

The Myth as Lodestar

FREDERICK FRANCK

The Vision of Christ that thou dost see
Is my Vision's greatest Enemy. . .
Mine speaks in parables to the Blind. . .
Caiphas was in his own Mind
A benefactor to Mankind.

WILLIAM BLAKE, *The Eternal Gospel*

IN A recent contribution to these pages, "Sea Change, An Emerging Image of the Human" (*EB* xi, 1, May 1978), I reflected on the extent to which Zen ideas and Zen ways of seeing have, since D. T. Suzuki's introduction of Zen to the West, increasingly percolated into the cultivated Western mind, and have created a new climate, a deepened awareness of reality, stimulated new insights into the nature of ego, and a new openness for modes of spirituality which until recently were absent from contemporary Western culture. From a series of writings by Catholic and Protestant thinkers, I tried to show that such radical mutations are taking place in Christian self-understanding that I dared to ask myself whether, under Eastern and, more specifically, Mahayana influences, a "meta-Christianity" was perhaps emerging in this "post"-Christian era.

I did not yet dare to articulate the word "Mahayana-Christianity." This would have to wait until, quite appropriately at the office of Eastern Buddhist, I found in a pile of recently received review copies the slim paperback *Yeshua Buddha*,¹ of which the title intrigued me sufficiently to take it along, and to start reading it, at an altitude of 37,000 feet, on the way home.

This altitude seemed not quite irrelevant, for although the author, Dr. Jay G. Williams, a Protestant theologian and educator, seems to have his feet firmly planted in Christian earth, his vision of the tradition he stands in, soars to uncommon heights, thus demonstrating—and in an elegant way—that indeed

¹ Jay G. Williams, *Yeshua Buddha: An Interpretation of New Testament Theology as a Meaningful Myth* (Wheaton; Theosophical Publishing, 1978), 133 pp.

MYTH AS LODESTAR

something unprecedented is happening in the Christian mind. During the endless flight I alternated reading Dr. Williams's study with that of a fine paper by Rev. Jan Van Bragt, "Nishitani on Japanese Religiosity,"² which quotes Dr. Nishitani Keiji: "Western culture has reached a dead-end, precisely in its clinging to the subjective ego and in its loss of all human ground in technology. Nihilism is the real outcome of Western culture. From this abyss it cannot be saved, even by its return to its own origins in primitive Christianity and classical Greece."

It struck me that the point of view expressed by Dr. Williams might possibly conceal an unexpected life buoy for our floundering Western culture as well as for the Christianity which is so inextricably interwoven with it, namely in his radical interpretation of the Gospel story as Christian Myth, radical enough to give me the courage to pronounce the word Mahayana-Christianity aloud.

The author does not present this reading of the Gospel as myth as a scholarly analysis, but as an adventure of the spirit which yielded profound existential meaning to him, a contemporary man who does not conceal that in this adventure he received great help from his acquaintance with Eastern modes of thought. What makes the book almost symbolically significant for the mutations in Christian spirituality pointed at in "Sea-Change," is that J. G. Williams is a practicing Presbyterian minister and Chairman of the Department of Religion at Hamilton College, a respected college somewhere in the dark interior of New York State.

The author is as aware that his point of view will be astonishing, if not annoying, to many, as he feels confident that—although in this study he lacks space to anticipate the many scholarly objections to be expected—the interpretation he outlines in order to stimulate fresh reflection on the inner meaning of the Gospel myth, is fully defensible.

