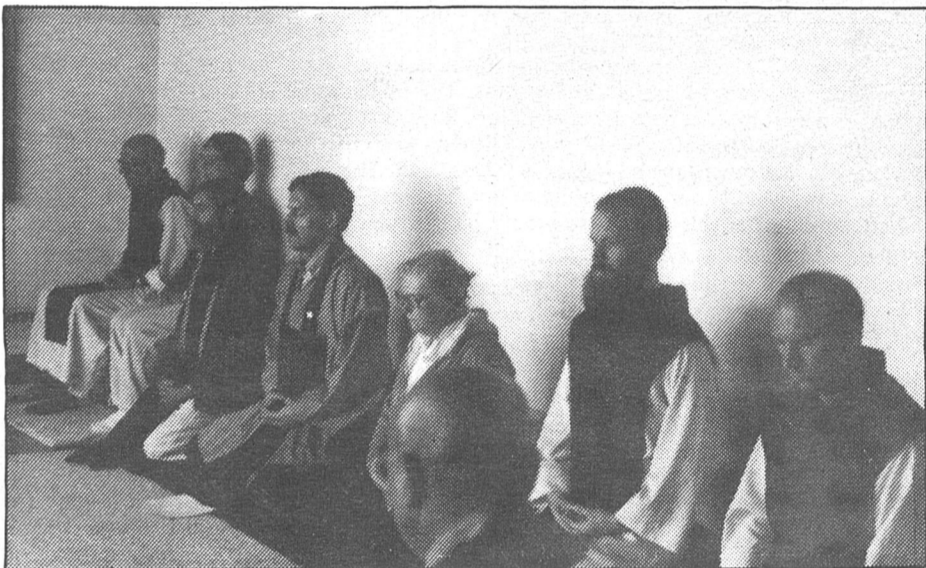


“BE STILL— KNOW THAT I AM GOD”

*Soen Sa Nim Leads
Combined Christian-
Buddhist Retreat at
Gethsemene Trappist
Monastery in
Kentucky*



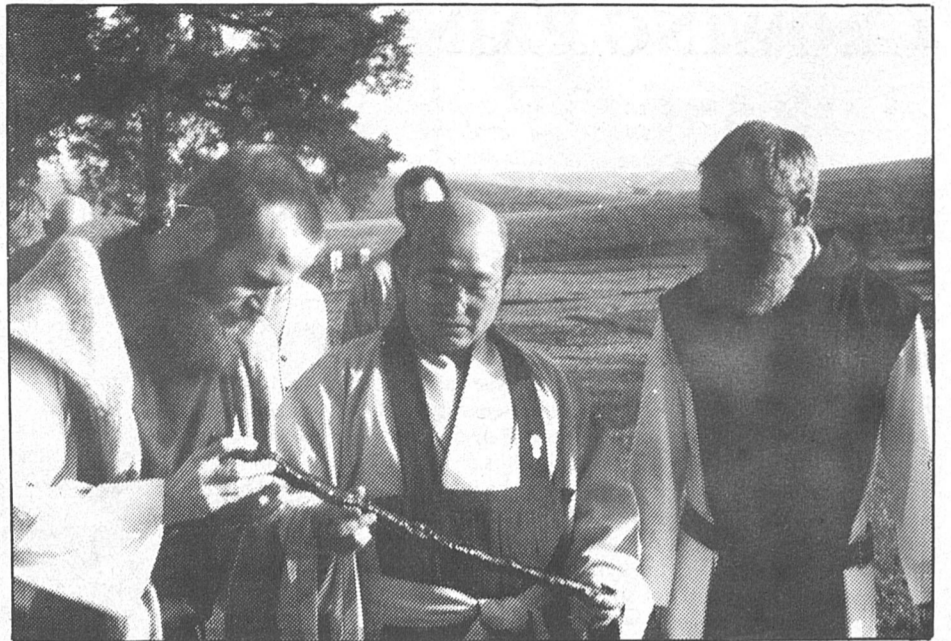
Ten people, including 8 Trappist monks, two nuns, and three members of the Lexington, KY, Zen Center, sat an unusual two day ecumenical retreat at Gethsemene Monastery in Trappist, KY, in April. Soen Sa Nim led the retreat, assisted by Brother Anthony Distefano of the monastery. Gethsemene Monastery is well-known because of one of its famous former residents, Thomas Merton, a prolific writer and modern spiritual pioneer in the ongoing East-West dialogue.

