

Perspectives on Self-Emptying

A Zen-Catholic Dialogue

BETWEEN

RICHARD DEMARTINO AND KENNETH KRAMER

“While alive, be dead, thoroughly dead.”
—Bunan Zenji

“It is no longer I who live, but Christ.”
—St. Paul

IN THE LAST twenty years, a vast literature branching out in various directions has grown from the soil of Buddhist-Christian encounter, a literature still more dominantly Christian than Buddhist. As we approach a new millennium, Buddhist-Christian dialogue is entering a new stage: from “mutual understanding” to “mutual transformation.” Bristling with cross-reanimational insights, this dialogue focuses on relationships between self and selflessness, and between what seems to be impossible, and the unique occurrence of this impossibility.

What follows is a portion of a discussion that occurred between Richard J. DeMartino (Associate Professor Emeritus of Religion, Temple University, Philadelphia) and Kenneth P. Kramer (Professor of Comparative Religious Studies, San Jose State University, California). The initial conversation took place at Dr. DeMartino’s home in New York on July 17, 1991. Subsequently, each participant elaborated upon and refined his position via a series of coast-to-coast correspondences which, while adding material, in no way altered the intent of the original exchange—to allow the subject matter itself, to lead the way. Along with several shifts in sequence, some editing has been done in order to fashion a more coherent expression of this interdialogical exchange. The initial purpose of the dialogue was to allow the former student (Kramer, a Zen-influenced Catholic) an opportunity to question, and to be questioned by, his former teacher (DeMartino) about the relationship, or lack thereof, be-

tween two understandings of the human situation, and more specifically about two perspectives on self-emptying.

Of the many provocative questions initiated by our dialogue, one is particularly intriguing: What is self-emptying for a Zen Buddhist and for a Christian? Do their particular perspectives, though seemingly opposed, existentially reinvigorate each other? Is it possible, as Professor Roger Corless has suggested, that *shunyata* and *kenosis* can exist coinherently? If so, what difference does the difference between them make? Questions such as these focus this interreligious investigation on a dynamic borderline between the two traditions. What is at stake in this encounter, it may turn out, is not so much crossing the border, but rather recognizing where the border is drawn.

Perspectives on Self-Emptying

A Zen-Catholic Dialogue

I

KRAMER: A few weeks ago, I met Roger Corless at Nanzan University in Nagoya, Japan, where he was spending the summer months. Intriguingly, he spoke of his practice of coinherent meditation. Since he has had initiation both into Roman Catholicism and into Mahayana Buddhism, on one day he practices a Catholic meditation (e.g., the Divine Office or the Mass) and, on alternative days, a Buddhist meditation (e.g., the Avalokitesvara mantra or a Gelugpa visualization). And then on the remaining day in the week, he practices what he calls a coinherent meditation. He claims that he has taken the next step in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue—beyond H. M. Enomiya-Lassalle, beyond J. K. Kadowaki, beyond William Johnston—with this coinherent meditation (which allows each form to resonate in the presence of the other).

DEMARTINO: Kadowaki is a Christian, is he not?

KRAMER: Yes. He wrote *Zen and the Bible*, for instance.

DEMARTINO: As far as I understand, he is not trying to bring Christianity and Buddhism together, is he?

KRAMER: Right. That's exactly what Corless is saying—that Enomiya-Lassalle and Kadowaki (as Catholics) practiced Zen, but always maintaining the separation. Corless is saying that he is taking the next step by practicing both, and thereby allowing their central truths and implications to play out within his own subjectivity, or what he calls "superconsciousness."

DEMARTINO-KRAMER DIALOGUE

"Meeting God, killing God"

DEMARTINO: Practicing both? How, then, would he come to terms with what would be Shin'ichi Hisamatsu's Zen stance in this regard: "Meeting Buddha, killing Buddha! Meeting God, killing God!" How would he deal with something like that?

KRAMER: While I can not speak for him, one could say that Zen's position is true (and it is true for him) and, at the same time, God, understood in a trinitarian and a mystical way, is true as well. At the exoteric level, they contradict each other; yet, at an esoteric level, each can be said to be true. Therefore, he lives creatively in the presence and possibility of a contradictory complementarity.

DEMARTINO: If there is an interest in considering the relation of contradiction—or "absolute self-contradiction"—to "God," he would probably want to study Kitarō Nishida. Although that is something that puzzles me about Nishida. Why does Nishida use the term "God"? I think I understand why, in his English writings, D. T. Suzuki does—because there he is writing for a Western readership. Nevertheless, for both Nishida and Suzuki, there is, in their use of the term "God," an "absolute negation" or "absolute self-contradiction" within God. For example, as Suzuki wrote in his *Living by Zen*: "God is God when God is not God!"

KRAMER: That sounds a bit like Meister Eckhart.

DEMARTINO: With respect to what Eckhart calls Gottheit (or Godhead), perhaps. Which is why even such a statement as Suzuki's can be misunderstood. It is for this reason, I believe, that Hisamatsu is not generally inclined to speak that way, but would rather insist on: "Meeting God, killing God! Meeting Buddha, killing Buddha!" Although Suzuki likewise once said: "Zen tells us first to 'kill' everything we come across: buddhas, patriarchs, arhats, bodhisattvas, humans and non-humans; and then to serve others with your 'face and head covered with dirt and ashes,' and this quietly. . . ." (from his 1962 essay in Charles Moore, ed., *Philosophy and Culture East and West*, reprinted elsewhere in this issue).

KRAMER: Except that in another issue of the *Eastern Buddhist* (XIV-1, 1981) in which you write about first coming to meet Hisamatsu, Kondō Tesshō also speaks of Hisamatsu's bowing before a wooden statue of the nembutsu teacher Ippen Shōnin at Hogonji Temple, and uttering the words, "Namu Amida Butsu" (I take refuge in Amida Buddha).