Yeshua Buddha is a consistent series of meditations rather than cerebral arguments, resulting in an unmistakably experiential Credo, expressed on the whole in a felicitous language devoid of neither poetry nor wit. If there should be grave lacunae in scholarship (which this non-scholar ventures to doubt), it is certainly highly estimable as a work of the imagination, that is, as a work of art. For it seems that the author has read the venerable story, for once, not exclusively with the left hemisphere of the brain, which as we know now, is verbal and analytical, but simultaneously with the right hemisphere, the artistic, intuitive, holistic one. It is unfortunate that, as a work of art, it has been treated somewhat cavalierly by its publishers, who disguised it in an unappealing cover suggestive of a platitudinous little uplift book (which it certainly is

² Rev. Van Bragt's article is found in Joseph Spae, *Japanese Religiosity* (Tokyo; Oriens Institute, 1971), pp. 271-284.

not) and had it copy-edited and proofread so sleepily that it is marred by typos and linguistic monstrosities as for instance the chapter heading, "A Prolegomena." The subtitle should simply read: "An Interpretation of the Gospel as Myth."

Beginning with a critical look at the term "theology," Dr. Williams finds that taken at face value, it denotes at best something paradoxical and at worst something nonsensical, insofar as it means talking about, reasoning about "Theos," about "That which cannot be objectified." As the Queen of the Sciences, theology has been definitively dethroned ever since it was realized that science deals with the structured world of *facta*, and that the attempt by conventional theology to metamorphose Theos into such a *factum* was bound to lead to the deicide which Ultimate Reality has survived so spectacularly: what had been talked to death, was not the *Urgrund* after all.

In his indictment of theology Dr. Williams's point of view finds cogent support in a recent article by Ken Wilber in the magazine *Re-Vision*, which does much to clarify the confusions and blurrings which all too long have made discussions of the relationships between science, theology, philosophy, psychology and mysticism so endless and so fruitless.

Wilber calls rather surprisingly on the thirteenth-century mystic Saint Bonaventure to help us end the muddle. It seems well worthwhile adopting the diagnostic device suggested by the Doctor Seraphicus as a powerful energy saver.

Saint Bonaventure held namely that we humans have at least three modes of cognition, of which he speaks as "the eyes": *the eye of flesh*, by which we perceive the external world of separate objects in time and space; *the eye of reason*, by which we see, that is discriminate, philosophical discourse, logic, and the mind itself; and *the eye of contemplation*, the Third Eye, that does not "discriminate," but which yields the cognition of transcendent Reality. Bonaventure regards all knowledge as modes of illumination, and hence he distinguishes a *lumen exterius* and *interius* which lights the eye of flesh which we share with the animal kingdom and which makes us aware of sense objects. The "*lumen interius*" lights the eye of reason, transcends the eye of flesh. Whereas the eye of reason is trans-empirical, the eye of contemplation is trans-rational, trans-logical, trans-verbal; it is trans-cendental.

Science, by and large, is in the realm of the sensorial, empirical eye of flesh; philosophy and psychology in that of the eye of reason, whereas religion/meditation is, or should be, the realm of the eye of contemplation. The quest of the philosopher therefore has nothing in common with that of the contemplative, who sees beyond words and concepts. The quintessence of science, "fleshly" knowledge is quantification, as that of rational knowledge is philosophical and psychological postulation and that of the contemplative truth is

MYTH AS LODESTAR

spiritual insight.

Thomas Aquinas's rational proof of the existence of God, for instance, is based on a "category error," that of attempting to prove with the eye of reason what can only be seen by the eye of contemplative insight. The trouble is that we are prone to mix up these realms and so to commit such fatal "category errors." Whenever, for example, contemplative sages of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam or Hinduism witnessed to what they had seen with their "third eye" of contemplation (enlightenment never made them claim automatic expertise in the realms of the first and second eye!), their followers and commentators, with their third eye still firmly closed, were quick to mistake the beatific vision of the enlightened for empirical fact and/or rational truth, so that these ultimate, trans-verbal insights into Reality became hopelessly mixed up with empirical *facta* and rational deductions.

Science, according to Whitehead, began as an anti-rational rebellion. Galileo, Kepler, Vesalius recoiled from the inflexible logical, rational deductions of medieval thought and returned to the observation of the brute facts by that most common-sense organ, the eye of flesh.

