Why Zen and Christian Monks
Live Similar Lives

A Social Scientific Study of Monks as Mythopoeic Models of
Religious, Nonegocentered Worldviews and Lifestyles

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INTRODUCTION

Monks are celibate religious men of women who devote themselves entirely to strict, usually communitarian, lives of obedience to a master and to a code of conduct and religious practice laid down by a monastic rule or tradition.

As this general definition of monks indicates, there are, or have been, not only Buddhist and Christian monks but Hindu (in ashrams of many kinds) and Jewish (the pre-Christian Essenes, among others) monks as well. In fact almost every major religious tradition has, or has had, its monastic groups of one kind or another. The lifestyles and practices of these various historical monastic groups differ widely, but they have a core of common characteristics: celibacy, possession of only the rudimentary necessities for sustaining life, obedience to a master and a code of conduct, with meditation, prayer, and ritual taking up a very significant portion of their lives.

The present investigation aims at exploring the human basis for and the human dynamic of monasticism—and in a very general manner—of religion itself. We will pursue this goal by comparing the life and practices of Zen and Benedictine monks and then investigating the causes for the great similarity to be seen in these practices. A philosophically oriented anthropology will be used as a means of interpreting carefully compiled empirical data on monastic practice from these two completely different cultural and religious milieus. Since data gathered from male monastic communities is used, most references will be in the masculine gender; however, both traditions studied have female monastic communities which have almost identical lifestyles, following the same monastic rules and performing the same practices.

Looking at monks from this general perspective, we of course find a great variety in
their lifestyles and practices. It is especially important to this investigation to note from the beginning how completely the practices and lifestyles of any particular monastic group seem to flow directly out of their particular mythic or doctrinal understanding of the ultimate nature of the world and of man's relation to it. This conceptual notion of the ultimate nature of things is clearly the immediate source of the various wide differences between the monks here studied as well as of others referred to only in passing. Our central object here is to search for the anthropological sources for the likenesses between monastic practitioners coming out of totally different cultures, religions, and civilizations. The present comparison is limited to Zen and Benedictine monks' lifestyles and practice. Other monastic traditions have been investigated however, and the practices of one Hindu ashram are included in the Chart in Part One as a kind of control, to indicate the extent to which the likenesses noted between Zen and Catholic monks are not merely coincidental.

It has already been noted that a monk's practices and lifestyle flow directly out of his particular worldview and beliefs. It must also be noted, however, that in almost every religious tradition which has monastic traditions the monk is widely considered to be a sort of ideal, or "perfect" fulfillment of that religion's teachings regarding man, his moral obligations, and the way in which man should relate to the "really real" or ultimate nature the world. Hence we wish to test the hypothesis that in looking at the dynamic of a monk's life and practices one may be able to gain a sort of concentrated vision of the lifestyle and practice towards which the whole believing community orients itself. The monk is very often viewed as a sort of model whose general attitudes and practices the regular faithful should strive to imitate, in the manner that their style of life permits. In this way the monk becomes a sort of mythopoeic model or worldbuilder. He reflects in his life and practices the ideal fulfillment of his religion's teachings concerning the manner in which man should relate to the ultimate nature of reality. His lifestyle symbolizes, embodies—and legitimates or corroborates—the believers' ideas of the true nature of mankind. The monk becomes a mythopoeic model of the manner in which men and women should understand and relate themselves to their own true nature and to the ultimate nature of the world. Individual monks may fall very short—and in fact historically have fallen very short—of perfectly embodying the teachings of their rules, masters, and religious traditions. Nevertheless, the general outline of their lifestyle and practice seems to remain a model to all the faithful. This is why monks' lives and practice make, in many ways at least, the ideal object of cross-cultural, empirically oriented study of the human dynamic of religion. Their very circumscribed and regimented lives make them relatively easy to investigate in a verifiable manner. Compared to the work and inherent uncertainty involved in investigating whole communities or populations of believers, investigating monks is very easy. Yet monks' beliefs and practices closely parallel those of the larger believing community. To the degree that this hypothesis is correct, the life and practice of monks represent the
life and practice of a whole religion in very concentrated form. Therefore monks lives should reveal the large patterns and dynamics of certain types of religious faith and practice with a clarity not possible to attain by looking at the believing population as a whole.

Of course there are many religious traditions which do not have monks. Often the beliefs of these traditions directly oppose monks' practices as being useless and harmful attempts by essentially degenerate men and women to save themselves, instead of relying on the mercy of a compassionate Other. This is the case of the Pure Land Buddhist tradition and, speaking generally, the Protestant Christian one. What follows in no way implies that such traditions are any less religious or any less noble, than the ones under study. In fact, preliminary investigation indicates that the same general conclusions which we will draw concerning the nonegocentric orientation of the human dynamic of religion are as valid for these antimonastic traditions as for the monastic ones.

This investigation will have two parts. The first will be a summary of an ongoing detailed comparative investigation of the life and practice of the Zen monk or "unsui"1 and of that of the Catholic follower of Benedict of Nursia's Rule for Monasteries. The latter includes both the Trappists and the so-called "Black Benedictines", so called from the color of their habit or monk's clothing. The second part will be an attempt to explain the similarities and differences between the two monastic traditions—with emphasis on searching for the human or anthropological sources for the underlying similarities. This explanation will begin at the very rudimentary level of genetics, and on that basis will suggest a more specific foundation, located with the help of sociological and anthropological methods in the tradition of Durkheim, Weber, Alfred Schutz, and their contemporary intellectual descendants.

