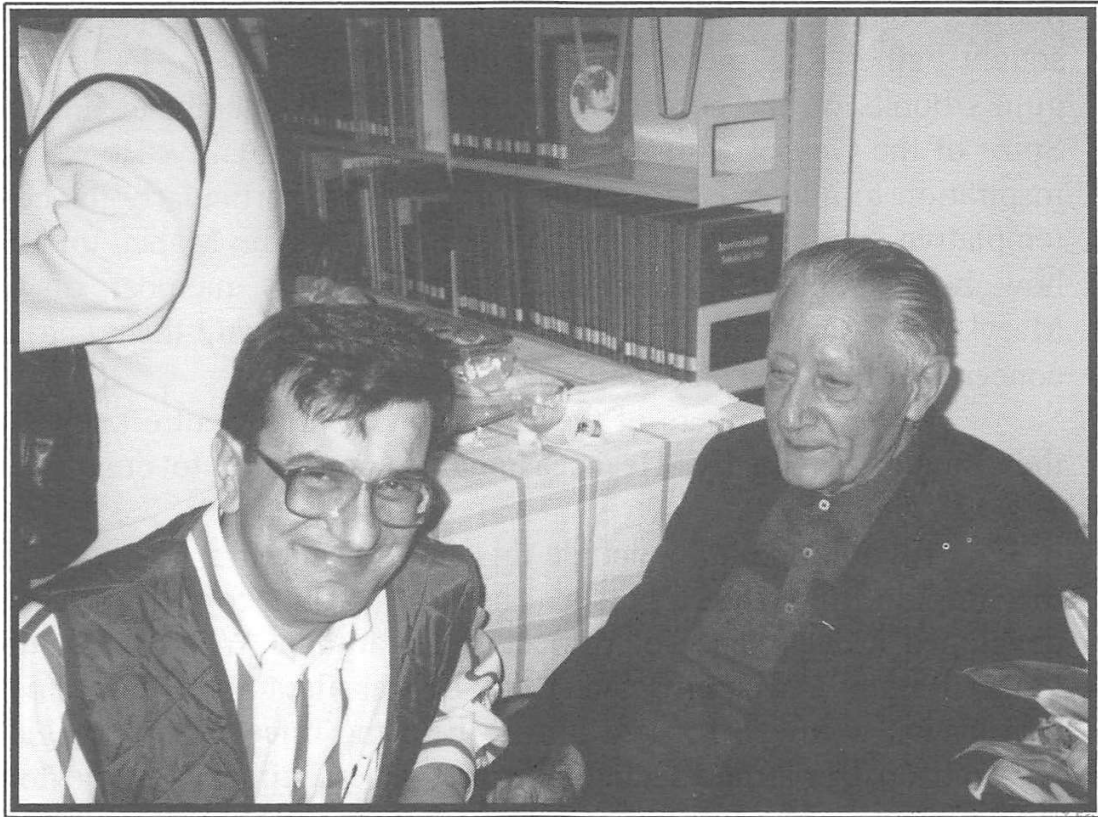
Father Vermander affirms that "even more than a scholar, Raguin was a man and a priest whose kindness and wisdom helped an innumerable number of people". Father Raguin was very much appreciated as a spiritual director, preacher of retreats, and lecturer on the spiritual life. In Taiwan, where he spent the last 45 years of his life, countless religious women and men as well as lay faithful sought Father Raguin for spiritual direction and advice. Father Raguin's books on the contemplative life were an attempt to link the Spirit of the Gospel with the best of Chinese spirituality. He was an inspiration to numerous religious communities, particularly the contemplative ones, all around the world. Sr. Betty Ann Maheu told me how he was playfully nominated an "honorary member of the Maryknoll Sisters", thanks to his long association with them and his concern for their spiritual welfare.

Several members of the Holy Spirit Study Centre knew Father Raguin personally. He occasionally contributed to our review *Tripod*.

I would like to conclude this short tribute in memory of Father Raguin by paying a personal homage to him, for whom I have developed a deep sense of respect and gratitude. When I first met Father Raguin in Taipei in late 1991, he was already 80, and I knew him by his writings. I asked him to help me orient my theological research on Christ and China. We met several times and had long conversations. He was very helpful, kind and generous. I was touched by his continuous desire to deepen his research and learn from anyone, in spite of his old age and declining health. I kept visiting him and looking for his counsel every time I went back to Taipei, and we exchanged numerous letters.

The last time I saw him was August 1998, and we discussed the term “The Lord of Heaven” adopted by Matteo Ricci. Raguin was working on an article proposing an original interpretation of the origin of this expression. Because of my specific interest in the question, he was kind enough later to send to me a draft of his study. We kept in touch until the end of his life because he was always ready to answer any of my questions. “If you need any other information, do not hesitate to ask me,” he wrote me last October, and I was really touched by the fact that this simple remark came from an 87 year-old man, in poor health who was still so willing to help.

Although it did not come as a complete surprise, the news of his death deeply moved me. Dear Father Raguin, from the abode of the “Lord of Heaven”, where you enjoy the company of Francis Xavier, Matteo Ricci and other great China missionaries, pray for the Chinese people that you served and loved so well and for the future of Christianity in China.



The author, Gianni Criveller, with Father Yves Raguin.