Renaissance philosophy succeeded in shaking the "rational" foundations of religion, while the rise of science undermined its "empirical" pretensions. Still, Western theology—peering all too rarely through its atrophic third eye, and hence totally dependent on its rationalistic techniques—continued to waste the next few centuries in futile defensive arguments with scientists and with the philosophers, who in their turn had themselves been driven into the corner by the triumphant new scientific empiricism, which reduced all human knowledge to the value-free nihilistic perceptions of the eye of flesh.

Wilber quotes Whitehead as accusing Aristotle of misleading the early physicists when he bade them to classify instead of to measure! For the one essence of the scientific method is to "search for measurable elements among phenomena and then search for the relations between these measures of physical quantities." From the point of view of science, obviously the very notions of God, Buddha, soul, etc., are merely extraneous and disruptive. Science succeeded in making the eye of reason and perhaps even the third eye subservient to its eye of flesh. When science asserts that what cannot be seen and measured by the eye of flesh does not exist, it merely demonstrates that, in its hubris, it has fallen into the fatal superstitions of scientism, the results of which now threaten not only our culture, but our planet's survival.

Returning to J. G. Williams, he seems to emerge from his book less as a theologian than as a latter day Christian gnostic, whose eye of contemplation may indeed have been opened on that detour by way of the Orient without which no contemporary Westerner's pilgrimage seems complete. He fully concurs with Wilber's and the Doctor Seraphicus's diagnosis that the eye of flesh, even assisted

FRANCK

by the eye of reason are inadequate to sustain theology and that therefore theology would be wise to leave those realms of human activity, the arts and sciences, alone, except perhaps to remind them of their arbitrary and ludenic nature. The theologian has become both irrelevant and misleading unless, cutting away all linguistic dross, he speaks of Theos, of Ultimate Reality, in the minor key of the *Via Negativa*—in which Theos is neither this nor that, neither spatial nor non-spatial, neither finite nor infinite, etc., etc., thus merely confirming that language is impotent in describing Ultimate Reality at all. For if he wishes to speak in a major key, he must speak through myth, that is, by telling those stories which point beyond themselves to Ultimate Meaning, stories that have neither known authors nor fixed forms, their roots being lost in antiquity, stories that survive in garments that change according to time and place, while remaining essentially intact. Myths are the natural expression of man's relation to the unknown, that grow out of human experience as hair grows out of the skin. To dissect myth, to analyze it in order to "isolate" its meaning, kills the patient instantly. Therefore, the theologian's task should be: witnessing to the compelling power and splendor of the myth, reading it with his own eyes, realizing that it was not intended for a particular people at a particular time, long ago. Unless it has meaning now, it is defunct as a myth.

For the myth is not a museum piece, but a living reality that remains itself, however often translated and transformed. The relation between myth and history, far from being the distinction between fiction and fact, is rather that a myth is a story which points to the ineffable Meanings, while history is a story which by the way it is told, embodies the narrator's ideology and abstract principles.

In reading the Gospel story as myth, Williams does not imply, of course, that the Gospel authors were indulging in the camouflaging of the "perennial philosophy" which he distils from their stories. He realizes fully that once a myth has been formed, told and retold, the original intent of its mythopoetic creators has become irrelevant. The myth's meaning, emerging anew for every listener, is born out of the interaction of story, ego and unknown Present. Williams concludes that, since for his purpose it is fruitless to concentrate on matters like the historical background of the New Testament, modern critical analysis or form criticism, the scholarly community is likely to shrug him off, particularly since he dares to mix quotations from St. John's Gospel with those from the Synoptic Gospels, neglecting the differences in theology of their authors and their "sources."

He has no intention whatsoever of asserting that what Yeshua's life and teachings reveal (he uses the Hebrew name of the Hero to sidestep the stereotypes the name Jesus is certain to evoke) and what Gautama taught, are "one and the same thing," nor that Yeshua was "influenced" by Buddhist thought. His reading

MYTH AS LODESTAR

of the Christian texts as myth only leads him to the conclusion that Yeshua and Gautama join in shedding a common light into our darkened cosmos.

