

BOOK REVIEWS

Johnston, of course, would say in reply to such objections, that in the psychological-experiential dimension, theological distinctions are bypassed or transcended. And in part I agree. Yet, *can* an experience of "detachment" nourished while sitting upon a Christian pillow of personal communion with a Divine Spirit be genuinely equated or meaningfully compared with one which discovers the Void to be the glorious essence of all reality—available on the Zen pillow? Not easily I think. Nor does the author himself really believe so; for throughout the book he insists that *Christian* mysticism is intrinsically and inherently an experience of the Divine Trinity.

Other examples could be given, but these make my main points. First, there is no clear, consistent delineation either of the mystical experience as a distinguishable entity, or of Christian-Zen likeness and difference. Second, despite an obviously wide acquaintance with world religions, a genuinely ecumenical sympathy, and a deep religious awareness—as well as some personal experience of Zen-type meditation on the part of the author—there is in this book no *genuine* encounter between Buddhist and Christian mystical substance and experience, let alone a "reconciliation." The best that is produced is a series of perceptive insights and rough parallels, suitable for an introductory comparative mystical treatise. But there is no fundamental intersection of thought or interaction of religious essences.

And why is this the case? It is because the author has never had a truly existential encounter with Buddhism. He himself, in the core of his being, has always been and still is sitting *firmly* on his Christian pillow—though he has allowed his mind and imagination to journey interestedly and interestingly into the ways of inner Buddhist spirituality. And this points up a key question for all of us who, like him, have essayed to study-experience a religious way of life which is different from our own faith-accepted one: How genuine or veridical is *any* such experience, short of conversion to the "experienced" faith's ideas and values?

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ABSOLUTES NICHTS: Zur Grundlegung des Dialogs zwischen Buddhismus und Christentum. By Hans Waldenfels. Freiburg, Herder-Verlag, 1976. 222 pp.

This publication, the result of many years of intensive work, is not only a study of Nishitani Keiji's religious philosophy, its Buddhist origins and essence, it deals also with the development of the so-called Kyoto school, whose outstanding exemplar his philosophy represents at the present time, and with the

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spiritual background of that philosophy in the east and west. The bibliography shows that the present book has been preceded by a number of shorter publications on different aspects of this theme, which are here enlarged, deepened, and coordinated in an impressive manner. It consists of three parts: "Background," "Nishitani Keiji and the Philosophy of Sunyata," and "Fundamentals for Dialogue."

In his sketch of the historical background, Waldenfels makes reference to the homelessness of the Buddha, his silence in respect to the question of metaphysics, the concept of anatman, the doctrine of dependent co-origination, and, further, to Nagarjuna and the Madhyamika philosophy. Then follows a brief description of the history and essence of Zen Buddhism, culminating in a characterization of Nishida Kitarō's way of thinking, from his standpoint of "Pure Experience" to that of the "Self-identity of Absolute Contradictions." In his description of Nishitani's religious and philosophical heritage, the author makes mention of the positions of other representatives of the Kyoto school, and compares them with those of Western philosophers, particularly Nietzsche and Heidegger.

This broad comparative method is then used in the discussion of Nishitani's sunyata philosophy. This, the main part of the book, is again divided into three sections. In the first, he deals with the "impulses" behind Nishitani's thinking; in the second, with the way from "nihilistic despair" to "empty hands," the last stage in the Ten Oxherding Pictures; in the third, he develops the "evaluation of world, history, and man" which results from the "aspect of the void." The central focus of the present analysis is directed to one of Nishitani's chief works, *What is Religion? (Shūkyō to wa nanika)*, which has been appearing in English translation in the *Eastern Buddhist* since 1967 (the final chapter appears in this issue). For central concepts such as Nothingness and "the discrimination of nondiscrimination," Waldenfels makes use of expositions by Abe Masao and Ueda Shizuteru. He also quotes from the works of Buddhist thinkers such as Suzuki Daisetz and Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, and Christian thinkers represented by Tillich and Rahner, and Takizawa and Yagi in Japan. In this way, we are given not only a picture of Nishitani's philosophy, but a glimpse of the tendencies of the Kyoto school as a whole and its role in the ongoing East-West dialogue.

The universality and orientation to the actual of Nishitani's sunyata philosophy is already present in its point of departure, in the dilemma in which religious man finds himself: burdened by modern science and technology, he is in danger of falling into nihilism or a no less destructive idolatrous scientism. Convinced that Christianity and Western thought are unable to overcome this situation, Nishitani believes a solution is to be found in the Way of Zen, which leads through the "great doubt" to the "true Self" of enlightenment, and to the "wondrous being" therein.