1. THE LIFE AND PRACTICES OF THE UNSUI AND THE BENEDICTINE MONK

A. Outline of the Zen Monk's Worldview, Lifestyle, and Religious Practice

Brief history and central notions of Zen: The origins of Zen monastic life in China are not known with any great precision. In the early six hundreds Tao-hsin wrote a number of regulations for his many Zen (Chan) disciples, but it seems to have been Pai-chang (720–814) who wrote the first monastic rule modeled on the old vinaya texts of Indian Buddhism but carefully adapted to accommodate the special teachings of the sect.2 Firstly, these teachings include a rejection of previous heavy dependence on sutras and philosophical reasoning and speculation. In the words traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma, Zen is: "A special tradition outside the scriptures; no dependence on words or letters; directly pointing at the soul of man; seeing into one's own nature and the attainment of Buddhahood."3
Secondly, even though it vigorously denies any reliance on words or forms, this very denial by the Zen sect is itself the heart of one of Buddhism’s famous philosophical schools: that of the Prajna, or Perfection of Wisdom, School. According to this school the central truth of Buddhism is sunyata, or Emptiness, and tathata, or Suchness. To cling to any idea whatever is to remain caught up in ignorance. To vigorously practice until no trace of ideas or any clinging remains to cloud the pure Mind of tathata is the true Way. But even such logical propositions are dangerous objects of clinging. This school, which the Zen sect has strongly relied upon for its own ideas and practices, teaches that the most effective manner to gain true insight into the Buddha’s dharma is through direct experience gained through practice, especially practice of silent meditation, concentration, or zazen. That is why we find the unsui continually reciting the koan-like propositions of the Heart Sutra, which epitomize the Prajna School’s teaching, and striving continually not to understand this sutra’s teachings intellectually but to “realize” or experience them directly by arousing the Bodhi Mind, which is the Original Mind, without any trace of either conceptualization, desire, or clinging. It is by zazen rather than by understanding the Heart Sutra’s words that the unsui strives to gain insight into the following central core of its teaching: “Hear, O Sariputra, form is Emptiness and the very emptiness is form. The same is true of feelings, preceptions, impulses, and consciousness... no eye, or ear, or nose, or tongue, or body, or mind...”

These teachings become the keynote and goal of the unsui’s lifestyle and practice. “Only sitting:” there should be nothing outside of zazen. “There is nothing to attain,” “Enlightenment and ignorance are one,” the end of Zen is “Vast emptiness and nothing holy,” and similar sayings, plus the koans or “Zen riddles” his master gives him, are the primary verbal accounts of the worldview and goal of the unsui. To the degree that he makes progress, they all become one seamless mu, or ku: sunyata.

The more one contemplates the relation of worldview and practice, the more clearly one sees that the unsui’s practices, especially the central one of long hours of daily zazen, clearly spring directly from his notions of the ultimate nature of reality.

Outline of the Daily and Yearly Cycle of Practices: The unsui rises around 4:00 A.M., washes, dresses, and marches single file with his fellows from the Zendo—where, typically, he lives and practices zazen—to the Hondo where, for about an hour, he chants the Morning Service (Chōka, 朝課) consisting of sutras, eko (如向: formulae for handing over the merits of his practice to the honor and/or benefit of various human and/or superhuman beings), and other formulae. All are chanted communally in time to the staccato beat of the wooden drum and punctuated by the sounds of bells and gongs. This is followed by the Service in Honor of the Kitchen Deities, (Idaten fugin, 韶頌天諷經) performed near the kitchen, and the Services in Honor of Manjusri, (Shoso fugin, 聖僧諷經) and the Plum Tea Service Service, (Baito zarei, 樹溫茶禮) both performed in the Zendo. These
services are followed by breakfast, (*Shukuza*, 粥坐) taken in silence in the Dining Hall after about five to ten minutes of preliminary prayers of thanksgiving, praise, and repentence. This meal, typically consisting of only rice gruel and Japanese pickles, is eaten hurriedly and is finished somewhere near 7:00 A.M.

The middle of the day—between 7:30 and about 3:00—is taken up with either Work, (*Samu*, 作務) or Almsgathering, (*Takuhatsu*, 托証) except during the frequent periods of *sesshin* (接心) or Intensive Practice when this time, and practically the whole day, is taken up with zazen. This midday period is broken by the noon meal, (*Saiza*, 斋生) made up of rice, miso soup, vegetables, and Japanese pickles, and is taken in the same manner as breakfast: hurriedly and in silence. From about 3:00 P.M. until 5:00 is the only free period of the day.

The evening meal (*Yakuseki*, 柴石) is taken after 5:00 in silence. This is followed by a return to the Zendo for successive periods of zazen until about 9:00 o'clock. These last about forty minutes each, with brief periods of Walking Zen, (*Kinhin*, 照行) of about five to ten minutes, and are terminated by a brief ceremony of post-zazen chanting. Soon after that the signal is given to prepare for bed. The monks must quickly take down their bedrolls from the shelf above their allotted two square meters of tatami mat where they do zazen. All the monk's possessions must fit on to the small shelf area above his mat where his bedding is stored. Each monk rolls into a single thick mattress-quilt, the lights are turned out, and the day is over. Strict silence is maintained in the Zendo, the Dining Hall, and in the Bath.

There are changes in this rigorous lifestyle occurring regularly in its yearly cycle. Some of these changes make life even harder, for example than the above: the roughly two periods of *sesshin* per month—one of seven days and one of lesser length—during the half-year occupied by training periods. Other changes are much easier: half of the year is taken up with two Interim Periods (*Seikan*, 維間) and during about one month of each of these periods the monk is free to return to his home or to visit other places of practice, and the like.

Most Zen monks in Japan belong to either the Rinzai or the Soto sects and the above lifestyle varies in minor ways within each of them. Within the two sects' individual sodos or Monks' Halls the life and the strictness of the discipline also differ to some degree. The above description is meant to give only a minimal outline of life and practice so as to leave room for interpretation. Volumes could be written about the many special virtues (subservience to elders, absolute obedience to the roshi or Master), attitudes (living in the present moment with no concern for the past or future, compassion for all living beings, and the like), moods, predispositions (to accept everything, no matter how good or difficult, with equanimity, etc.), emotions, rituals, and actions which are cultivated in the Zen monastery. We will argue that all of these aspects of practice arise immediately out of the
monk's view of ultimate reality—and ultimately as Geertz also argues, out of a symbolic synthesis of his culture's and civilization's most favored and admired virtues, attitudes, and the like, woven into a single fabric by means the symbolic structure of his worldview.

B. Outline of the Benedictine Monk's History, Worldview, and Religious Practice

Outline of History and Worldview: It is evident that the Benedictine monk's beliefs concerning the ultimate nature of the world are completely different in almost every aspect from those of the unsui. The monk sees himself as following his divine Master, Jesus: in his celibacy, renunciation of all possessions, complete submission to the Father's will, love and service of all mankind, especially the poor, and in his complete renunciation of all but the minimum of life's necessities. It is very clear, therefore, that whatever similarities are found between the unsui's and the Benedictine's practice, they definitely do not arise out of similarities in worldview.

Benedictine monastic life was founded in Italy in the sixth century A.D. by Benedict of Nursia who wrote his short Rule for Monasteries based on the best elements of Christian monastic practice already in existence for over two hundred years. The Trappists and/or Cistercians—who arose in the thirteenth century out of one of the many reform movements—as well as the Black Benedictines still follow this Rule of Benedict today. The former do so with a good deal more rigor and literal interpretation than do the Black Benedictines. In this Rule the monk's life and practice are seen as the ideal way to follow Christ in a total and "valient" manner. All of the practices derive directly from Jesus' teachings as Benedict understood them. That is, they derive from the Catholic Christian notion of one eternal and omnipotent God who, as mankind's kind and loving father, sent his divine Son into the world as a man named Jesus. Jesus saved man by showing him how to gain the supernatural life of God by renouncing his own self-centeredness and by loving both God and his human fellows in the same way Jesus did. Unlike the Protestant interpretation, which emphasized man's weakness and corruption, Benedict saw the monk as a valient soldier who was required by his Master to cooperate with God's grace in a continual struggle to purify and transform himself after his divine model, Christ.