DEMARTINO: About that, two points. First, Hisamatsu would bow in front of anybody. That was one way of his thanking and honoring everybody. But he is not really bowing to anyone. I recall quite vividly how, every time he passed by the founder's temple in the Myōshinji temple-compound, he

would bow. He would take off his hat and bow—even on a snowy day in the middle of winter. When I once impishly asked: “To whom are you bowing?” he replied: “My-Self!” Which is the second point. As Reverend Kondō herself wrote in that article: “[His] utterance, ‘NAME AMIDA BUTSU,’ seemed not to have issued from the lips of the person who stood before me. It had pierced me like a flash of light shot out from the very source of life itself.”

KRAMER: Let’s return to your question about God. While visiting the Jōdo Shin priest Shōjun Bandō in Tokyo, I asked if God and Amida are one.

DEMARTINO: Which God?

KRAMER: The Trinitarian God, the God of Christianity, the God of Scriptures and tradition. Are the Judeo-Christian God and Amida one? And he said: “At the level of Godhead, yes! After that, there are only distinctions.”

DEMARTINO: The question is, can Zen be properly expressed in terms of the Christian concept of God. For Hisamatsu it can not. Let me put it this way. When Keiji Nishitani attended a conference on Hermeneutics held at the Syracuse University in 1970, he read a paper entitled “Ontology and Utterance” (later published in *Philosophy East and West*). After presenting his interpretation of Paul, he then quoted Bodhidharma’s response to Emperor Wu’s query about the first holy principle—which response may be translated as “Unbounded Emptiness; nothing holy!” This prompted the Emperor to ask: “Who then is standing before me?”

KRAMER: “I do not know!”

“I am Christ!”

DEMARTINO: Actually, the pronoun “I” is not used. In Chinese (or Japanese) it is not needed. Bodhidharma’s retort was just “Pu-shih!” “Don’t know!” Nishitani then said, “In Bodhidharma’s saying that, the whole cosmos is expressing itself.” This is similar to Reverend Kondō’s comment about Hisamatsu’s exclamation, that it “Shot out from the very source of life itself.” My question to Nishitani at that time was: “When Paul says, ‘It is not I but Christ in me,’ was that the whole cosmos expressing itself?” If it was, then the next question is: “Why, then, does not Paul say ‘I am Christ!’ ”

KRAMER: He never would, and he never could, as a Jew; because to Paul, Christ is the Messiah, incarnate in the fullness of his particularity. There can only be one, uniquely eternal Christ (or anointed one). Furthermore, Christian theology is neither ontological nor metaphysical. To say, “I am Christ,” or “I am God,” for that matter, would be theologically as well as spiritually misleading, not to mention inaccurate.

DEMARTINO-KRAMER DIALOGUE

DEMARTINO: Then are you saying that no one else can say "I am Christ!"—that it is not possible for anyone else to make such an assertion?

KRAMER: Certainly there are, and have been, those who say, "I am Christ," but this has always been understood as an intensely personal assertion made problematic by its extremely private meanings. The term "Christ" is already difficult enough to understand by itself—as distinct from and related to "Jesus" (Yeshua, Hebrew). To the extent that Christ is the "only" self-manifestation of God, a Christian cannot make that statement. As a Catholic, I am no more Christ than I am God. At the same time, I am to be empty of "I." My "attitude" is to be that of Christ who "emptied" (kenosis) himself of divinity and took on human form (Philippians 2:5).

DEMARTINO: When one says, "It is not I who lives but Christ who lives within me!"—is there a duality in that expression?

KRAMER: Yes and no. According to St. John of the Cross, for example, the soul overcomes its anxious longing for the beloved Bridegroom (or Christ) and achieves "union" or "spiritual marriage" with the Bridegroom. Each surrenders to the other completely without holding anything back. Yet it is God (as wholly other) whose grace makes the transformation possible. St. John writes: "The union wrought between the two natures and the communication of the divine to the human in this state is such that even though neither change their being, both appear to be God" (*The Spiritual Canticle* 22:4). In this relational "union" of love, insofar as possible the soul "becomes" God only through a graced participation. One could call this a union without identity in which soul is united with God through a coinherence of spiritual discipline (self-power) and unconditioned Grace (Other-power). This union does not imply assimilation, or fusion, or absorption—there is always a living awareness of, indeed the necessity of, the otherness of God. Perhaps reconciliation, or communion, would be more appropriate terms to describe it. According to Adolf Deissmann, for example, Paul is not a "unio-mystic" but "a communio-mystic." As Mircea Eliade would say, Paul speaks of "a union with a remainder" as opposed to "a union without a remainder."

DEMARTINO: For Zen, it would not be a "union." It is what may rather be designated a nondualistic-duality—or, more precisely, an onto-existential nondualistic-duality wherein I am (I) precisely because I am not (I): a Self-awakened not-twoness of two ontological contradictories. And since I am I because I am not I, I am also You, or any other—or, indeed, all others: a Self-awakened not-twoness of two or more phenomenological particulars or contrary particulars. All this is exactly what makes one a Buddha—which means, therefore, that as a Buddha (or a Selfless Self), one is at the same time Everything and Nothing. Can a Christian speak in that manner?

Graced kenosis

KRAMER: In an analogous manner, perhaps. Of course, it should be said that kenosis is not an accomplishment (of the ego-I), but is, rather, as Donald Mitchell writes (in *Spirituality and Emptiness*) a "graced kenosis." From a monastic and contemplative point of view, St. John called self-emptying "living without inhabiting myself." Paradoxically (as he writes in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night of the Soul*), the goal of Christian spirituality is "to come to be what you are not" by traversing "a way in which you are not." To put it another way, kenosis means self-abandonment into God. I abandon I-ness just as I abandon otherness. It is by grace that self-emptying happens. A mainstream Christian, however, would probably not think this way.

DEMARTINO: Would Teilhard de Chardin think that way?

KRAMER: Or would Brother David Steindl-Rast, or Thomas Merton for that matter!

DEMARTINO: What would Thomas Merton say?

