

In Memoriam

FATHER VINCENT-MARIE POULIOT O.P.

Apostle for Intellectuals in Japan

(1913-1978)

Toward the last evening of the year 1978, when the Japanese people were about to finish preparations for celebrating the coming of the New Year, the news of the death of Father Pouliot, O.P. arrived from Canada. Within a few hours the word spread among his acquaintances dispersed all over Japan, deeply saddening all of us who had known him.

Fr. Pouliot came to Japan in 1933, and soon after started his missionary activities in Sendai, mainly as editor of a Catholic magazine, the "Taimatsu" (Torch). Inspired by an eminent Japanese priest, Iwashita Sōichi, who stressed the importance of mission work among intellectuals, the scholarly young Dominican enrolled in the course of Indian philosophy at Kyoto Imperial University in 1940. With the outbreak of the War, Fr. Pouliot, along with other foreign missionaries, was detained in an internment camp in Kobe until the end of the war. Although his time there must have been extremely trying, I have never, in the fifteen years I have known him, heard him say a single bitter word about it. Rather he referred to his experience in the camp with warmth, as if it had somehow strengthened his love for the Japanese people.

In the midst of the post-war turmoil Fr. Pouliot founded Sei Thomas Gakuin (The Saint Thomas Institute) in Kyoto, where numerous young scholars, male and female, gathered together in search for the truth. Truth was the call-word of Fr. Pouliot, faithful brother of St. Dominic. He often said, "We must pursue truth sincerely and eagerly. Truth is the only way to lead people to God, not propaganda." He took it as his mission to foster good Catholics among academics in Japan and to this end he labored until his death. While he organized seminars on St. Thomas., St. Augustin and other great teachers of the Church to prepare specialists in Christian philosophy, Fr. Pouliot opened the monastery generously to serious Catholic students, himself serving as one of the directors of Nippon Katorikku Gakusei Renmei (Japan Catholic Students Association).

Gifted with artistic sensitivities, the Canadian Dominican manifested a deep appreciation for Japanese traditional arts, which often surprised even native enthusiasts. He understood the soul of Japan to a surprising depth, and was himself the incarnation of authentic Japanese virtues. "He is an embodiment of Giri-Ninjō (courtesy and

humaneness)," one of his Japanese confreres once remarked of him. Long before Vatican II Fr. Pouliot, realizing the relativeness of culture and the universality of the Good News of Jesus, manifested deep respect for and understanding of Japanese traditional religions and spiritualities, and the role they would have to play in the evangelization in Japan.

Thus Sei Thomas Gakuin became a center of research for serious Catholic scholars. Observing the tendency of Japanese philosophers to neglect the Middle Ages with its rich storehouse of Christian philosophy, in favor of the philosophy of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, Fr. Pouliot encouraged them to study the historical evolution of Christian philosophy and strive to establish a true and authentic knowledge of it among the philosophers. His influence was immense. Now some thirty-three years after the foundation of the institute, many young scholars who came there to study have gone on to occupy important chairs at various universities, exercising not a little influence on the Japanese philosophical world. To him Kyoto University owes the inauguration of the chair of Medieval Philosophy in 1947. It is the only state university which holds an independent chair in this area.

Fr. Pouliot himself was surprised at these events. "I could never have imagined that divine providence would work in such a way. When I lost all my books, including my dissertation, in a fire on the ship en route from Oxford to Canada in 1933, I thought my academic life had come to an end..." Yet he went on to do such great work, this faithful servant of the Church and precursor of the ecumenical encounter between Christianity and Japanese religions. The difficulties he must have had to face in the course of the foundation and development of the institute were surely considerable, but his trust in the divine providence was firm and steady. Prof. Yamada of Kyoto University, one of his most cherished students and friends, addressed the congregation during the memorial funeral mass, "Fr. Pouliot attracted so many people with his childlike simplicity and his genuine love for them. And above all Fr. Pouliot was a man of prayer. I saw him deep in prayer every morning and evening. Prayer was the secret of his extraordinary accomplishment..."

#### Vita

1913 (October 15)	Born at Orléans, Quebec, Canada
1927 (March 6)	Entered the Order of Preachers after having finished the course of philosophy at the Major Seminary of Quebec.
1928	Began his study of theology at the Major Seminary of Ottawa; received the degree of Bachelor of Arts and Licentiate in Canon Law from Laval University

- 1930 Continued the study of theology at the Major Seminary of the Blackfriars, England.
- 1931 (July 29) Ordained to the priesthood at Saulchoir in Belgium.
- 1931-33 Concentrated on Greek philosophy, especially Aristotle at Oxford University, England.
- 1933 (October) Sent to Japan; began missionary activities in Sendai.
- 1935-40 Editor of the Catholic magazine "Taimatsu."
- 1940 Enrolled in the course of Indian philosophy at Kyoto Imperial University.
- 1941-45 Civilian internee during World War II.
- 1946 Founded Sei Thomas Gakuin (The St. Thomas Institute) in Kyoto and directed it until leaving for Canada in 1977. Hereafter became a member of several academic societies concerning philosophy and religion.
- 1946-66 Lectured in Medieval philosophy at Kyoto University and taught at the Institut Franco-japonais du Kansai.
- 1949-50 Did research at Harvard University.
- 1955 (June) Received the title of honorary doctor of Letters from Laval University, Canada.
- 1961-77 Lectured in Christian philosophy at Notre Dame University, Kyoto.
- 1963 Received the title of Honorary Magister in Sacred Theology from the Dominican order.
- 1971-74 Rector of Sei Kazoku Joshi Kōtōgakkō (Holy Family High School for Girls), Sonobe, Kyoto.
- 1975 (December) Decorated by French Government as Officier de l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques.
- 1977 (May) Returned to Canada for medical treatment.
- 1978 (December 31) Died at the municipal hospital Quebec, Canada. (1:00 a.m. Japan time)

NAGAKURA HISAKO