The Benedictine monk sees his life as an attempt to follow Jesus' "counsels of perfection" given to the rich young man in the Gospel: "If you would be perfect, go and sell what you have and give it to the poor and come, follow me." Just how completely the Benedictine's life and practice spring from this Christian worldview can be seen from the following section of the Prologue of the Rule:

To you, therefore, my words are now addressed, who are renouncing your own will to do battle under the Lord Christ, the true King, and are taking up the strong and bright weapons of obedience.

And first of all, whatever good work you begin to do, beg of Him with most
earnest prayer to perfect it, that He who has now deigned to count us among his sons may not at any time be grieved by our evil deeds... And so we are going to establish a school of the Lord's service...

Daily and Yearly Cycles of Practice: Typically the Benedictine monk rises before dawn, somewhere between 3:00 and 5:30 A.M., and after a brief period for washing, dressing, and bed-making, hurries in complete silence to the chapel for the morning portion of the Divine Office: Matins, Lauds, and Prime, followed by the Conventual Mass, a re-inactment of the Lord's Supper and of Jesus' sacrificial death for love of man. The Office is made up of seven “Hours” of varying lengths composed mostly of Psalms and other portions of the Bible which the monks either recite or chant communally and chorally during the course of each day. Together with the communal celebration of the Mass, this is the central religious practice of the monk. It frames his whole day, being the first thing he does in the morning and the last thing he does at night.

The morning portion of the Office and Mass is followed by breakfast, which means that the monk will have spent approximately one and a half to three hours singing, chanting, and praying together with his brothers in the chapel, plus some small period for private meditation and prayer. The morning meal is taken in silence in the refectory after prayers of thanksgiving and blessing.

After breakfast and a short free period the daily work begins at around 8:30. The monks return to the chapel at around 11:30 for more of the Divine Office, typically Terce and Sext, after which the whole community walks often in procession to the Refectory for the midday meal. This is also taken in silence. Typically, this means that the monks are silent while listening to readings from the Scriptures, the Rule, and other edifying texts. Benedict carefully regulated both the quantity and the quality of his monks' food, declaring, that about “a pound of bread a day,” plus two vegetables at the main meal should be enough. Actually today, the Trappists and some others have a purely vegetarian diet but others are content with keeping the food, including meat dishes, simple and wholesome.

After the noon meal and a brief return to the chapel for None the monk returns to his work, which ideally should be such that it supports the community's needs without taking the monks outside of the monastery. This work is considered an important form of religious practice. The monk's motto is “Work and pray”, and the Rule declares that “if the monk does not work, then he should not eat.” By about 4:30 the monks have finished their work and gather in the chapel for Hour of Vespers, usually sung in Gregorian or an equivalent simple vernacular type of chant. Vespers are followed by the evening meal and about an hour of communal recreation during which the monks may talk freely. Then comes the night Prayer Hour of Compline followed by the Grand Silence and retiring to bed. Sometimes the Trappists maintain Benedict's stipulation that the monks should sleep
in dormitories, but in most communities each fully professed monk has his own simple room or “cell” in which none of the furnishings are his own but merely given him for his use by the abbot.

The Benedictine monk takes vows of poverty, celibacy, obedience, “stability”, living his whole life in one monastery, and continual conversion of his living towards his model Christ. After a year of novitiate and three years of temporary vows, the monk takes these vows for life and they constitute the central core of his lifestyle and practice. He is expected to live a life of humility and prayer, seeking to cooperate with God’s grace to cultivate the divine life within his soul into which he was “reborn” through Baptism and which continually grows if the monk cooperates with God’s grace and does not create obstacles through sin and selfish modes of living.

C. Striking Similarities in Zen and Benedictine Monks’ Lifestyles and Practice.

In spite of the totally differing origins, beliefs, and understandings of the world, one can, by considering the outlines above and studying the data provided in the Chart below easily see that the lives and practices of Zen and Benedictine monks have a great deal in common. Let us take a look at eight areas where the similarities are particularly evident and important for our total investigation.

1) Celibacy: both types of monks pledge themselves to practice complete sexual abstinence during the tenure of their monastic life. In fact, both traditions pledged a lifetime of celibacy until the Meiji Era of Japan when Zen monks were allowed to marry after finishing a period of celibate monastic training. Once married, however, they are no longer considered unsui.

2) Minimal food, clothing, housing, and personal possessions: both have a simple—usually vegetarian—diet, have only one or two changes of simple clothes, live together in a single dormitory-like hall or in small simply furnished rooms, and both have either no personal possessions at all or an absolute minimum necessary for their work.

3) Silence: Both insist on a minimum of speech necessary for common life, work, and friendly relations.

4) Submission to a Rule and a master: both practice strict submission of their own wills to their Rule or Vinaya and personal submission to the counsels and commands of a spiritual master.

The above four commonalities are “negative” in that they severely restrict the monk’s use of the basic necessities of food, clothing, shelter, and the like. There are also “positive” commonalities.

5) Ritual: Both types of monks spend a very significant part of each day performing religious ritual. For the Zen monk this takes the form of about an hour of sutra and other chanting in the morning, plus hundreds of carefully prescribed bows, prostrations, postures,
and the like. For the Benedictine it takes the form of Mass, and the ritual recitation of
the Divine Office in the Church, together with hundreds of bows, signs of the cross, kneel-
ing, and other gestures.