KRAMER: He would say "I am nothing," and "I die into Christ." He has written that "Christ is our own deepest and most intimate 'self,' our higher self" (*The Living Bread*, 68), and that Christ "penetrates our whole being, transforming and divinizing us by His power" (70). According to Merton, "my union with Christ . . . must be a union created in me by transforming action of His own Spirit" (*The New Man*, 100). He would say, "I die into the death and resurrection of Christ," but I do not believe that Merton ever says, "I am Christ!"

DEMARTINO: Could any Christian ever say that without being excommunicated from the church?

KRAMER: How about Christ-like?

DEMARTINO: Being Christ-like is not being Christ—or a Christ; just as being God-like would not mean being God—or even a God. Aptly illustrating one of the difficulties involved here is an incident concerning John C. H. Wu. I believe that Merton, at the time of his death, was on his way to Taiwan to visit John Wu. (He had already written the Introduction to John Wu's *The Golden Age of Zen*.) Wu, a Catholic (he was Chiang Kai-shek's last envoy to the Vatican), was nevertheless, I feel, a born Taoist. I remember sitting in his office at the University of Hawai'i one day in the fall of 1949. He was deeply sympathetic to—and was in effect praising—Zen. However, he then said to me: "But, Richard, remember, the greatest Zen Master of all is our Father in Heaven."

KRAMER: (*Pause*) I'm not sure what that means.

DEMARTINO: I was not sure either. But this is what you have to look into if

DEMARTINO-KRAMER DIALOGUE

you are working on the possibility of bringing Zen and Christianity together. For a modern representative of Zen (comparatively unknown to the West) I would strongly recommend Hisamatsu. In my opinion, after his teacher and the founder of the Kyoto School, Kitarō Nishida, Hisamatsu is arguably the brightest luminary in the star-studded constellation of that School. Find someone who can go through the eight volumes of his collected Japanese writings for you.

KRAMER: But returning to the question—what about God?

DEMARTINO: Perhaps it is better to talk about “Christ.” “Christ” is a title—just as “Buddha” is a title.

KRAMER: Yes. It points to a realization, to an actualization. . . .

Crucifixion and Great Death

DEMARTINO: Yes! For Zen it points to—or expresses—the fact that there is no distinction between actualizer, actualized, and the actualizing! Instead of trying to deal with the term God, the meaning of which I am never quite certain, let us try to deal with the term Christ, which is a title, meaning “Anointed One”—just as the term Buddha is a title, literally meaning “Awakened One.” The nub of the issue, it would seem, is that whereas Christianity speaks of “the Christ,” using the exclusive, definite article “the,” Zen speaks of “a Buddha,” using the nonexclusive article “a.” Secondly, as for those who would liken the crucifixion of Jesus to the Zen Great Death, and the resurrection of Jesus to the Zen Great (Re-)Birth, in Christianity there is a three-day hiatus between the two, suggesting that there is supposed to be some sort of a mediated transition—or transposition—from the one condition to the other. For Zen, on the other hand, the Great Death is the Great (Re-)Birth. Which is to say, in Zen, the one is itself the other—i.e., they are not-two; whereas in Christianity the one is not itself the other—therefore, they are two. So, similarly, in Zen it would not be that I live in Christ or in Buddha—or that Christ or Buddha lives within me, but rather that I am Christ—or a Christ, or that I am Buddha—or a Buddha, even as—or just because—I am Nothing. Are these not important differences?

KRAMER: For Christians, there is only one Christ—the Christ—who, as the writer of the Gospel of John states, uniquely was, and was with God from the beginning. In that sense, there is only one Messiah, one redeemer. At the same time, the historic Jesus of Nazareth, who becomes Christ, is emptied of divine nature, is forsaken, is crucified, is resurrected. But what sense does this make? Here the methodless method of Zen’s koan practice assists me. As I think D. T. Suzuki once noted, there is no distance between

crucifixion and resurrection: the crucifixion is the resurrection. Self-emptying in this perspective is dying-rising, actionless-action.

And, yes, there may appear to be, as you suggest, a discrepancy between Buddha and Christ. The crucifixion is not the Great Death, and the resurrection is not the Great (Re-)Birth. While I was in Kyoto, Zen Master Ryōmin Akizuki pressed me about the word "nature." He suggested that Buddha nature is an Indian-Buddhist concept, not a Zen concept, because it points to potentiality, or to possibility, rather than to Zen Buddhahood—the right here, right now womb of awakening. He asked if anyone wrote about the realization of Christhood in English.

DEMARTINO: As the actualization of Buddhahood would mean to be a Buddha, so the actualization of Christhood would mean to be a Christ.

KRAMER: Here I am influenced by Suzuki's references to Eckhart's Godhead beyond God, to the Eckhart who prays that God will disappear and who, in his sermon "Blessed Are the Poor," states that "God and I are One!" He writes: "There I am what I was, and I grow neither smaller nor bigger, for there I am an immovable cause that moves all things" (Sermon Fifteen).

DEMARTINO: Yes, but Eckhart never said, "I am the Godhead!" did he? Why doesn't—or why can't—he say that?

KRAMER: Because those words do not match what he intended to say. There is, finally, a cosmic as well as an existential distinction between God and Eckhart. Yet, at the same time, God cannot be reduced to a dualized other. For Eckhart, the distinction between God and self is of a different order than distinctions between members of the human order.