The Gospel myth, of which Yeshua is the Hero—the Hero being the one who dispels in his existence-time the ego-illusion which entraps mankind—is the subject of Dr. Williams's meditation, and he deals specifically with the Yeshua myth by selecting and concentrating on seven essential moments in Gospel literature: The Prologue to the Gospel of St. John; the story of Yeshua's Baptism and his Temptation; the Sermon on the Mount; the Sending of the Twelve; the Recognition of Yeshua as the Christ; the Passion; and the Resurrection.

The Hero—as is to be expected in a myth—moves towards victory through a power obviously not his own. Helpers appear at the precise instant when his strength seems at the point of failing, events outside his control occur propitiously. His triumph then is one that is not "his," but that of the Unknown, the Ineffable, that transcends ego. And yet of this Unknown, the myth must not speak too clearly, for to venture into the "why" of the victory too plainly, would be to speak the Ineffable and hence to desecrate it.

In this respect the hymnic Prologue to St. John's Gospel is almost recklessly daring for it comes close to objectifying and hence desecrating That which can never be objectified. In contrast to the Synoptic gospels, St. John feels compelled to lift the veil of the Ineffable briefly and so to remind the reader of that Light which Jesus reveals and which He is. On the other hand, by his daring he presents us with the glasses through which to read the myth correctly. He places the Story into the context of "In the beginning. . ." but obviously this "once upon a time" refers to the Present, a Present which is not a mere dividing line between, nor a continuum with, past and future. It is the fixed point, unconceived, unformed, by which all temporal points are defined. This Present can never become object.

In the Prologue to St. John's story, Theos "speaks for Himself, and to Himself" for the "Word was to God" ("*pros*" is here translated as "to" instead of "with"). The apprehension of the Light is not a matter of knowledge or even experience, for through the Word that is Theos, the flickering projection called Cosmos arises.

Williams sees ego as part of this Cosmos, and the ultimate dichotomy therefore as being not between ego and Cosmos, nor between external and internal, but between Something and No-thing. The ego, being the construct of our collective and individual imagination, is unable to find "the Light," the ultimate, the non-illusory No-Thing, the Unutterable, within its confines. "The whole universe," says the eight-century Zen master Ch'ang-sha Ching-ts'en (Chōsha Keijin), is but "the Light of the Self," the word "Self" here meaning, as Dōgen observes, "your original face which you had even before your parents were born": the subject that is aware of its being completely one with the non-

articulated.

The Light is not an object; the result of what has been called Revelation is that "not-knowing," in which the eye of reason is flooded by the eye of contemplation. As Nishida Kitarō puts it: "Revelation is the self-expression of the Absolute." The eye of contemplation itself is the awakened eye of liberation and en-Lightenment. Dr. Williams sees Yeshua's baptism by John as a washing off of the old ego; what distinguishes him from other men, is not "a better quality" ego, but its having dissolved! In his baptism Yeshua has become Everyman who must die, so as to rise again from the watery grave of ego. He *IS* the Truth, the Way and the Life in each one of us. He *IS* the Ineffable Light. He embodies the reality of our existence in his overcoming of ego. He manifests "that state of unity in which things lose their ontological differences and become submerged in an absolute un-differentiation . . . technically designated by the term 'Nothing' or 'Nothingness.' 'Nothing' thus understood, is the plenitude of being, it is the *Urgrund* of all existing forms."³

Far from leading to hermetic detachment, the Word provides the context for a new source of profound unity with others, a wholehearted "yes" to life on the transcendently Human plane of Insight, "for at root all men are this Light." One is tempted to translate this, by means of a little twist, into Dōgen's "All Beings are the Buddha-Nature."

