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JUST OUT

EDMOND PEZET

*A Priest among Buddhist Monks
in Thailand*



Letters and Writings
collected and presented by H. Huysegoms et P. Liesse

The first part of our book presents the career of Edmond Pezet by revealing extracts from letters sent to his superiors and friends between 1949 and 2005.

Born in 1923 in a family of poor farmers living in Lot Prefecture in France, Edmond Pezet was drafted in 1946 into a French expeditionary force bound for Indochina. It was there that he decided to return to Southeast Asia as a missionary priest: *"I felt the need to try to make atonement that would compensate, in a modest way, for the harm I had witnessed being done to the Vietnamese people."*

In 1956, he was sent by the Society of the Auxiliaries of the Mission (S.A.M.) to serve as a native bishop in Northeast Thailand. For more than twelve years, he shared the hard life of the villagers, adapting himself to their customs and their severe living standards. It pained him to see that the local clergy confined itself to recommending to Christians and to people asking for baptism religious practices not related to their culture. At the same time, his interest in Buddhist spirituality of the Thai people increased.

In 1970, Edmond Pezet went to a university in Bangkok to study Sanskrit and Buddhist doctrine. He stayed at that time in the *wat* (monastery) of an urban monk. Later, he shared the contemplative life of the "Monks of the Forest" who follow the rigorous practice of the Elders. After that, Pezet provided paramedical service in a camp for Cambodian refugees. Little by little, his way of life and his relations with Buddhists found him becoming quite distant from authorities of the official church. Finally, in 1989, he returned to France where he spent his remaining years as a country priest.

A major part of our book is a selection of nine of Pezet's articles, some unpublished while others appeared in various journals. Pezet desired to make known to Christians the essence of Buddhism beyond the outward forms and wrong paths we find in all religions.

May our readers discover that Pezet was able to absorb on his own the fundamental intuition of the Buddha, that is, the perception of the ultimate in the reality of every moment. For him the important thing was not to compare doctrines. He was able to grasp the key doctrines of Buddhist spirituality, thanks to his dedicated practice of meditation he found among the Buddhist monks. In other words, he discovered a new way of looking at reality. It is our hope that our book will also allow those who have become conscious of the limits of dogmatic assertions to deepen the ultimate meaning of their own lives.

"Thanks to their writings and friends, memories of Fathers Monchanin and Le Saux, who encountered Hinduism, are kept in France and in the Church. Concerning his encounter with Buddhism, Edmond Pezet was their equal in terms of merit, but because of his modesty, his self-effacement, and his very ordinary looks, many people were unaware of him and took no notice of this exceptional being and great spiritual personality that he had and still has. It is unfortunate that in the Church, even among its leaders, people did not use Pezet's experience and his competence."
Gérard Bessière

"This second part of Pezet's article is really great; it is the best I have read so far on inter-religious dialogue. He is so sensitive and understanding. One or two points which struck me: Buddha's teaching and doctrine, not a matter of dogmas or beliefs. They point to the spiritual Way. We cannot really define or explain the ultimate reality, only symbols and silence can be used. Western logic and mindset will not do. Only Buddhists can really understand Buddhism...etc. All this is great stuff. Ama Samy