This retreat marked the first time Soen Sa Nim has been invited to led a retreat for monks at a Catholic monastery, although for years he has been speaking at numerous monasteries around the world. The retreat was a balance of Zen and Catholic monastic forms. Soen Sa Nim gave Zen interviews and Dharma talks, and led prostrations in the early morning, but not all of the monks participated. There was group chanting of

the Heart Sutra (in English), a traditional Zen chant, and Kyrie Elison, a traditional Christian chant. The retreatants sat in chairs and ate silent meals with plates and forks, instead of four-bowl temple style.

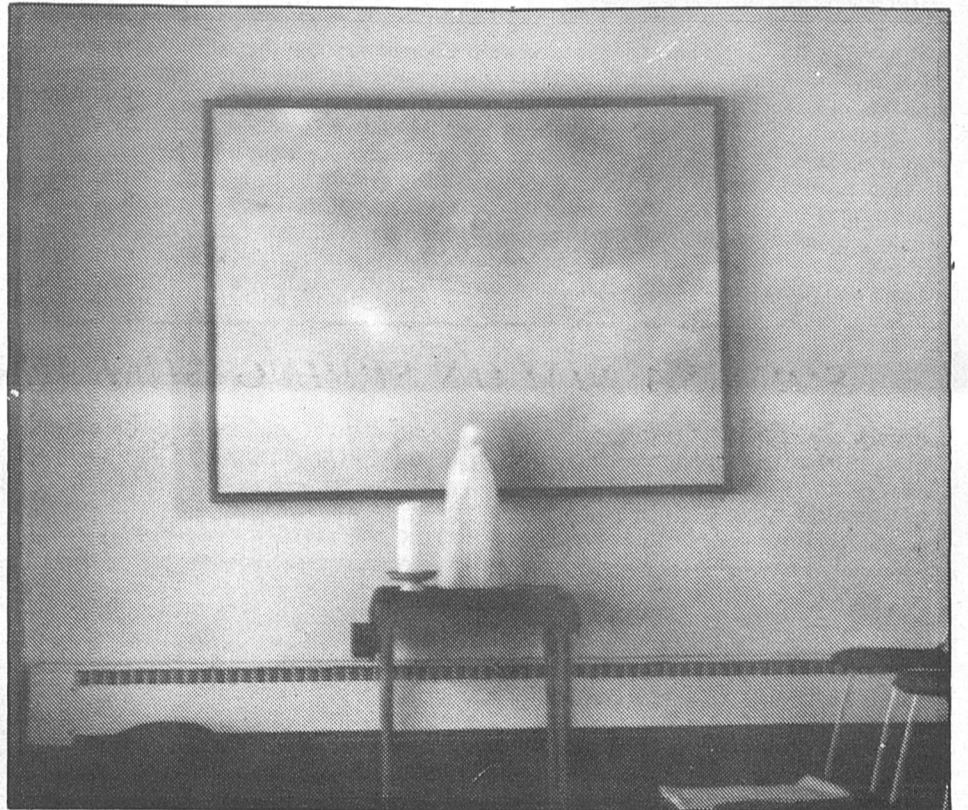
Lexington, KY, Zen Center Abbot Bob Genthner, who was one of the three LZC members permitted to join the retreat, spoke of the good spirit of the retreat. He said that Soen Sa Nim spoke of “God-mind” instead of “Buddha-mind” and told the retreatants, “You do not need God—God needs you. This world is in trouble, so you must find God.”

This retreat grew out of a talk that Soen Sa Nim gave at Gethsemene last year. Some years ago, Joshu Sasaki Roshi also gave a combined Christian-Buddhist retreat there. Gethsemene seems to be trying to keep the ecumenical spirit alive. Soen Sa Nim welcomes such opportunities to help people of different religious traditions practice and worship together.



