

The living god...

By JUNE
SOUTHWORTH

HE's not a matey sort of god — even if he does travel economy class.

The 14th Dalai Lama has swept through Europe with all the aplomb of an American taking his annual Cook's tour. The only difference is that on his zipalong schedule of 11 countries in six weeks the only luxury item in his luggage is three armed guards.

In Rome he met the Pope (touchingly referred to by his interpreter as Mr Pope).

In Holland he met the Moral Rearmament faction, and when he arrives in England if he runs true to form he may yet meet Mrs Mary Whitehouse.

In Belgium he drew breath long enough to offer me his official (now well-polished) reason for his crash-bang entry into Europe.

Meeting you, he holds on to your fingers as if willing his inner strength to flow into you, this gentle man whose bright eyes search for your soul.

A HIGH-SPEED PILGRIMAGE THROUGH THE ADOPTED LANDS

"This is a private visit to thank all those who have given refuge to my people, to meet Tibetans living in Europe and to exchange religious and cultural views with people of all creeds and social class."

The 38-year-old son of a peasant, found in a remote village when he was two by a search party and proclaimed the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama (it means Ocean of Wisdom) now lives in Dharasala, near Delhi.

He may end his days exiled in India, where he fled from the Chinese invasion of Tibet 16 years ago.

He told me: "It has always been my view that all human beings are equal. When the leading men of Europe believe that strongly, nothing will stop people coming together and ending this conflict that divides men."

He is more worldly than might be expected of a man who lives off the beaten track of life, saying pointedly: "Today in the world there are people dying from poverty while others live in affluence. That is not right. That is not good."

His sermons can last a day or six weeks. Sometimes the most dramatic event of his week is when he has his head shaved.

I first saw him in Holland, peeping through the picture window of the International Theosophical Centre at Huiszen (a millionaire retreat town near Amsterdam) as the reporters assembled in the library to meet him.

He finally made an entrance, dressed simply in a monk's maroon habit, and for five minutes we all smiled at each other and surveyed his maroon socks in their leather slippers.

He sat primly on a sofa, his fine little hands folded expectantly in his lap, and smiled back at us. Silence. Well, it isn't every day you meet a man who has reached Nirvana and has consented to come down to talk to mere mortals.

Someone snapped out of the spell and asked why he had come to Holland. The Dalai Lama ventured a small joke: "As a Tibetan, I lived in one of the highest parts of the world, so, Holland being the lowest, I come down from the mountain."

Everyone laughed a little louder than was called for, mainly out of relief. His Holiness speaks English rather well, but takes convenient refuge behind his interpreter/deputy secretary, an ascetic-looking young man I later saw buying sweets, with a considerably more worldly look on his face.



The Dalai Lama ...
down from the
mountain