Pure experience

DEMARTINO: Shussan-Butsu: Buddha—any Buddha—descending from the mountain. Is there anything greater than that? Is there anything left over? Suzuki, in a conversation with Winston King, once said: "I do not know exactly what William James meant by 'pure experience,' but if I could have a chance to talk with him now, this [very speaking] would [itself] be pure experience, the act itself." Just as Suzuki once said in a conversation with me, when he undertook to explicate the Taoist-Buddhist term *miao* by referring to the book of Genesis. (At this point DeMartino read from a portion of an unpublished manuscript entitled "D. T. Suzuki, Oriental Thought, and the West" that recorded an edited English translation of a conversation held in Japanese between Suzuki [then 94] and DeMartino that took place in Suzuki's home in Kita-Kamakura in 1965):

SUZUKI: In the Old Testament Book of Genesis it is written that God com-

DEMARTINO-KRAMER DIALOGUE

manded, "Let there be light," and there was light; and the light was separated from the darkness. God saw this light and said that it was "good." Now this "good," in my view, is a "good" that precedes the differentiation between good and evil. I disagree with those Western thinkers and theologians who would maintain that this "good" is the good of good-and-evil. In my understanding, as a "good" that is "before" or "prior to" all dichotomous discriminations—including that between good and evil—this "good" is what would be characterized in Buddhism (and, coincidentally, in Taoism) as *miao*. From such a vantage point, looking upon this "Let there be light!" as a Zen injunction or a Zen command, it would mean: "Dispel—or Awaken from—your delusion!"; "Take resolute hold of the very root of your (mind's) activities!"; or, "See—or be—at the time 'before' heaven and earth were divided into two!" Indeed, if reinterpreted as a Zen challenge, this fiat could be reformulated as: "Be with God in His workshop 'before'—or 'prior to'—His saying 'Let there be light!'"

KRAMER: Yes.

DEMARTINO: Would any Christian speak of being with God in His workshop before He said "Let there be light!"—or, in the words of the Hindu Hymn to Creation, "before *sat* and *asat*" (i.e., "before being and nonbeing")?

KRAMER: It wouldn't occur to most Christians to speak in that kind of a metaphoric fashion. Rather, a Christian might speak both of meeting and/or of experiencing the presence of God's love in the world. As part of my recent trip, I met William Johnston, at Sophia University. In our conversation about Zen and Christianity, he juxtaposed Bernard Lonergan ("My being becomes being-in-love") with St. John of the Cross ("In 'the Living Flame of Love,' my 'I' burns up—my being is on fire!"). In both cases, love consumes the "I" who I think I am.

Shortly thereafter, when I visited Zen Master Keidō Fukushima at the Tōfukuji Monastery, he mentioned that William Johnston spoke to him of "no-ego" in the Christian sense as "realizing the God within oneself!" However, one must recall at the same time Tillich's response to Hisamatsu—"that there is one point of which one does not empty oneself, namely the presence of God . . ." (*Eastern Buddhist* IV-2, 1971). Self-emptying, for a Christian, is always relational, always in dialogue with the other.

DEMARTINO: That is the reason for the term "onto-existential." No true Zen person makes a purely ontological statement. It is always, at the same time, thoroughly existential. As I attempted to phrase this in that same conversation with Suzuki, Zen aims at "the Self-awakening of the nonduality of (ontological) being and nonbeing as well as of the (existential) I and its not-I—

or, therefore, the Self-awakening of the (onto-existential) not-twoness of the (contradictory) two." So, again, exactly because I am not I, I am I.

KRAMER: Fair enough! Perhaps it is just at this point that Christianity and Zen differ the most, because a Christian tends to separate these.

DEMARTINO: The ontological and the existential?

KRAMER: Yes, but in a mutually reciprocal manner. For me, our conversation, and my dialogue with Zen, is necessary for precisely this reason—it calls attention to the need for more precise faith-expressions. It marks part of a growing awareness (on my part, at least) of the indispensable inter-religious process of juxtaposing forms of Zen and Christianity: both to distinguish their uniquenesses, and to reinforce their cross-reanimational possibilities. For example, I conjugate my understanding of Christ with Hisamatsu's remark that the "Buddha" is Rinzai himself, and that "[t]here is no Rinzai apart from our own Original Face" ("On The Record of Rinzai," *Eastern Buddhist* XIV-1 [1981]). That is, the Zen of Christ, the not-I/I of Christ is a living emptiness as vital as death, as compassionate as unconditional love. Moreover, Hisamatsu's expression of Nothingness, especially in "The Characteristics of Oriental Nothingness," by analogy clarifies grace as infinitely empty of self-being. In that regard, Zen's phrase "not one, not two" has been invaluable to me.

DEMARTINO: In what way?

Participation and identity

KRAMER: My relation to the Jesus event, for instance, takes the form of a "not one, not two" participation-identity. It is certainly not one. I do not experience absolute identity with Christ-nature, or with Christ-hood. No. At the same time, I do not experience myself as completely separate from, or other than, Christ. As the New Testament puts it, we are "Sharers in the Divine nature" (II Peter 1:4). That is, I am present to, and in the presence of Christ as he is present to, and in the presence of God. For example, in John (17:21), Jesus prays that he may be in the Father as the Father is in him and, at the same time, that believers may be "in us." This dynamic, indwelling trinitarian relationship affirms unity (I become Christ as Christ becomes me) and difference. Of course, by becoming Christ, I do not mean substantively, but rather, relationally. In unitive moments, the relational act goes beyond itself—the "I" and the "Christ" are forgotten, if only then to be reincarnated in the present moment.

DEMARTINO: In Suzuki's discussions with Tillich, Suzuki continually hammered away against the term "participation." But, then, he used the word identity which, as he well knew, is not that good either.

DEMARTINO-KRAMER DIALOGUE

KRAMER: What about transparency, transparent to!

DEMARTINO: What would that mean? I know what the term nondualistic-duality means, but I'm not clear as to what, in this usage, the term transparency would mean.

KRAMER: Roger Corless, in *The Vision of Buddhism* (1989), translates shunyata as "transparency." He writes that while reality exists, "its thingness, essence, or intrinsic autonomy cannot be found when it is analyzed." Reality is "transparent to analysis" (20). It exists but, like space, cannot be found or pointed to. It is not like a window which is transparent to light, but rather it is transparent to its own existence.

DEMARTINO: But, again, what does "transparent to its own existence" mean?

KRAMER: For me, the term points to both form (substance) and, simultaneously, to overcoming form (nonsubstantiality). Transparency suggests a shining through of that which is prior to interpretation, of the "really real reality" as I recall Nishitani once expressing it.