**CHART**

**Common Positive and Negative Elements** of Zen and Benedictine Monastic Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Practice</th>
<th>The Zen Unsui</th>
<th>The Benedictine Monk</th>
<th>Vedanta Ashram Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Positive Practices</strong>: Practices tending to arouse, support and, reinforce special, relatively nonnegocentric attitudes, emotions, activities, and levels of consciousness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEDITATION</strong></td>
<td>Zazen: the central practice of the unsui: 3-14 hrs. daily.</td>
<td>Meditation on Jesus, God, etc.; “Contemplation” and other forms of non-conceptual meditation. 1-3 hrs. daily.</td>
<td>Mantra and Japa, plus conceptual forms: 3 hrs. daily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHANTING</strong></td>
<td>Morning: hōka, plus frequent sutra and other chants daily: about 2 hrs. daily.</td>
<td>Choral recitation or chanting of Office, at Mass and other times. 3-5 hrs. daily.</td>
<td>Japa, mantra, hymns: 1 hr. daily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRAYER</strong></td>
<td>Praise and Thanksgiving to Buddhas, etc. Dharami, eko, and other: 1½ hrs. daily.</td>
<td>Many types of prayer are monks’ central practice: Praise, thanksgiving in Psalms, Mass, etc. 5 hrs. daily.</td>
<td>Krishna praises, etc.: 1 hr. or more daily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RITUAL</strong></td>
<td>Chōka, homage, and petition to Manjusri, Idaten, etc., bowing prostrations, etc. A central form of practice.</td>
<td>Mass, Office, Sacraments, bows, prostrations etc. A central form of practice.</td>
<td>Arati ceremonies, etc. 1 hr. or more daily. An important form of practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LOVE/COMPASSION</strong></td>
<td>Very important: central virtue of bodhisattva.</td>
<td>Extremely important: main goal of monk’s life is perfect love of Christ and man.</td>
<td>Highly stressed: Bhakti or devotional love of God is a central goal of life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>USE OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS</strong></td>
<td>Rhymical striking of various instruments is ubiquitous. Bells seen as aid to samadhi.</td>
<td>Small bells punctuate Mass, Office, meals, etc. Organ at Mass, Vespers.</td>
<td>Frequent use of bells at ceremonies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>READING SACRED TEXTS</strong></td>
<td>Outside of sutra chanting this is not much encouraged.</td>
<td>Daily Spiritual Reading, continual study of Bible, and other uplifting books.</td>
<td>Study of sacred texts an important practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBMISSION TO SPIRITUAL MASTER</strong></td>
<td>Daily interview with roshi; utter dependence on his direction is central.</td>
<td>A central aspect of practice: rely on Confessor and Spiritual Director.</td>
<td>Reliance on Master insisted upon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SECLUSION FROM SOCIETY</strong></td>
<td>Quiet and concentration of sodo and zendo is of great importance.</td>
<td>Lifelong separation from secular society and the contemplative atmosphere of monastery highly valued.</td>
<td>Living in the Ashram, a place of seclusion and contemplation is very important aspect of life and practice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Areas of Practice | The Zen Unsui | The Benedictine Monk | Vedanta Ashram Member
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**B. Negative Practices**: Practices tending to suppress or de-emphasize selfish and egocentered thinking, attitudes, emotions, activities, and levels of consciousness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIET</th>
<th>Vegetarian: minimal selection and quality; ample quantity.</th>
<th>Vegetarian for Trappists: simple but ample except when fasting.</th>
<th>Usually vegetarian: simple but ample.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HOUSING</td>
<td>Minimal: dormitory style in zendo is spartan.</td>
<td>Simple: sometimes dormitory but usually “cells.” Minimal but not formally regulated.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL POSSESSIONS</td>
<td>Minimal: containable on small shelf in zendo.</td>
<td>No private property: articles for personal use minimal.</td>
<td>Celibacy while monk: vows usually for life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEXUAL ACTIVITY</td>
<td>Celibacy and continence mandatory while a monk.</td>
<td>Celibacy and continence vowed for life.</td>
<td>Spirit of silence highly stressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPEECH</td>
<td>Strict silence in zendo, dining hall, etc. and continual spirit of silence.</td>
<td>Strict silence after Eve-Spirit of silence is highly stressed. and halls. Continual spirit of silence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLEEP</td>
<td>Minimal: 6 or 7 hr. a night, sometimes much less.</td>
<td>Minimal: 8 hrs. or less.</td>
<td>Not highly regulated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBEDIENCE</td>
<td>Obedience to Master and seniors is strict obligation.</td>
<td>Highly stressed and practically absolute; seen as imitation of Christ.</td>
<td>Complete obedience to spiritual master strictly insisted on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEGGING</td>
<td><em>Takuhatsu</em> several hrs., several times weekly is an important practice.</td>
<td>None, but it is respected since Jesus depended on others for all his needs.</td>
<td>None, but highly respected. A tradition for advanced sanyasin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEVERE ASCETICISM</td>
<td>Seen as dangerous for all but advanced, with advice of roshi. Middle way stressed.</td>
<td>Seen as dangerous for all but highly advanced, with consent of Director. Benedict stressed, “Moderation in all things”.</td>
<td>Seen as dangerous for all but highly advanced.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6) **Prayer**: Both the Zen and the Benedictine monk spend a significant part of their day in formal recitation of prayers of praise, thanksgiving, and petition to the Buddha or God. In prayer, both acknowledge total submission to and dependence on the Buddha or God according to their respective beliefs concerning the Ultimate.

7) **Chanting**: both use a form of chanting to chorally and ritually recite scriptures and other formulae, usually to the accompaniment of sound or musical instruments.

8) **Meditation**: Both assume a motionless posture to concentrate their minds. The Benedictine practices a variety of types of silent meditation which depend on his level of achievement. The upper rungs of these levels, such as the “prayer of quiet,” are remarkably similar to zazen in that they involve special levels of consciousness in which conceptual activity drops sharply or ceases altogether. The usual mode of meditation however, differs sharply in the two traditions. Both traditions do, however, allow for both conceptual,
reflective kinds of meditation and nonconceptual forms where the mind is more or less emptied of all concepts, even of God or of the Buddha.

These latter four "positive" commonalities seem to have a common human or psychological result: they tend to arouse special levels of awareness, or nonordinary modes of consciousness. One striking common characteristic of these special modes—actually, though they resemble one another, they are by no means identical, being aroused and sustained by differing notions of the world and correspondingly different modes of practice—of consciousness is a lowering of egocentered awareness. That is to say the ordinary, egocentered mode of awareness is supplanted by one in which the monk strives for an actual experience of what is considered to be the ideal state of the emotions and consciousness: a selfless and benevolent attitude.

The former, "negative," practices also have a common characteristic which is correlative to the "positive" ones: they tend to depress, deemphasize, or minimize some of mankind's most fundamentally egocentered urges and modes of consciousness, such as those relating to food, sex, and personal possessions.

Each of the other practices can be related to a greater or lesser degree to these two categories of suppressing or moderating egocenteredness or arousing and emphasizing nonegocentered emotions, actions, attitudes, and modes of consciousness. For this reason all of the commonalities between Zen and Benedictine monks have been divided into these two basic categories. In Part Two some possible reasons for the similarities highlighted in the chart will be discussed.

2. THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF RELIGIOUS NONEGOCENTERED WORLDVIEWS AND PRACTICES

A. Religious Practice Springs From a Notion of Ultimate Reality, and Arouses Experiences Which Confirm that Notion

The first step towards understanding some of the common human dynamics which would explain these similarities—and we will see that these dynamics are partly genetic, partly social, and partly cultural in its nature—is to note, as we already have done in brief, that each one of the similarities involves an emphasis on what I have chosen to call "nonegocentric" human attitudes, actions, emotions, experiences, and modes of consciousness or awareness.

But what does this mean in practice? It means that unless the monk finds ways and means of modifying or moderating his normally egocentric basic human drives or urges for food, sex, possessions, aggression, domination, independence, and the like he will not be able to persevere very long in his resolve to be a monk. He is, however, furnished with relatively effective means for modifying his attitudes, emotions, and the focus of his con-
sciousness through what are here called the positive negative and practices. His original belief in his religion's teachings about the ultimate nature of mankind and the world is greatly enhanced and confirmed by deep and immediate experience of the attitudes, emotions, and levels of consciousness which these practices facilitate. Ideally this enhancement motivates even more vigorous practice so that the focus of his whole life tends to be moved away from egocenteredness and towards a relatively nonegocentered mode of both thinking and acting.

Naturally, the basic genetics, chemistry, and biological dynamics of his basically egocentered drives are not altered. They are nevertheless given a different interpretation, and so they can be channeled into new directions. The monk remains biologically driven towards self-centeredness throughout his life. Nevertheless, history clearly testifies to the power of such a religious dynamic to fundamentally affect not only monks' lives but whole societies and civilizations whose members find in the monks' lives a model which they aim at imitating, in at least their broad and general outlines. It appears that when belief in ideological or religious systems which foster and legitimate basically nonegocentered ethical systems become weak and ineffectual in a society, then antisocial behavior increases and the whole fabric of the society weakens.

The samadhi or zamaai produced by vigorous zazen meditation can serve as an effective example of the dynamic involved in monastic practice. Zazen produces a state of mind which is almost without conceptualization but which is nevertheless sharply focused and awake to everything which is happening. The monk is motivated to do zazen by his Buddhist worldview and faith. And the state of consciousness with which the monk views the world in samadhi is one which corresponds more or less exactly to what the Buddha taught to be the original and ultimate reality: one in which no concepts or things appear, where desire or clinging is nonexistent, and where a calm tranquility pervades one's awareness of every "thing." A closely parallel experience is had by the Christian monk who chants and contemplates the beauty of human life transformed by the type of love Jesus' life and teaching described. The Catholic monk interprets the, at times, intense feeling of joy, freedom, and benevolence towards all mankind and all things as the result of God's indwelling Life within him. Because he has been reborn as a child of God, then Jesus' own feelings are at work transforming the "old man" and his selfish tendencies into selfless love.

In other words, both monastic systems foster the kind of emotions, attitudes and, levels of consciousness which their respective teachings declare to be in accord with man's true nature. Thus: 1) the practices and the resulting emotions and states of consciousness on the one hand, and the notions of the ultimate nature of reality on the other, tend to corroborate one another, and thus to synthesize a unified worldview with a clear notion of ideal human conduct; 2) although their worldviews are totally different they nevertheless use similar means to produce similarly nonegocentric emotions, attitudes, and levels of
consciousness.

This interpretation applies the general theories concerning the general social and cultural dynamic of all religious systems which Berger, Geertz, and others have elaborated during the past twenty-five years. But these general theories need to be greatly developed in order to adequately explain the apparently shared human dynamic which underlies the commonalities in such religious phenomena as Zen and Catholic monks' lifestyles and practices. Here, we will attempt a small contribution.

All believers of every religion combine an idea of the ultimate nature of the world with the practical and ethical means for living and experiencing this ultimate nature of things, at least in a dim and imperfect manner. These two elements—conceptual worldview and practical elements of practice and lifestyle—tend to mutually support and confirm one another. Looked at from the social point of view they do a good deal more than this: they produce a relatively stable worldview into which a whole society's or subsociety's familial, political, economic and artistic systems can be anchored, giving them moral standards and values bound together by an ultimate context. Thus anchored in an ultimate or religious worldview, all of the other social systems of a society—or the social subgroup constituted by the believing community—can be seen and legitimated as being in accord with the widest, deepest, or most ultimate dimension of reality. Of course such a powerful ideological force as a religious worldview can be and has been manipulated by unscrupulous leaders both within religion itself and from the outside for political and economic ends. A society without such an overarching worldview and ethical system is, however, even more powerless against such manipulation.

Frederick Streng has gone a step further in specifying the human dynamic which takes place when a certain inspiring symbolic, mythopoeic, and doctrinal religious worldview motivates an individual to attempt to embody in his or her life a corresponding lifestyle and practice. He begins by presuming that, as mentioned above, emotions, attitudes, actions, and modes of awareness are aroused which tend to corroborate and validate a given doctrinal worldview. But Streng has delved deeper into the dynamic involved here. He calls this religious dynamic a "process of authentic personal transformation." When a person really believes that a certain religious worldview is authentic, he immediately has a model for his own character and behaviour and sets about trying to use the recommended religious practices to transform himself into a human being whose own character and disposition correspond as perfectly as possible to the ultimate dimensions of reality. Using as cross-cultural models one notable Buddhist text (*The Eight Thousand Line Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*) and one Christian one (Luther's *Lectures on [Paul's Epistle to the] Romans*), he elaborates or discloses five common elements within this human dynamic of personal transformation through religious belief and practice. He describes as "axiological structures" the cosmological elements which I have here called mythopoeic notions of ultimate reality.
This comparative analysis of axiological structures will be made by describing five key elements of the process of ultimate transformation found in the LLR and the ELPW. These key elements are: (1) the basic problematic of living authentically in existence, (2) the ultimate reality which makes authentic living possible, (3) the spiritual means available for authentic living, (4) characteristics of personal experience in living authentically, and (5) characteristic social expressions of living authentically. Streng shows how Luther's basically Protestant Christian worldview and the Perfection of Wisdom notion of Buddhism both evince the same human dynamic of personal transformation in accord with their respective axiological notions of ultimate reality. Here we wish to briefly illustrate how the same dynamic is evinced not merely in texts but in the existential lifestyles of Zen and Benedictine monks.