In the Gospel myth all seems to be darkness and alienation; *avidyā* reigns supreme. There is only the figure of Yeshua to represent the Light. Insofar as the rest of the cast prates about love, this "love" is Eros, driving force of ego, perennially pulled between the poles of domination and submission, both sides of the coin of ego. Only Yeshua speaks of love as Agape. There is no continuity between Eros and Agape. They are antipodal, for Agape, having transcended ego, is that love which does not discriminate, that sets free, that lets be, that never grasps for security. Agape is as the opening of the hand, as Eros is its closing. Agape travels incognito, can neither be proven nor recognized. Agape is never directed towards God. When Yeshua speaks of "loving God with all one's heart, soul and mind," he qualifies it immediately: the way to fulfill this precept, is to act in Agape towards friend and enemy without discrimination. Here, as is usual in Yeshua's technique of communication, he uses the conventional language of scripture, but only to reinterpret the familiar words radically, giving them new meanings. He has indeed not come to abridge the Law that is so necessary to enforce the rudiments of ego control, to curtail otherwise unbridled barbarity, brutality, and chaos, but to proclaim that even this ego-control is no more than another corporate form of egotism. The hero is not concerned with ego-manipulation, but with ego-crucifixion, not with self-actualization

³ Toshibiko Izutsu, *Toward a Philosophy of Zen Buddhism* (London, 1977).

MYTH AS LODESTAR

but no-self-realization: kenosis.

Just as the main danger for each individual is to be deluded by the self-created karmic ego and to rationalize its ruthless egoism, religion and society are inclined to forsake the living Present for their dead past and their corporate egos. What poses then as concern for law, for order, for the preservation of tradition, is in reality the protection of this corporate ego which perverts faith into belief, freedom into the bondage of convention and truth into "facts," historical or otherwise.

When religion speaks of "loving God" as Eros, that is, as an act of ego, religion represents merely the cosmic dance of maya, for ego's profoundest "submission to God" is no more than another attempt in extremis to prevent the inevitable demise of ego. Hence religion presents the ultimate temptation: to make the submissive ego feel secure in its delusion, which inflates it into being the delegate of divine power. Then its hubris knows no bounds and in its self-centeredness via God, religion becomes the perpetrator of the most vicious, destructive, unbridled criminal acts. Religion has also tended, or at the very least has failed to discourage, Yeshua's being made into an idol, an objectified Christ, a cultic object.

Faith, as Williams seems to conceive it, is then the total transformation in which Yeshua is definitely *not* an object in relation to a perceiving subject; faith sees him neither objectively nor subjectively, for subject and object have become subtly fused into absolute unity. Only if seen through the veil of ego, that is: objectified, he becomes the idol Jesus. When theologians of the Augustinian tradition especially, distinguish between the elect and the damned, they misconstrue the meaning of the New Testament, for which all egos are chaff bound for the flame.

From Yeshua, however, who is Adam, Anthropos, radiates the Light in which at root all are already saved and secure. For at his Baptism, the Hero is identified as that one Light, shining forth from Nothingness. In his Baptism he enacts, so to speak, the miracle of metanoia on the screen of history. The scene culminates in the voice from heaven crying out: "You are My Son, the Beloved." The inner eye of contemplation, now fully opened, then sees the Dove descending, not as the symbol which it was to become later, but as the mythic reality which proclaims man's divine lineage.

The Jewish apocalyptic forecasts of the bloody turmoil which is to announce the Messianic kingdom on the material level, are transformed by Yeshua, while preserving the imagery, into parables for something much higher and deeper. Repentance is, for Yeshua, not some moral act, some regret and rejection of past actions resulting in a return to Torah and oral law. Repentance, for the Hero, is nothing less than a frontal attack upon that chief of culprits, the illusory deceptive ego, resulting in a total turnabout from the ego to the "I am," from