The presentation of this Zen thinking, which would transcend the subject-

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object dichotomy of consciousness-thinking, is no easy matter from the *formal* aspect alone. More to the point here, however, the contradictions in the assertions the author makes about the "inexpressible" become incomprehensible when he attempts to draw the material, *practical conclusions* of Zen-type thinking for the understanding of nature and history and the role God and man have to play therein. Yet this failure to provide an intelligible reconstruction of Nishitani's philosophy is perhaps not to be laid entirely on the author alone. It probably has its cause in the nature of what it is he is attempting to represent here. Ultimately, only falling silent and maintaining that silence would correspond to the inexpressible. But that would mean that at the same time a setback for the true Self and its Transcendence, the promotion of which belongs to the basic interest, each in their own respective manners, of both the Buddhist Nishitani and the Christian Waldenfels.

That this common interest is endangered is what Waldenfels seeks to convey in the proposals which make up the closing part of his book, "Fundamentals for Dialogue." As he sees it, these fundamentals are to be found in two directions. On the one hand, they consist in hermeneutical considerations, this in view of the necessity of combining in a dialectical manner positive statements about the existence and essence of God and the essence of man with the acknowledgement of the impossibility of such statements, and also in an understanding of mystical texts as "mystagogy," this as a guide to existential praxis in the renunciation of every intellectual and dogmatic self-affirmation. On the other hand, they are—following Waldenfels—to be found in the proclamation of the "Christian claim of revelation" in the faith in the "God-man Jesus," and in the Catholic Church's parallel doctrine of the Trinity, the *analogia entis* and the Christological-theological basis of the doctrine of the *kenosis*. In his description of Nishitani's philosophy, Waldenfels charges him with not taking the meaning of these doctrines seriously into account.

The two directions he outlines are obviously too disparate to become a solid basis for dialogue, which requires something more than a mere repetition of the unreliable standpoints of the past. It is probably true that a Buddhist would not have trouble dealing with the first type Waldenfels describes in referring to the *theologia negativa* of the mystics. But with the second, the demand to take "seriously" the dogmas of his church, which means for him to acknowledge them as he does, he contradicts what he has affirmed previously with regard to the first. This self-contradiction by the Christian, which the "enlightened Buddha" can only respond to with a "smile," is perhaps the real reason for the "painful visage of the crucified Jesus," the image with which the Jesuit writer finishes his book. This "modest" but also disappointing result of the author's attempts to confront Christian faith and Buddhist philosophy might bring the representatives of both religions to the conclusion that "enlightenment which

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radiates love and love which is enlightened" occurs where we distinguish between "being" and "ought to be," and take upon us a corresponding responsibility. Though Waldenfels faults Buddhists for failing to accept this responsibility (properly so, I think), he does so without himself accepting the consequences, and by shifting the burden implied in those consequences onto the shoulders of his Christ. By accepting the burden of personal responsibility, a Buddhist could no longer—as Nishitani likes to do—use Paul's words about the "Christ in me" merely as a shocking koan—rather he could find in it a correspondence to his "becoming Buddha," through which we would become, one another, Buddha or Christ. Here we would have no more to do, not only with nothingness or the abyss of God, but on that unfathomable depth, with the no less unfathomable special revelation of the transcendence in its incarnation in our "becoming man," which is a universal possibility beyond any doctrine or dogma, training or institution. To find such a positive solution to their shared problematic, Christian theology should realize the consequences of the failure of the biblical eschatology, which consists in the apparition of the church instead of the expected kingdom of God, and Buddhist philosophy should acknowledge that its speculations on nothingness stand in opposition to the Buddha's silence.

It is with the grateful memory of the discussions I had during the past winter with Nishitani Keiji and others associated with the Kyoto school, that I presume to conclude this appraisal of Waldenfels's book by offering an alternative to the dead end reached in his considerations. When we are ready to use our religious traditions, their mythologies and practices, in a critical manner as symbols for the realization of our self-understanding, we will encounter our transcendental destiny of being unconditionally responsible for one another. At such moments, for which Buddhists and Christians may use different symbols, their truth could reveal itself, as Plato said, as one that "occurs between friends in a good hour." In remembrance of such hours, I feel myself in the good company of my Buddhist friends, and I, for my part, shall try to accompany them to our common future.

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