DEMARTINO: But something "shining through" something else is not a nondualistic-duality. Ken, do you recall a conversation we had about my doctoral dissertation years ago (1970) at Temple when you were a graduate student. One of your basic criticisms was that I did not use more metaphors. I believe I said to you then that I write the way I do because I am trying to express as precisely as possible what I am trying to say. Transparency as you are now using it is a metaphor. But I don't know exactly what it means. However, whatever such metaphors as transparency or shining-through mean in this context, it is clear that they do not mean (or express) an ontologically Self-actualized nondualistic-duality or not-twoness of the two in which the one, even as it is itself, is not-itself—and is, therewith, the other, all others, and no others.

Nondualistic duality

KRAMER: Couldn't one say of your term—nondualistic duality—that it is a conceptual metaphor?

DEMARTINO: I think not. It is a description of something that is onto-existentially actualized. But whether it is or not, is there not an attempt to explain what it means? Is there any ambiguity left in, through, or around it? What it means, in one of its predominant aspects, as formulated in the piece "On Zen Communication," is that: "I am I, You are You; I am not-I, You are not-You; I am I and You, You are You and I; We are One; We are None; We are All." So even if you call it a metaphor, is there any ambiguity in it? Most metaphors puzzle me, because I never know precisely what they mean.

KRAMER: When I speak of metaphor, Dick, I mean more than poetic meta-

phors; I mean a way of thinking—metaphoric thinking—which is reflected in metaphoric discourse. As over and against discursive discourse (the language of logic, measurement, quantitative analysis, systematization), metaphoric discourse (as old as language itself) is a way of expressing what cannot be known, or contained by, or reduced to discursive language. It provides us with a way of knowing (or naming) nuances, or newly-forming perceptions of reality. “The vital, arrogant, fatal, dominant X” as Wallace Stevens wrote in his poem “The Motive For Metaphor.” The power of metaphoric discourse (“this” in terms of “that”) is its ability to name, via an intuitive leap, the emergence of that which was not known, or realized. Metaphor means literally to move through, to transport from the known into open-endedness. It includes ambiguity. In the uniqueness of the lived moment, there is always the . . .

DEMARTINO: Zen denies that! For Zen there is no ambiguity in the lived moment! So Hisamatsu’s emphasis on *ryō-ryō-jō-chi*: “crystal clear ever present awareness.” So, also, Suzuki’s previously quoted remark that if he could talk with William James, that would itself be an act of pure experience. “Pure experience”; “ever present crystal clear awareness”: no ambiguity!

KRAMER: Dick! Look!

DEMARTINO: Yes, I am looking! Now, are you looking?

KRAMER: Listen! If what you are saying right now is true, if Zen’s No-Self actualization of formless form cuts through every other self-expression, and if there are only a handful of people who are awake, where is its value in the world?

DEMARTINO: That is another point to be stressed. The Self-awakening of the not-twoness of the two—that is, Actualized Love—must always apply itself to the concrete situations at hand.

KRAMER: Show me where it does!

DEMARTINO: Well, first, let us not forget, among other things, that if it were not for Suzuki and Hisamatsu—and, through them, all the other Zen teachers—we would not now be sitting here having this discussion. But, secondly, notwithstanding having said that, one of my chief criticisms of Zen is that it did not take up the problem of individual and social justice.

KRAMER: Maybe because there are too few actualized Zen masters to take it up.

DEMARTINO: Wait a moment. What is the concluding statement of Spinoza’s *Ethics*—All things of excellence are as difficult as they are rare. Is it a shortcoming of Zen that most egos do not undergo the dying to themselves that is the actualization of their nondualistic Selfless-Self?

KRAMER: Exactly the point! The point is that since it is so difficult, if not im-

DEMARTINO-KRAMER DIALOGUE

possible, for human egos to realize this . . .

DEMARTINO: Difficult for the ego to die to itself, yes; impossible, no! For this very reason, Zen would never impose itself on anybody. In fact, Zen can not impose itself on anybody. The ego—of its own initiative—must first take itself to Zen. So the concern is not to proselytize on behalf of Zen, but rather to try to prevent—or to correct—any misrepresentation or confusion regarding Zen. A Christian certainly has every right to be a Christian. But I fear that any attempt to Christianize Zen is to misunderstand and to misrepresent Zen—and, for that matter, perhaps even Christianity. And this despite the somewhat Zen-like (notice, I say Zen-like, not Zen) figure of Jesus—or, as Tillich would say, picture of Jesus as portrayed in the Bible (e.g., as when he is represented as uttering the Zen-like statement, “Before Abraham was, I am.”)

KRAMER: Agreed. Zen cannot be Christianized. As a Christian I would say that one reason Jesus died the way he did, was to identify fully with human suffering.

DEMARTINO: But was he fully identified? In the Zen understanding, before the Awakening of the Selfless-Self, one is just an ordinary person—in that sense like any other person. So I would ask, did Jesus ever suffer anxiety?

KRAMER: I would say, yes.

DEMARTINO: Tillich would say, no! Tillich would say that Jesus was tempted, but that he never yielded to temptation. Did Jesus ever doubt?

KRAMER: I would say, yes!

DEMARTINO: But do Christians say that?

KRAMER: Perhaps not. Many Catholics cling to a romanticized notion of a dualistic Jesus, a Jesus who is more God than man.

DEMARTINO: I once put this question to Tillich: When, on the cross, Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” was Jesus separate, alienated, or apart from God? Tillich replied, “No! Because even then Jesus still said ‘My God!’ ”

KRAMER: Yes, Jesus experienced anxiety, separation, and seeming abandonment. If it were not so, he could not fully identify with the human condition. He experienced himself forsaken on the cross. That was anxiety!

DEMARTINO: Ego anxiety? Existential angst?

KRAMER: While no one but Jesus could know what occurred on the cross, one could say (though these psychological and philosophical terms are open to question) that coexisting with anxiety was a reservoir of egoless peace. It allowed him to pray: “Not my will, but Thy will be done.”

DEMARTINO: Is that Christianity, or is that Ken Kramer’s Christianity?

KRAMER: Is the position that you present Zen, or is that Richard DeMartino’s Zen?

By Whose Authority?