Something to No-thing. Yeshua's "I am" does not refer to his empirical ego but is rather "the I as a concrete actualization of the entire Field" to quote Toshiko Izutsu who in his turn calls on Hung-chih Cheng-cheh (Wanshi Shōgaku, 1091-1157): "The Reality (i.e., the Field), has no definite aspect of its own, it reveals itself in accordance with things. The Wisdom has no definite knowledge of its own: it illumines in response to situations. Look! The green bamboo is so serenely green, the yellow flower so profusely yellow! Just pick up anything you like, and see in every single thing It so nakedly manifested." The kingdom Yeshua speaks of, is not that of David, it is the realm of the Ineffable Suchness, always presupposed, never known. The image of the kingdom proclaims that the meaning of the drama called history is not in the drama itself, but in the Present which makes the past possible.

The Baptism is followed by the scenes of temptation in the wilderness to which the Spirit drives the Hero so that he may undergo the testing of his metanoia. But his examiner is not the Spirit, but the Spirit's opposite and *alter ego*, the Diabole. The Hero rejects all magic tricks, all security guarantees, all the power, and public relations stratagems offered, for he is fully aware that there is no point in buttressing ego's futility.

In the Sermon on the Mount he turns all the value systems of our world topsy-turvy and espouses attitudes and modes of being and acting which are radically opposed to what the eye of flesh knows to be common sense. He does not offer counsels of perfection to a few privileged monastics, thus making the rest of us into second-class citizens, nor formulas to induce us with a sense of sin and inadequacy in need of indulgences and forgiveness. Least of all does He intend to impose an impossible code of ethics on merchants, politicians or soldiers to live by. If he states an ethic at all, it is that of the person who no longer has need of an ethic, the one who has snapped the bonds of desire, whose ego has been crucified, who has passed over to the Other Shore. The Sermon on the Mount is no other than the description of the code of behavior of the fully enlightened human being, the one who having realized non-dual Wholeness, "descends into the market place." Yeshua does not counsel a little less ego, a little more compassion, but manifests the passage from darkness to Light, from the old Adam to the New Man, from death to life, from Eros to Agape. He does not offer any doctrinal, theological or social ideologies to this inner circle, but acts as the Master, the Initiator, who may bring about in His disciples the crucial metanoia that makes all things new.

He shuns all advice on how to proceed to defeat ego, for if ego tries to lift itself by its own bootstraps to conquer ego, the deepest of delusions is born, namely the "perfected" ego: the most dangerous idol known to man. There is nothing to be "perfected" or "attained," for the wholeness and completeness beyond ego are already there from the beginning. Are they Bankei's "Unborn"?

MYTH AS LODESTAR

"Follow me!" means then: "Follow no one but the Light within, the Unborn!" In not recommending any particular techniques or disciplines, apart from the usual religious practices of his culture—fasting, almsgiving, simple prayer—Yeshua is perhaps even more radical than Gautama in adding his stern precept for absolute secrecy about the spiritual disciplines used, the prohibition of all demonstrativeness about one's prayers, meditations and almsgiving. Nothing is counselled other than to allow the contemplative eye to open. It is as if one heard Hui-neng's: "The Meaning of Life is to see."

The prerequisite for laying up treasures in heaven, is none other than this seeing with the inner eye, the Wisdom Eye, which makes the central parable of the Gospel that of the Blind Man. Only when the Wisdom Eye is open, it becomes impossible to continue ego indulgence-as-usual, for "the whole body is filled with the Light" and to act has become: to act according to the Divine Will.

What distinguishes this Wisdom Eye, this Christ Eye, from the Buddha Eye? Isn't this one of these pseudo-questions from the realm of "the eye of reason"? For its Wisdom does not seem radically different from Mahaprajna, "transcendental non-discriminating knowledge," nor is its Agape in such shrill contrast with the Great Compassion, Mahakaruna. Isn't it of secondary importance to worry about their "differences" at a time in which there is such a frightful chasm between both and the limitless barbarity of the darkened mind, of *avidya*?