Each of the five categories are packed with meaning and deserve at least a brief clarification before being expanded and applied to the present study. The first principle simply points out that both Christianity and Buddhism, as mirrored in the two texts, offer an authoritative explanation of why man is so often in misery and in need of salvation. The first sees the problematic as the result of original sin and the second sees it as being the result of men and women's gross and subtle attachments. We all know that the second axiomatic principle concerning the nature of the Ultimate or ultimate reality is God for the Christian and the tathata (Suchness) or sunyata (Emptiness) for the Buddhist. The first two elements are useless without the third which is a kind of conclusion to be drawn from the first two taken as premises: since man's deepest problematic is thus, and since the ultimate nature of man and reality is so, then the way to release and fulfillment is this: faith in God's absolute righteousness and mercy for Luther, and utter rejection of all attachment to any form for the Prajna teacher. When this third element is put into practice, the practitioner looks within himself and sees whether or not his faith and practice are authentic—by following elements four and five as guidelines. In this way the believer and sincere practitioner has an integrated system of guidelines and checks whereby he can, in the security of the community of his fellow believers, continue a lifetime of self-transforming practice.

Streng's disclosure of these elements has its strengths and weaknesses. One of its chief strong points is that, unlike much of the pioneering work in this field, it is completely free of the reductionistic tendency to make religion a mere function or epiphenomenon produced by supposedly more important social, economic, or depth-psychological forces. It has the potential of being adapted either by Christian theology or by Buddhist thought without doing violence to either. This is possible because the underlying symbolic nature of all truth, religious, and otherwise, is carefully—even if not extensively—spelled out. Another strong point is the solid philosophical and social-scientific principles on which it rests. One of its chief weak points is the scant attention which it gives to certain ramifications and
conclusions which it naturally gives rise to. We will briefly discuss these below.

For our purposes here it will be enough to briefly investigate the extent to which Zen and Benedictine monks' lifestyles and practice, when studied in the context of Streng's five elements of ultimate personal transformation, can be seen to correspond to this dynamic. We will see that they do so to an impressive degree.

First, it is necessary to note that Catholic monks' axiomatic structures or views of ultimate reality have both great similarities and great differences from those of Luther. Suffice it here to say merely that the notion of God, sin, and man's need for grace are very similar, but that, as we have already noted, the Catholic monk's notion of man's relation to the Ultimate demands great personal effort to cooperate with God's free grace, while Luther sees such personal effort at good works as useless and even harmful to man's basic stance of total dependence on God's power. This basic difference in understanding is of course the key to understanding why Luther's type of Protestant religion has few if any monastic groups whereas the Catholic tradition has many.

The Catholic monks' practices of daily communal praying, chanting, and ritual celebration of Jesus' self-effacing death as well as his self-denial, restraint, charity, and meditation all follow logically from his Catholic notion of God. He is Creator and Father; he had pity on man's weakness and sinfulness by sending his own Son whom the believer should obey, depend on, and valiently strive to imitate. Each of Streng's five elements are clearly present here, and go together to form a single religious fabric. In the monk's mind, all elements go together to form a single dynamic: the imitation of Christ and symbiotic relation with the invisible Life and Love of God which was grafted onto his own human life at Baptism.

The dramatic yearly cycle of liturgical celebrations of Christ's birth, death, and resurrection, wherein the monk's person is mystically or sacramentally involved, furnish him with convincing experiential proof that God has redeemed him by transforming his own inner human life and loves into a kind of symbiotic union with the divine Life and Love of the Christ. Thus it can be seen that his whole life and practice arise out of the first three of Streng's elements: 1) man is sinful, 2) God is Father, and, 3) man can be transformed by a free decision to vigorously embark upon a set of practices which presume God's love and his special help or grace but which also demand the individual believer's own strenuous efforts and practice. Elements four and five complete the picture: upon resolutely embarking on such a course of practice the monk can look both into his own interior experience and into the exterior social milieu of the monastery and see confirmations of many types that indeed these realms of reality are deeply impressed with the imprint of the divine life and love such as his view of the Ultimate had led him to believe. These experiences make it easy to believe that Jesus is God's Son sent as the model for man, and as the King of the newly established Kingdom of God. In fact the monk, surrounded by his brothers
and chanting God's praises in the monastery, has every trace of doubt swept away. So that, as Geertz says of the average Javanese person's reaction during a great religious ritual, a doubter's sanity would be seriously called into question. Such is the nature and sociology of knowledge, religious and otherwise. Verbal symbols unite with social common consent, common action, and common experience to produce not just "Knowledge" but reality itself.

The monk's whole life is simply an effort to conform his own life and love to his divine model. When this very simple symbolic truth is seen to be its core, the whole pattern of the Catholic monk's life and practice is seen to fit together as a logical, whole process of personal transformation. His hours of prayer are primarily praise and thanks for the reality of his reborn life of love. His life of abnegation is the logical necessity of his understanding that the "old" selfish man is not yet dead but must be continually "crucified" to give room to the life and selfless love of the new man.

In the same way the unsui's life with its long hours of zazen, spartan restraint in respect to food, sleep, housing, dress, and obedience flow directly out of the notions of the human condition and nature of the Ultimate which he takes as axiomatic principles. Like those of his Catholic counterpart, the first three elements are very simple: 1) all pain is due to clinging or attachment, 2) since all things are from the beginning really only Empty Suchness, then such attachments are vain; therefore, 3) he must pursue the Bodhisattva's Way with vigor and compassion for all sentient beings. The last two elements follow automatically from these, and together they make the many practices and elements of the unsui's life and practice into a single, simple fabric of a personally transforming lifestyle.

The sutras, the Four Vows, the interviews with his Master, and the like help to integrate a strong clear intimation of the Emptiness of the really real. His zazen, his work, and his actions all aid in giving many impressive interior intimations and experiences of his own original Buddha Nature, which is nothing else but Empty Suchness undifferentiated from the myriad empty beings around him. The conceptless samadhi achieved after long and energetic periods of zazen confirms and reveals, at least in an initial manner, what the sutras only imperfectly hinted at: inexpressible Suchness.

The Zen monk's life and practices can thus be seen to also be a process of ultimate personal transformation. But the ideally transformed Zen monk is quite different from the Christian one. The hundreds of differences clearly seem to arise from different ideals slowly clarified in the totally different cultural milieu in which Zen Buddhism arose. All of such differences were programmed into the notions of ultimate reality which his faith authoritatively gives him.

One can, it seems, get to the heart of these differences by reducing Streng's five elements to a single central symbolic goal for each of the two monastic Ways into personal transformation. The Zen unsui seeks release through insight, and insight is obtainable through long and continued effort to achieve absolute concentration which stills both mind
and body. The Benedictine seeks absolute *Life* through selfless *Love* of all men, and perfect love of men through perfect love of God in Jesus the Christ. Even more radically put, the Zen man seeks the perfect compassion of the *bodhisattva* through the perfect peace of samadhi and the Bodhi Mind. The Benedictine seeks perfect peace through the completely self-renouncing love of Jesus. The single symbol of the Buddha enlightened by meditating under the bodhi tree furnishes the Zen unsui with all he needs to impel him along his way of personal transformation. Its central motif is complete peace bringing gentle compassion. Its counterpart for the Benedictine is the crucified Christ as triumphant king reigning by means of absolute and gentle self-sacrificing love. These two mythopoeic visions of the world, like those in art or poetry, symbolically present to their believers a powerfully moving picture of man, his dignity, and his destiny. However, unlike works of either art or poetry, they are visions to which believers have communally committed themselves as representing the deepest and most ultimate nature of man. By their very nature they must become practical ideals or they are nothing. Hence, like codes of law or kinship systems, they take their place in their culture's total stock of genuine human knowledge.