DEMARTINO: It is the Zen, as well, of the Indian Diamond Sutra, the Chinese Lin-chi (or Rinzai), and the Japanese Hisamatsu. I even would say that it is the Zen of the Chinese Taoist Chuang-tzu, who once wrote: "Heaven, earth, and I arise together. All things and I are one." What I should like to hear about are those Christians who would say, along this same line, that they are Christ, that they are before Abraham was. One Sunday morning, Tillich delivered in the St. James Chapel at Union Theological Seminary a sermon on authority. Following the sermon, Suzuki and I were invited to a reception in Tillich's apartment. There, Tillich came up to Suzuki and asked: "What would you say? Wherein lies the ultimate authority?" Suzuki, who was almost half the size of Tillich, and said: "You, Paul Tillich, are the authority!" Tillich's response was: "That is what I expected you to say."

KRAMER: I think I know why Tillich asked that question. For a Christian, Jesus' "authority" is a central issue—"Never spake man with such authority!" This was not an authority that Jesus took upon himself, however, nor was it granted by an investing institution. It came of God. As Brother David Steindl-Rast has intriguingly suggested, Jesus provoked an authority crisis not to tell people what to do, but because "he appeals to the divine authority . . . in the hearts of his hearers" (*Belonging to the Universe*, 184).

DEMARTINO: I do not remember Tillich's entire sermon, but that was his theme: wherein lies authority. And Suzuki gave him the answer: "You are the authority!" But, now, who is that You?

KRAMER: For a Zen-influenced Christian, authority does not stem from an ego-I, but from an interaction between myself and the One Martin Buber in I and Thou called: "wholly Other," "wholly Same," and "wholly Present."

DEMARTINO: Not the ordinary dualistic ego, of course. But Zen—again there immediately comes to mind Lin-chi (or Rinzai)—would say that true authority rests with the nondualistically Awakened True Self—a True person of No Rank, of No Title—who is ever ready to "Speak!" and to "Speak quick!" What, however, would a Christian—for instance, Reinhold Niebuhr—say about this? Would he not say that this displays the ultimate human hubris?

KRAMER: Perhaps he would, but I wouldn't!

DEMARTINO: It is good to hear that.

KRAMER: I would say that it's my vocation to do precisely that.

DEMARTINO: Then do so. But Niebuhr is not going to accept you into the Christian Church on that basis.

DEMARTINO-KRAMER DIALOGUE

KRAMER: Then Niebuhr's church would need renovation, enlargement. But back to your question about Christ.

DEMARTINO: Christianity began with Paul, did it not? And did not Paul believe in a divinity of Jesus as the Christ that was different from all other persons?

KRAMER: No and Yes. Technically, Christianity did not begin with Paul, for it was in Antioch that the term was first used. But one can say, and I think this is what you mean, that Christian theology began with Paul. He was the first interpreter of Christian teachings. And clearly, he believed that Jesus, as the Christ, was qualitatively different from all other persons. In fact, in the book of Colossians, Paul writes that Christ is "the image of the imageless (or invisible) God" (1:15).

DEMARTINO: What, however, does that mean? Must not a clear explanation be offered as to what such a combination of words means?

KRAMER: But one could say the same thing about Zen, Dick.

DEMARTINO: Then give a specific example, and let us see if a comprehensible explication cannot be provided.

KRAMER: All right. What does Nishida's "absolutely contradictory self-identity" mean?

DEMARTINO: I am not that I am! Or, as the Diamond Sutra would probably prefer to put it, I am not-I, therefore I am I.

KRAMER: But what does that mean? You took one paradoxical statement and explained it in terms of another one.

DEMARTINO: Yes. But is it really such an outlandish affront to dualistic human reason to say that I coincidentally am and am not, or that I am not that I am? If (in our reflective awareness) we think about Nature and the way Nature functions, is it not undergoing a continuing—and concurrent—self-construction, self-destruction, and self-reconstruction? Doesn't this ongoing simultaneity characterize or describe the ultimate nature of reality, comprehending, as it does, both being and nonbeing? So, even if only speaking in terms of dualistic paradox, these statements have a rational cogency. I would characterize the Diamond Sutra's assertion, however, as nondualistic paradox. But when, on the other hand, you speak of an imageless God creating human beings in His own image, or of Jesus as the Christ being uniquely the image of an imageless God, what is the explanation of what those statements mean?

Imageless agapé

KRAMER: First of all, when Paul writes that God is imageless, he means "invisible," empty of image, incorporeal, formless. Biblically speaking, the

glory of God is preserved by the expression that no one is able to see God. Orthodox Jews, in fact, refrain from even speaking the name of God, and instead use HaShem ("the name") to refer to God. For Paul, Christ is an image, or presenced remembrance of the invisible God. If God is agapé, then Christ is compassionate, self-emptying love.

With regard to being created in the image of God, this createdness includes all possible aspects of creativity—for example, freedom, imagination, integrity. Through loving activation of these creative possibilities, I live in relational "union" with God, with Christ, with Buddha, with you. In that sense, original (Adamic) nature embodies and expresses the *imago* of agapé always arising in mutual relationship.

DEMARTINO: Could you restate what is meant by image?

KRAMER: The word comes from the Greek word "icon"—likeness or similarity to an archetype or prototype. Here, however, that likeness does not necessarily mean a likeness of appearance, but suggests a likeness in agapé. Previously, you mentioned the conference on Hermeneutics at Syracuse University, where Keiji Nishitani remarked: "[T]he image of Christ is not a mere 'image' but life, because it is an utterance of self-giving love. . . ." I agree. "Image" here refers not to exteriors, but "silently and genuinely exhales realness of the love realized in it. . . ." In fact, as you know, Nishitani goes on to say, Christ's being Christ "is essentially being-in-emptiness."

DEMARTINO: Perhaps we should back up, start from the beginning, and try to proceed more systematically. What is meant by an imageless God? Does an imageless God have a body?