The Gethsemene retreat was followed by a weekend Zen retreat at the Lexington Zen Center. Some 25 people attended, from as far away as Ohio, Tennessee, West Virginia, Indiana and Rhode Island. Accompanying Soen Sa Nim and also sitting was Richard Streifeld, Director of the Kwan Um Zen School. The retreat ended with a Precepts Ceremony on Sunday in which four people took the Five Precepts.

With so many people attending, the logistics of eating, washing, sleeping and movement were tricky in what is basically a 3-bedroom house. But it went smoothly, according to Streifeld who was impressed with the new Dharma room the Genthners had constructed in their basement and the cooking and coordinating skill of Mara Genthner, who is the mother of two children and in the last month of expecting her third child. □



THE MADONNA adorns a simple altar used during Gethsemene retreat

Excerpt from “ZEN DIALOGUES IN CHINA” Dialogue No. VIII

September 15, 1985

The next place visited was Pu Tuo Mountain, located on Pu Tuo Shan Island, one of the most sacred Buddhist places in China. On the island there had been one hundred temples, most of which were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Some are now being reconstructed by the government. The island as a whole is dedicated to Kwan Um Bodhisattva. Mt. Pu Tuo means “mountain of beautiful, little white flowers.” The mountain on the island is shaped like a small half-moon. It is so beautiful that it looks like a bunch of flowers. Anyone on the mountain feels like he is being embraced in the arms of the Bodhisattva. Hills, water, rocks, everything seems to preach the Dharma, and the trees, flowers and singing birds all combine to make a joyful, holy scene.

There are three big temples on the mountain and the group visited Pu Ji Temple first and then Fa Yu Temple. This temple was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and was being rebuilt under the direction of the present Abbot, Master Miao Shan. Master Miao Shan is quite in-

fluent. Donations came from abroad, from the government and from many devotees. Thus the reconstruction work has progressed quite rapidly.

Master Miao Shan left home at the age of seven and stayed at the temple for the next seventy years, except for twenty years when he was chased out during the



Cultural Revolution to work in the fields; He looked much younger than his age; strong, clear-voiced and very compassionate. He had visited America, touring New York and San Francisco, etc. He said that America seemed like the Western Pure Land, a paradise on earth. He said he

liked Americans and gave us a special welcome.

Soen Sa Nim asked the Dharma Master, “This temple is the temple of Kwan Um Bodhisattva, who has one thousand eyes. Of his one thousand eyes, which is the true eye?”

The Chinese Master wrote, “The eye nature is completely bright.”

Soen Sa Nim asked, “What is it that is completely bright?”



The Master replied, “One nature is all nature. It is without hindrance.”

Soen Sa Nim asked, “What is that nature?”

The Chinese Master hesitated, so Soen Sa Nim said, “Blue sky and blue mountain, isn't it?”

The old Master said, “I'm not sure. But you are wonderful.” He held Soen Sa Nim's hands with delight and everyone laughed with one mind.

Then the talk continued. Soen Sa Nim asked, “Since we have come to China, we have been given tea everywhere we go. This reminds me of JoJu Zen Master who used to say to students, ‘Go drink tea.’ What then is the meaning of JoJu's ‘Go drink tea?’”

The Chinese Master answered, “Have you drunk tea in China?”

Soen Sa Nim then took up the tea cup and offered it to him. The Chinese Master and everybody burst into laughter. They then bid farewell and the old Master shook hands with each member of the group and gave them a cordial send off. In return, the group bowed in deep respect to Master Miao Sahn's compassionate mind, cultivated throughout his whole life. □

This excerpt is from a small pamphlet sent to us from Korea, an account of Soen Sa Nim's trip to the People's Republic of China last fall. In the pamphlet are nine stories of places visited where Soen Sa Nim had “Dharma combat” with the old Chinese monks and Zen Masters. Soen Na Nim was the first South Korean monk admitted to China for decades. He was accompanied by several dozen students and colleagues.