In his section on "The Last Things," Williams shows how the Hero's Light—as might be expected—is rejected categorically by the pillars of his society, for whom he could not be but a lethal menace. Even his own inner circle fails miserably. In the drama of the Passion, there is not a single person who has overcome ego: High Priest, Pilate, Judas, Peter, are all part and parcel of the ephemeral world that struggles against the Light which, to preserve individual and collective ego, must indeed be snuffed out. And so the religious authority has to deny its own law, the civil authority its own canons of justice to condemn the Light, the Hero to death, while the disciples aid and abet "the world."

The myth of the eschaton speaks of the end and the beginning of each person. The Last Days which from the point of view of the ego are somewhere in the future, are Here and Now. The resurrection did not occur in the distant past, but is occurring in the Now, whenever we wake up from all dreams of past and future, and see "I am the Resurrection and the Life" in this Unknowable Now. The myth of the Judgment Day portrays the meaninglessness and utter ephemerality of our world.

In Christ then, Everyman is illumined, is raised, is transfigured. In this illumination the Cosmos is not denied but affirmed, for beyond the demise of ego, there is the Kingdom of God, the No-thing, which is Every-thing. Here I

FRANCK

seem to detect one missing link in Dr. Williams's reading. If I may presume to supply it in order to make this entire interpretation of immediate relevancy to our contemporary predicament: Isn't this Kingdom that of Hua-yen's *jijimuge hokkai*, that of the unimpeded mutual interpenetration and interdependence of all phenomena of the Dharmadhātu? For then his meta-Christian insight would become the underpinning of the radically ecological view of existence our age is in critical need of.

The question: "How does one leave the world of ego behind and enter the world of Light?" is answered by the Risen One showing the two worlds to be one, without demarcation line, without crossing over, manifesting the supreme Enlightenment beyond all talk about "enlightenment experiences."

And so the Yeshua myth, as the Gautama myth, points to the Ineffable, Unrealized No-thingness on which the Cosmos depends and which we are. In the end then, the myth erases itself for Dr. Williams, and nothing is left but a series of Gospel koans and, beyond these, Sunyata . . .

For Dr. Williams's reading of the Christian Myth then, the Hero is the manifestation of the Light that is the source of all Enlightenment, when the Third Eye is activated to see the Invisible, to know the Unknowable. Neither theology, nor doctrine, nor great works are of any importance compared to the opening of that Third Eye without which neither faith nor Insight arises, for Faith, in contrast to "belief" is not submission to dogma, nor trust in a Supreme Being. Faith is to enter into, to acknowledge, one's fundamental Oneness with that Realm of Light by leaping across the gap between subject and object. Faith is the trust in "The Light that Lighteneth Every Man come into the world" and that *avidyā* cannot obliterate.

"Is the Church then no more than an outward cultural husk, part of the cosmic dance, merely tangentially related to what Yeshua-Buddha stands for?" Williams asks himself. And his answer is: "Although the Light of Christ is universal, the Christian Church is not" . . . and that there is no need whatever to take Christ to the nations, for he is already there. There is no need to import the Bodhi tree, for it is growing in our backyard. There is no need for a "new, universal" religion, only the need to stop quarreling about which tradition is the correct one: the only false religion is the one that reads its myth as if it were fact, which confuses symbol and Suchness and which uses the pointing finger as the cultic object. Among the tragedies of that "Christian Church that is not universal," Williams points at the early degradation of the Master-disciple relationship of Yeshua, the relationship of guru or initiator to "catechumen," into the pattern of preacher-listener, shepherd-sheep, and just as tragically the transformation of the apostolic succession into that of organizational managers for the protection of formal orthodoxy.

On his final pages, he goes so far as to erase his own book by calling it "a

MYTH AS LODESTAR

mythology written about a myth, which having been read, should be immediately erased." "Theology," he says, "is a reflex action, an absurd attempt to express the inexpressible. For the seeker of illumination needs not an overview as is provided here, but a Master, the struggle against delusion is not won by theories, but by well-aimed specific blows."