KRAMER: Physically, of course, God does not have an objectifiable body. At the same time, metaphorically speaking, God may be said to "have" a body. In fact, my former professor of Systematic Theology, Nels Ferré, used to say that "God both is and has a body" (*The Christian Understanding of God*, 35). By that, Ferré meant that God sustains a creative relationship with time and space, history and nature (i.e., is a body as well as has a body). Following both Ferré and the writer of I John, I would say that God's agapé body is infinite, unconditioned, self-giving Love. As agapé, God is embodied and continuously creates in and through time, space, history, and nature. To the extent that I embody "God's body," I share divine Love.

DEMARTINO: In what sense is a human bodily person imageless?

KRAMER: In the sense that who "I" truly am, original image, or nature, cannot be grasped, cannot be described, cannot be confused with anything tangible or substantive.

DEMARTINO: When it is said that God created Adam and Eve as male and female, were they tangibly identifiable or not? And in the Kingdom

DEMARTINO-KRAMER DIALOGUE

of Heaven, according to this view, would a resurrected person be with a tangible, identifiable body, or not? Can you cite one Christian thinker who says that the true nature of humankind is to be imageless?

KRAMER: Not to be imageless, but to express the incorporeal nature of God's image—the original purpose of creation—in and through one's corporeal existence. Of course, God's creation is self-surpassing: it never repeats itself and it includes within itself what it is not. Do "I" express *imago* perfectly? While attending Akizuki Ryōmin's lecture on Lin-chi's "True Man of No Title" at Hanazono College, I asked him if enlightenment in its once-and-for-all nature included unenlightenment as well. That is, if from the beginning one is awake, then in this very moment am I awake even though I am not aware of being awake? In the terms of our conversation, how does self-emptying include its opposite?

DEMARTINO: Now you speak not so much of being "imageless," but of expressing "the incorporeal nature of God's image." That is why when you speak of "the imageless expressing itself invisibly in and through finite (and, I would assume, 'corporeal') images," I find it somewhat confusing—or unclear.

KRAMER: How about paradoxical? As Søren Kierkegaard maintained, Christ is the ultimate paradox—that the invisible God becomes physical. This way of speaking is no more, or less, paradoxical than your speaking of Zen's nondualistic duality.

DEMARTINO: Nondualistic-duality most certainly is paradoxical, but its explication, I would continue to hope, neither confusing, inconsistent, nor unclear. Paradox is never a synonym—or an excuse—for either ambiguity or confusion. When Zen describes or explains formless-form, Formless-Self, or Selfless-Self, there is a strict, unwavering consistency there.

KRAMER: With other paradoxes that could be said to be equally illogical or nonsensical.

DEMARTINO: Just the opposite, they are consistent with each other precisely because of a fundamental and pervading logic that is operating—because there is an underlying logos to Zen. Expressed otherwise, in Zen's nondualistic-duality there is a basic nondualistic logos that is free of—because it does not abide—any external or internal dualistically logical inconsistencies.

Zen is never a capricious or a haphazard matter of arbitrarily slapping together verbal contradictions or existential contradictories. Quite the reverse. Exemplary Zen expressions such as I-am-not-that-I-am, or equivalent phrases such as Self-negation-affirmation, Self-affirmation-negation, Nishida's "absolutely contradictory self-identity," Dōgen's "body-mind fallen off; fallen off body-mind," etc., etc., are all at once onto-existentially relevant, meaningful, and logically consistent—albeit with a relevance,

meaning, and logical consistency deriving from a Self-actualized paradoxical nondualistic-duality or not-twoness of the two.

When you (or Paul) as a Christian, however, allude to an imageless image, to what does it apply? Does it apply to God? to Jesus as the Christ? to all persons? to all beings? to all of Nature in its being and nonbeing? or to what? Is the image itself imageless? Is the imageless with image? Posed still differently, why is not Jesus as the Christ spoken of as the image of an imageless Jesus who, as such, would be a Selfless-Self with nothing—no God or anything else—left over? In other words, are the two aspects of imageless and image really comutually and nondualistically not-two, each on an absolutely equal footing with the other, or is there some kind of a residual hierarchical duality persisting between them that is never totally overcome? Moreover, would not this sort of question pertain as well to the relation, in Eckhart, between Godhead and God? Why, for Eckhart, is not God as God Nothingness? Why is there the need for a Godhead beyond God? Though these questions are, admittedly, prompted by what can be called the logic of nondualistic paradox, it is difficult for me to discern in the Christian use of the terms “imageless” and “image” any clear meaning or consistency, the lack of the latter perhaps resulting from the lack of the former. Indeed, with respect to the issue of consistency in this connection, another thing that puzzles me has to do with freedom. The Christian position is that human beings would not be human unless God gave them freedom.

KRAMER: There are many questions within and behind the questions which you pose here. Let me speak to just one, your use of “image” and “likeness.” A key for understanding the creation story of Adam (as all humankind) is to recall that he shares in God’s reality from his own place in creation. The metaphor of God’s breathing “life” or “spirit” or “image” (*imago*) into Adam bonds Creator to created, and vice versa. As Thomas Merton has suggested: “At the first moment of his existence, Adam breathed the air of an infinitely pure freedom—a freedom which was poured into his soul directly by God in his creation” (*The New Man*, 39). Metaphorically speaking, original nature is breathing (and living) in unison with God, and in the process mirroring God’s freedom.

DEMARTINO: So that if God created humankind in His own image such that humankind “mirrors,” as you put it, “the loving nature” of “God’s freedom,” then God has freedom. Now, if God has freedom, and if this freedom, because God is all-powerful and all-knowing as well as all-loving, is a freedom that God would not—and does not—misuse, why, when creating human beings, as you say, in His own image (“mirroring God’s freedom”), did not God create them with the same kind of freedom that He has? Why did He instead create them with a freedom that, in His all-knowing wisdom,

DEMARTINO-KRAMER DIALOGUE

He knew they would misuse—that they would use to go against, as Tillich would say, their created essential nature?