Clearly, the two central symbols described above are very different, but just as clearly they symbolize the ultimacy of a solid core of similar virtues.

B. Nonegocentered Monastic Lifestyles and Practice Arise Out of Experienced Need to Moderate Primordial Biological Self-Centered Urges

The above sketched theory of religious action as manifested in Zen and Benedictine Monks' life and practice may be of considerable help towards clarifying, from a cultural point of view the, question of why the Zen or Christian monk does what he does. As it stands, however, it is not at all adequate to answer our central question: why do Zen and Catholic monks' practices have so many similar elements, even though their doctrines and worldviews differ as much as day and night. Streng's disclosure of a common human dynamic only puts off the central question as to why there should be a common process of personal transformation in the first place. Another step is clearly necessary.

Since the work of David Hume, and especially since that of Marx and Freud, it has become increasingly evident just how thoroughly *self-centered* every action of the human individual really is. Recent social scientific thought, from that of Geertz to that of Habermas, has tended to explore a complementary aspect of the human phenomenon which these earlier great thinkers tended to ignore entirely. Man is not merely a selfish individual, though that he surely is. He is also a social animal who must learn to develop relatively selfless attitudes towards his fellows and his world. If not, he and his society will inevitably perish at the hands of societies whose members are able to sacrifice and sublimate selfish urges for the sake of the social whole. Both Marx and Freud agreed that such socialization or sublimation were necessary. Neither, however, realized that religious
systems have been in the past and remain today one of the most effective means of tempering excessive and destructive egocentered urges and aggressiveness and of refocusing the individuals' consciousness on nonegocentric actions, attitudes, and realities.

Hume and Machiavelli showed us man's ineradicable selfishness on the social and political planes; Marx and Freud showed us the same thing on the economic and biological or subconscious levels. The works of these four great thinkers and others like them go a long way towards explaining the decline in popularity of religious notions of man and of the world. Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and the like all teach that man's ultimate fulfillment lies in total abandonment of egoism and selfishness and in the bliss of selfless at-oneness with the Buddha-tathagata, with God, with Allah, or the like. The great minds of modern science, psychology, and philosophy on the other hand have taught us that man is an organism driven by primitive genetic urges towards self-preservation through obtaining and ingesting food, reproduction through sexual union, and self-aggrandizement through aggression and the survival of the fittest. Now for more than two centuries these two views have been seen by most as more or less mutually exclusive and contradictory. Recent insight into the thoroughly symbolic and linguistic nature of all human knowledge, however, has tended to strengthen the notion that religious and scientific modes of thought and knowledge may be more complementary than contradictory.

According to the eminent American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, man is the only animal whose aggressive and egocentric urges are not genetically controlled by instinctual curbs against unfettered aggression against and killing of his own kind. Likewise, mankind is, along with a few other primates, the only species whose sexual aggressiveness is not genetically controlled by periods of estrus.

According to Geertz, man has developed cultural modes of replacing these genetic controls and, he says, religion is one of the central examples. Man's religious symbol systems, he says, are fabrics of symbols and stories of cosmogenesis and the inner nature of things according to which man must live if he is to be really happy and fulfilled in his true nature as man. This is the symbolic means used by both primitive and post-modern man by which he passes on his most favored moods, attitudes, predispositions, and feelings: presenting them as in accord with the ultimate nature of the universe as the wise men of the society know it to be. We have noted that although the central symbols which motivate Zen and Benedictine monks' practice are totally different, they nevertheless motivate practices which are very similar. The central problem is, Why? We are now near the answer.

Both the Buddhist and the Christian worldview—and in fact every one of the great world religions' worldviews—trace out a view of ultimate reality in which mankind and his everyday self-centered preoccupations are set into an immense context of time, space, life, and love in which they are dwarfed into insignificance and triviality. To attain the "really
real” which such a vision calls forth, the believer embarks upon a process of personal transformation which is aimed at putting his selfishness in its true place.

Even though their conceptual doctrines or ideas about ultimate reality are based on symbols and stories which are totally different, nevertheless, both of them are molded by a common human dynamic. The founders and patriarchs of both Buddhism and Christianity—and of the other time-tested religious systems of the world as well—realized that ultimately, in a way not easily understood by younger, less experienced and more hot-blooded members of their society, the very nature of men and women and of their universe require that strict curbs be placed on their egocentered urges, and that these curbs should not be based on force or fear. Rather they seem to be more properly based on the realization that a vision of relatively selfless human benevolence is not a mere illusory dream but, as the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch teaches, a “princip Hofnung,” or a “principle of hope” absolutely necessary for human life and well-being. The resulting central core of stories and teachings about the ultimate nature of the universe which one finds in Buddhism, Christianity, and other religions were never meant to be literal. That is not the nature of religious truth. Both are mythopoeic. That is, they were symbolic and creative by their very nature.

Calling the religious truth on which Zen and Christian monks base their life and practice “symbolic” does not by any means imply that the myths, stories, and other teachings which embody religious teaching are mere empty fabrications. If that were so, then there would be no basis for the commonalities in Zen and Benedictine monks’ practice which we have seen clearly to exist. On the contrary, these religious notions of the ultimate nature of things are true! They are symbolically true in a manner analogous to the way in which poetry and art are true. This is the center of the anthropological view of the nature of religion taught by Schutz, Geertz, Bellah, Berger, and others. Not all of these thinkers agree as to the sense in which these symbolic types of truth are true. In this paper, however, I wish to argue with Bellah that they are ultimately and irreducibly true in the way both great art and great legal codes are true. Even though constantly in movement and growth, as long as they are being lived by committed believers, the very interpersonal commitment and agreement among the faithful that these symbolic truths and the values they embody are ultimate truth constitutes them as part of that community’s general stock of knowledge just as surely as commitment to a certain legal or family system does so.

Both of the very different mythopoeic visions of the ultimate nature of the world which we are discussing here are based on primordial experience of the same general cosmic mold, as it were. The central point which I wish to make in this presentation is that both Zen Buddhism and Catholic Christianity, not to mention other religious systems, are formed out of the primordial human experience that giving free rein to one’s self-centered urges is not ultimately in accord with either man’s or the ultimate reality’s innermost “nature,”
in the widest symbolic sense of that term.

