

Concerning My Name

by Bô Yin Râ

There is nothing whatsoever "literary" in my family background. My ancestors were peasants, foresters, and rural craftsmen; I never heard of one who needed to read books to do his work.

My father, on the other hand, was always very fond of reading, although it was only after he had toiled all day that he found any time for it. Yet the literature for which he cared was very precisely defined. Moreover, with the one exception of his special favorite Alban Stolz* whose "Waking Calls" for the Catholic faithful he never ceased enjoying he showed no interest in who the authors were. Instead, the first thing that he looked for in a book was the official Imprimatur, which did assure the Roman Catholic that the contents of the work in hand would not do any damage to his faith.

In this tradition I grew up, and for more than twenty years I never saw a book that had not been approved by the appointed censor of the Church; excepting only schoolbooks, or technical works on painting, perspective, and anatomy. And even at that age I always first secured, in scrupulous observance of what the Church required, the necessary "dispensation" from the chancery of the Archbishop of Munich in order that I be allowed, with a clear conscience, to read a little more of German literature than the selections in our schoolbooks.

I am obliged to mention these details to give the reader some idea of how I later felt when, under obligation to my spiritual mentor, but also morally impelled, I finally was ready to assume the risk of publicly presenting the things I had to bring my fellowmen. I truly found this anything but easy. Indeed, I had to struggle with considerable obstacles within my nature before I willingly could shoulder the burdensome responsibility which, in my opinion, everyone must bear who will put any sentence he has written into print for all the world to read.

The only point on which there never had been any question was the name under which I would convey that which I had experienced in the world of spiritual reality. For from the very first it was unthinkable that I should be allowed to write about my spiritual experiences under that quite incidental name which always had

appeared to me the most external part of my exterior life: a label that perhaps was needed for official records, but which said nothing about its owner's individuality.

As to the essence of a real name, my spiritual guidance had given me quite different ideas. For instance, I had learned that one is able to progress from one name to another, that certain letters in a real name will work like spiritual "antennas," and more things of that kind.

As a pupil, I myself had once borne spiritual names that I had to surmount before I could grow worthy of my proper name. And ever since I only knew myself in this, my individual name, so that I sometimes even had to pause before I could recall how I was listed in the street directory. And I have never from then on been able to write my other name Joseph Anton Schneiderfranken with any sense of inner bond.

On the other hand, my attitude was also still affected by the habits of my youth, when I was only interested in the content of a book and scarcely paid attention to the author's name. And so I never thought that I myself was of particular importance as an "author," but rather made great efforts to avoid, as long as this was possible, that anyone concerned himself with me beyond the context of my books. And to this day I will divert such interest in what is my mere personal existence.

The first selections that I published are now combined in *The Book of the Royal Art*, but originally were printed separately and carried only the initials B.Y.R.** But beginning with *The Book on the Living God*, which appeared nine years ago in its earlier version,** I decided, on my publisher's advice, to give not only the initials, but the entire name despite its oriental sound.

I knew full well that this would cause me many problems, and that the name was certain to arouse a good deal of suspicion. Especially among the very readers for whom these books were written, but who, of course, could only take this seemingly oriental name to be a rather farfetched pseudonym. Besides, I feared the name might kindle far too much curiosity, which would not spare me questions about the "meaning" of this supposed pseudonym.

But since my editorial advisor refused to share my apprehensions, and furthermore could rightly make the point that The Book on the Living God contained a chapter giving detailed explanations on the nature of such spiritual names, I gained at last sufficient faith in the intelligence of my prospective readers to persuade myself that, surely, the whole tenor of the book should help them in their judgment of the author. And thus, I thought, they could not seriously believe that I might find it necessary to resort to some apparently oriental pen name for the purpose of effective self-illumination.

It is very gratifying to confirm that the majority of readers fully justified my confidence in this respect. Still, from time to time I also hear from people who, out of very normal prejudice, object to this "exotic" name, and thus feel they have cause to leave my books untouched without so much as having read a single page. Others again seem very anxious to obtain a "meaningful translation" of the name.

However, I can only help such readers by saying to the former: If it offends you that I use the name in which alone I know myself in sound, and if this name strikes you as being too exotic, then give me any name you will. But: do read just the same what I have written, because it does concern you too. And to the other I would say: If you feel you really must associate some meaning with my name, then practice patience for a little while until your inward ear learns to distinguish values in the sounds of human speech; in the way that a musician knows the quality of sounds when he is looking at a printed score.

But even disregarding these considerations one ought to understand that, if nothing more, from pure affection for the spiritual mentor to whom I owe the name, I now would call myself Bô Yin Râ, even if these three syllables were quite as strange to me as they may seem to others.

I only wish to state here very clearly, once and for all, that this name is not a combination of three words from the "significance" of which one might deduce hermetic secrets; even though these syllables are roots connected with an ancient tongue. Instead, they represent my spiritual proper name for the one and only reason that the values of their sounds are consonant with what I am; in the same way that, in musical notation, a group of notes expresses a specific chord. To me, all this appears so simple, clear, and obvious that I should think a child might understand what is involved.

On the other hand, I also know that we today have all but lost the inner sense for the instinctive, sure perception of what the sounds of human speech convey as spiritually given quantities. Indeed, one may consider this the reason why my teacher formed the name out of three roots belonging to an ancient Eastern language, even though he well might have created it from words or syllables occurring in my mother tongue which would at any rate have made my task a great deal easier.

I hope my readers will give me credit for enough intelligence to know that no one but a backwoods simpleton could nowadays be so inept that he would drape himself in what sounds like a foreign pseudonym. But then one also might have gathered from the contents of my books that I would not be so dishonest as to choose a pseudonym which could create the false impression that I was born in distant, foreign climes.

To conclude, I must admit that, on the whole, the way of reading to which I was so long accustomed in my youth, that is, of caring not so much about the author of a book, but all the more about its content, does not, in retrospect, appear so very unattractive. Indeed, my own books could not wish for more ideal readers!

When all is said, it surely is the content of a book, and the effect this content has upon the reader's soul, which will provide the most reliable criterion for any judgment on its author.

* Alban Isidor Stolz (1808-1883) was ordained in 1833 and, from 1847 until his death, Professor of Pastoral Theology at the University of Freiburg im Breisgau. Much admired as a stylist, the prolific author had wide influence on the religious writings of his time. Trans.

** These were the four brochures "The Light from Himavat" (1913); "Words of the Masters" (1916); "From the Lands of the Luminaries" (1916); "The Will to Joy" (1917); all published at Leipzig, Germany. Trans.

*** This edition appeared in 1919, at Leipzig, in Kurt Wolff's Verlag der Weissen Bücher. The definitive edition was published in 1927, by Koberische Verlagsbuchhandlung, Basel, Switzerland. Trans.