EPILOGUE

While reading this book, I felt that I was not confronted with a cerebral scrambling of Christian and Buddhist notions, but on the contrary, with a lived-through spiritual process in which equivalences and convergences occur spontaneously to the poetic meditative imagination. Discrepancies in Buddhist and Christian notions of faith: transcendental insight—an act of seeing—versus the "blind faith" of those who are "blessed, for they have not seen and yet believe," fade away. Christian love of an objectified, all too personal God, becomes secondary to a Prajna-Karuna, an Agape-Sophia being raised to pre-eminence.

Christian emphasis on the dignity of each human being finds a new grounding in the presence of the inner eye, this contemplative Wisdom Eye, this Buddha Eye, this Christ-Eye, that perceives the "Light that lighteneth Everyman," the eye of Rinzai's "True Man without rank in this mass of protoplasm," an unassailable Magna Charta of human dignity. Rinzai's True Man and the Man of Crucifixion and Resurrection stand now face to face. One thinks of the mondo of Enen and Ejaku.⁴

Even that fundamental contrast between Christian and Buddhist faith: the personal transcendent God, is trans-illuminated, for of that "hallmark of Christian understanding which outsiders are likely to regard as most peculiar, the Trinity," Williams says: "Most people begin by equating the Father in heaven with God and then proceed to wonder how Christ and the Holy Spirit can be God also. The myth, however, bids us beyond the mistakes of identifying one character in the story with Ultimate Reality, to see that all three participants in the drama point beyond themselves to the Ineffable Godhead, transcending both the story and us. The apparent irrational foolishness is the mythic means of leading the listener to the myth to go beyond the worship of either Father or Son as an idol."

"Christian and Buddhist apprehensions of the transcendent dimension of Reality from which all our meanings and knowledge arise, seem to flow together in this writer's mind. For him both are concerned with this transcendent dimension beyond all ego-centered modes of consciousness, so that both mythic struc-

⁴ See *EB* II, 2 (November 1969), p. 71

FRANCK

tures are made to cooperate in the 'awakening of faith,' to insight into those meanings and values which are beyond delusion."

"Christianity," as Dr. Nishitani pointed out, "finds it impossible to co-exist with other religions, with philosophy, with Eastern wisdom, for it is fixed in the firm conviction that a position of unwavering supremacy of faith can be ensured only by excluding all other standpoints on faith itself," and that Christianity's "all too exclusive conception of God as a personal being can only be remedied by the Buddhist one of Emptiness."

"The fundamental concepts of Christianity," according to Nishitani, "as well as man's traditional attitudes towards them, are today pressed by the necessity of a radical re-examination."

If the "Sea Change" signaled in my previous article indeed exists, and if I may call Dr. Williams's *Yeshua Buddha* as star witness, this study by a Presbyterian minister in a small American town, whether validated by scholarly experts or not, would indicate that "experientially" such a "radical re-examination"⁵ is well under way. It may be one of those signs of hope that in this *mappō*, in which institutionalized torture has been re-instated and all over the earth human beings are reduced to the status of disposable objects made to "disappear" without trace, the True Man without Rank remains indestructible.

I see, as in a vision, the great transfigured Christ in Glory on the tympanum of the basilica of Vézelay proclaiming, "Between Heaven and Earth I am the Blessed One for the Salvation of the World."

⁵ One might point to a forerunner of this re-evaluation: the Rev. Timothy Richard who three-quarters of a century ago translated Asvaghosa's *Awakening of Faith* (Shanghai, 1907) and who regarded the Mahayana faith as "not Buddhism properly so-called, but an Asiatic form of the same Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in Buddhist nomenclature." Although mistakenly annexing Mahayana as "an adaptation of Christianity to ancient thought in Asia," Rev. Richard intuited correctly in the convergences and isomorphisms which struck him so forcefully as "the deepest bond of union between East and West."