Contemporary thinkers such as Michael Foucault and Jacques Derrida have pointed out that Husserl was wrong in continuing to presume a platonistic unitary essence, truth, or Wesen for each phenomenon. Rather, truth is wrought. It is made by societies in historical process involving power plays of gigantic dimensions stretching over centuries, by civilizational currents, waves, and streams. Religious truth is subject to the same dynamic change, as history clearly shows, and religious practice is part of the process.

But the days of naive positivism, when "scientists" could apodictically claim that some luminous "reason" or "science" had gone beyond religious claims and proved them to be childish or neurotic falsehoods are over. Such claims refute themselves because they indulge in the very same kind of a priori divinization of their position as ultimate which they are trying to refute. It is not that they do not have a right to prefer their own version of ultimate reality; but they definitely cannot claim "scientific proof" for their position.

The study of the sociology of knowledge and linguistics has not yet achieved anything like a consensus as to the exact nature of human knowledge and its creation. It has, however, gone considerably beyond the naive rationalism of Bergson and his heirs who claimed scientific reason to be the ultimate criterion of truth and knowledge not realizing that reason too is a human fabrication. The best scientists since Einstein and Heizenberg readily admit that there is no such things as "scientific laws," absolute truth, or a single universal kind of "reason". Many do not personally give religious claims the value of truth, but few deny this with the same chauvinistic assurance which was popular a half century ago.

Every man inhabits the same earth and experiences the same rhythms of sun, season, birth, death, pain, and happiness. It is accepted by all major schools of philosophy today that human knowledge itself has been slowly pieced together by means of linguistic representations of millenial, lived, communitarian experience. Religious knowledge, unlike the direct, "empirical" knowledge of "mountains," "amoebas," or the results of scientific experiments which modern science has put into the center of our attention, is more like the truth of poetry or art, as the American philosopher George Santayana noted almost a century ago. That is, though "mountains" too are symbolically and linguistically generated "ideas" within man's stock of knowledge, religious notions of ultimate reality and human nature also, on a much more general level, symbolize and so synthesize realities of the widest ranges of human experience.

This experience, of course, differs in every society. The linguistic symbols, stories, and mythopoeic elements of every society piece together a unique fabric of religious, mythic, poetic, literary, and cosmological elements which becomes the common heritage of all its individual members—to one degree or another—in the very process of learning the same language and coming to maturity within the same environment. All of these elements are
of a different symbolic and linguistic order than are the direct linguistic symbolization of "trees," "mother," and "death." The former, religious, symbol systems are as it were the outermost layers of any given society's system of human knowledge. But precisely because they represent the widest, and so "ultimate," layers of cosmological and moral experience, they usually contain and "explain" all the other systems of knowledge, at least in the minds of the believing subgroup which constitutes any given religious community.

Actually, both Zen and Benedictine monks, are typical of many traditional religious action systems found in every society. These two systems have synthesized lifestyles and practices which attempt to perfectly embody the ideal human life as envisioned in two rather typical symbolic religious notions of the ultimate nature of both man and reality. Further, both of these symbolically synthesized notions of ultimate reality were originally carefully conceived by their respective founders to embody a notion of the Ultimate into which their respective society's most favored virtues, attitudes, habits, actions, moods, predispositions, and levels of consciousness were all carefully woven: love or compassion, repentence for sins or faults, thanksgiving and praise for a knowledge of God or Tathagata, rejection of money, food, sex, power, or human knowledge as being central objects of man's striving, and the like. Not all of these are by any means the same. In fact they are very different indeed when seen in action in the two monastic systems. Zazen, for example, has no close counterpart in Benedictine practice, even though motionless concentration is encouraged. Likewise, the Zen monk is not encouraged to be concerned with the well-being of the secular society in the way the Benedictine is.

Nevertheless, we have seen that they live very similar lives—for very different "reasons." The reason for this similarity, as I have briefly attempted to outline here, lies deeply in the very nature of man. Even though he must be self-centered or die from lack of food and other necessities, nevertheless, he must continually strive to moderate his selfishness or be excluded from his fellows as a cancerous cell in the social organism. Zen and Benedictine monks—and all the believers who see them as ideally conforming to the ultimate nature of reality—live their nonself centered lifestyles because they sense that such a lifestyle, and the symbolic worldview which calls it forth, are both somehow transcendentally true, in a manner which goes beyond mere rationality. They hear the mythopoeic truth in the dharma of the Buddha or the gospel of the Christ, and they use their lives and religious practice to actually "realize"—in their moods, actions, emotions, and levels of consciousness—the ultimate reality symbolically but really synthesized by their founders and millions of fellow believers. Perhaps that is why most cultures reverence their greatest poets and greatest saints in very similar manners.

NOTES

1. In this essay we presume that such Buddhist words as "unsui", "zazen", "tathata", and the
like have already been assimilated into the English language and so we do not italicize them as foreign words.

2. For a good discussion of the certainties and uncertainties concerning the origins of the earliest Zen (Ch’an) monastic codes in T’ang China, see Martin Colcutt’s “The Early Ch’an Monastic Rule”, in Early Ch’an in China and Tibet, Lewis Landcaster and Whalen Lai, eds. (Berkeley: The Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, 1983), 165-184.

3. These famous words have also been attributed to Nan-chu’an P’u-Yüan. See D. T. Suzuki, Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series, (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 171.


5. The data below is based on several years of direct study and observation of the schedules, rules, and lifestyles in the Monks’ Halls or sodos in the two major branches of Zen in Japan, the Soto and the Rinzai. Part of this study was done by the author but that study is validated and greatly extended by the unpublished material of Griffeth Faulk, whose ten years of careful research and observation of the Zen Buddhist monk’s life is surely the most careful and detailed work done to date.


7. This outline of Trappist and Black Benedictine daily and yearly cycles of practice is based upon an extensive survey of contemporary practice in American and European monasteries. These written surveys were made to supplement and update the author’s own thirteen years of personal experience as a Benedictine monk, which ended in 1968. Four years of this period were spent at Sant’ Anselmo University in Rome as a doctoral student in theology together with Benedictine students and professors from monasteries all over the world. During these four years the author spent over six months living in monasteries in Italy, France, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, England, Austria, and Belgium.


9. This information is based upon interviews with members of the Vedanta Society, a worldwide society whose members live a community life of monastic practice is ashrams. The information is naturally less precise and detailed than the other two central objects of our investigation. It is meant to serve here as a control, to indicate that the practices discussed are not limited to Buddhist and Catholic monasteries.


13. Ibid., 91-94.


