



ivity that it is only on occasions such as this that I get a chance to stand up and be counted as a committed Christian. The history of my relationship with the Christian faith has been quite involved but nontraumatic, so that I feel I have a fundamental grasp of its essence, though I have quite a ways to go in living out a commitment to it consistently.

Like countless others, I was a "good boy," raised in a Catholic home, in a Catholic school, fed with all the superstition and jargon-laden accoutrements of the Christian faith. So brainwashed was I by the end of high school that I joined the religious order of the La Salle Brothers and stayed on for almost ten years. Unlike most others, however, I used the period within the Order to delve into the world of biblical and ecclesiastical thought, language and culture, studying arcane things like hermeneutics, Hebrew, Greek, dogmatics, scholasticism and biblical anthropology. It was fascinating stuff but rather removed from reality and did not really evoke too much of a commitment. I ended up teaching specific scripture subjects for a while but was jarred into fundamental thinking when one day, in an attempt to spare college students who had gone through 12 years of religion classes in grade school and high school, I found myself having to handle a two-unit course summarizing all of Christianity for them. The need both to condense all of the theological studies I had taken and to make it meaningful to a group which had fundamentally "heard it all" and was bored to death by the topic, forced me to seriously come to grips with my intellectualized faith, fish out its essence, and communicate it in today's terms. The experiment was a happy one, and today my one-hour condensation of that condensation still occasionally gets an airing at various guest lectures.

This condensation has been

distilled, not only from my Christian studies but also from the pursuit of my secular disciplines and interests, including literature and the theater, and most importantly, from my exposure to Hinduism, both as the subject of my doctoral dissertation and as a way of life in the Hindu Yoga commune where I lived while in the States.

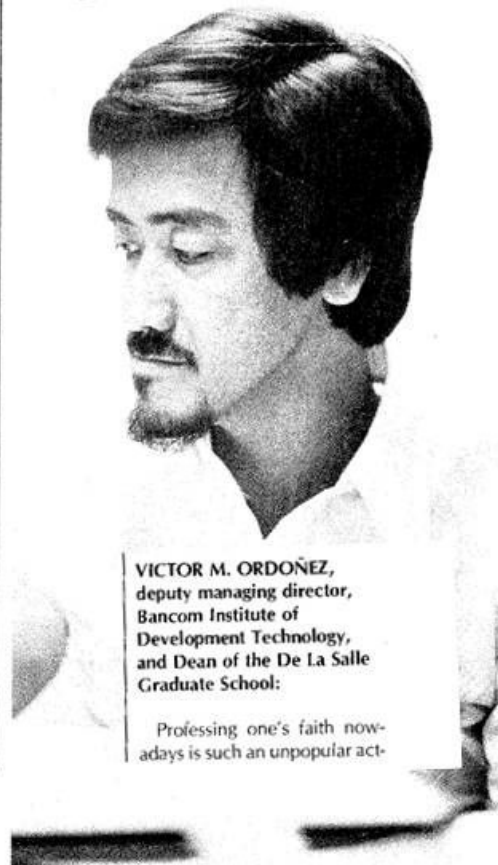
My feeling is that the Christian faith has been so cluttered over the centuries by thought patterns, cultures, and biases of different historical eras that its content is buried under obscure and obsolete expressions. The challenge today is not to throw everything overboard, but to strip the kernel-content of the faith of its layers of medieval and philosophical expression, and then to rewrap that kernel undistorted in today's expressions; in the same way, for example, that Thomas Aquinas stripped that kernel of the magic (miracles) and story-telling (parables) expressions of biblical times and rewrapped the faith in the fashionable, philosophical jargon of his day. The trouble is, he did so good a job that today's Church has become lazy to strip the content down once again, mistaking the 95 percent expression for the 5 percent content. My condensations have been explorations into the stripping process, an attempt to grapple with the content without such unnecessary philosophical concepts as heaven and hell, body and soul, mortal sin and venial sin.

What is left is a fundamental belief in Christianity, not as a code of ethics which by and large is a matter of common sense and societal convenience common to all religions, but rather a belief in the central fact of the resurrection, a belief that Christ has guaranteed life for all and for all time, with a guaranty of hope, not in some better life for the future, but in the confidence that this life and its most basic values are so important that nothing, not even death, can take it away.

I feel that an unswerving

commitment to this view of life and its implications has in store a share of joy and meaningfulness that I have only begun to fathom. Recently, the missing element in my view of Christianity has been pointed out to me by a number of prayer groups I have had a chance to visit. That element is the personal friendship with Christ that has to be cultivated in both individual and group prayer.

At this point I have a long way to go in that area. My cluttered lifestyle of running a graduate school, translating rural development into business terms, multiple social relationships, various athletic, theater and model ship building interests have placed me a long way from simplifying a lifestyle to a point where the focus necessary for commitment can be approximated. Maybe, not this year or next year, but sooner or later, I hope to get there. ■



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deputy managing director,
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Professing one's faith nowadays is such an unpopular act-