But, furthermore, if human freedom did mirror “the loving nature” of “God’s freedom,” whence even the possibility for that freedom to go against its nature created in “His image”? Would all this not mean, as Suzuki has observed, that what Christians call “original sin” is God’s own responsibility? This also relates to something that arose in the Tillich-Hisamatsu Conversations. When Hisamatsu noted that a person’s True Self can be said, in one sense, to be beyond good and evil, Tillich replied that as a Christian he would never say that. Hisamatsu’s comment was, that is because Tillich would consider it blasphemous for one to make such a claim. What Hisamatsu is underscoring here is that for Zen there is no hierarchical gap between the Selfless-Self and any thing else that is supposed to be “higher.” Is this not another major difference between Christianity and Zen?

Death-Resurrection Koan

KRAMER: Much could be said about God’s freedom and human freedom; but most fundamentally, God’s freedom is freely given as agapé. Thus, several implications in your questions must be questioned. Why would you assume that because humanity “misused” its freedom, that God therefore “misused” freedom? And why would you assume that God’s “knowledge” (i.e., that humanity would go against its “created-essential nature”) would somehow blemish the created order? What if a component of God’s freedom is hope, a hope (including a realizable possibility) that humans would overcome a “misuse” of freedom? What if humanity’s “misuse” of freedom is a natural, and even necessary, component of the created order without which human beings could not come to understand, and exercise, freedom in responsible ways?

As infinite freedom, God transcends all finite definitions of what freedom is, or should be. As finite freedom, humans mirror God’s freedom, though imperfectly. There is, as you put it, a “hierarchical gap,” or as I would prefer, a dialogical, or creative, over-and-againstness between Creator and created. Within the matrix of this interparticipatory separation, my “existential union” with God, as Thomas Merton expressed it or “genuine relationship” as Buber expressed it, is the innermost ground of my freedom.

DEMARTINO: For Zen it is not that any-one or any-thing dualistically “other” sustains or provides the “inner ground” for any-one or any-thing else. On the contrary, it is rather that the ego dies to itself in the dissolution of its im-

pacted dualistic structure of being and not-being, I and not-I, ego and other, subject and object, this and that, in what Zen terms the Great Death. The consequence of this Great Death that is the Great Awakening—or breakup-breakthrough of the Great Doubt Block—is the radical shifting of the onto-existential self-referent from the dualistic ego to a nondualistically Self-Awakened Nature in its Selfless-Self-affirmation-negation.

This means that what may be spoken of as the Awakening of the Selfless-Self-Nature of the human person is in fact the Awakening of the Selfless-Self-Nature of Nature. Put another way, it is not that the ego awakens to itself as Nature, but rather that Nature awakens to Itself as an egoless-ego. In this Selfless-Self-Awakened Self-affirmation-negation of the human person as Self-Awakened Nature, there is nothing left out or left over, not any-one, any-thing, or any “other”—not Nature itself, human persons (or their artifacts), nor any supposed extra-cosmic remnant that would then have to be accounted for or explained by a transcendent God, in turn leaving, of course, that transcendent God to be accounted for or explained.

I once heard a Protestant theologian say: “The world without God is nothing; but God without the world is still God.” Though voiced by a Protestant, I think Catholics might agree. Zen would not speak that way. Zen would say, to restate an earlier point (now adding language from a poem by Hisamatsu, “The All-Bearing Empty Sea”), that seminally and inexhaustibly exhaustive is the Formless-Self as Self-Awakened-Nature in its Being and Nonbeing such that it constantly and concurrently is and is not as it changes-without-changing in timeless-time and spaceless-space—or Eternity-Infinity: all-bearing yet empty!

KRAMER: “God without the world” is incomprehensible: The question here for me is less about differences, and more about what difference the differences between us make. Can Awakening and Grace coexist? If so, what potentially redemptive consequences follow? If not, why not? Thinking in this way, I live at an intersection between Zen and Christian self-emptying. Each clarifies and deepens understanding and expression of the other. In this coincidence of opposites, self-emptying surrender can be viewed as a mediated activity of Grace spontaneously expressed through the dying/resurrecting action of freedom-in-love. Instead of the possibility of realizing Zen’s “absolutely contradictory self-identity,” seemingly impossible (for me at least), I rely on a grace-power of absolutely contradictory Other-identity. Self-emptying, then, arises from relation to Other-power through an activity of authentic trust, that is, from a genuine “not-two, not-one” relationship with a unique other. At times, as Buber writes in *I and Thou*, “It is like a light breath, at times like a wrestling-bout, but always—it happens” (109).

DEMARTINO-KRAMER DIALOGUE

In light of this, several questions continue to pose themselves: Is emptiness actualized? Is actualization empty? But rather than arriving at answers, for me the purpose of this dialogue is to penetrate, in a relational way, ever more deeply and ever more creatively into these questions.

Nondual self-emptying

DEMARTINO: Whatever the time, the place, or the circumstances, let us, indeed, be Empty thoroughly and consistently—or consistently because thoroughly. For Zen this means to be empty even of being empty: not holding on to anything; truly “killing” everything—including the “killing.” It must be emphasized that “killing Buddha” is not in any sense a dualistic, negative, or nihilistic killing. Not at all. It is rather the Emptying—or Self-emptying—of a Buddha, or, in other words, the nondualistic Self-emptying of a Self-emptying. In Dōgen’s terminology, this probably would be *datsuraku-datsuraku*, the falling away of the falling away. However stated, what any consistent, thorough, or True Emptiness (whether shunyata—or a Buddha as a Self-awakened Self-actualization of shunyata) must necessarily be, is a Self-emptying Emptiness or, thus, a Self-emptying Self-emptying (very much akin to the Chinese Taoist Chuang-tzu’s Self-emptying, Self-negating, or Self-naughting Nothingness—or *wu-wu*). But, in fact, this could with equal appropriateness be expressed as a Self-emptying Fullness, a Self-full-filling Emptiness, or a Self-negating Being. For, in Zen, it is always to be empty-without-being-empty, to be full-without-being-full—or, more succinctly, to be-without-being, to do-without-doing (the *wei-wu-wei* of Taoism—which would include as well the more specific Zen Buddhist “to think-without-thinking,” “to know-without-knowing”).

As to how this is actualized, according to Zen it is through the dualistic structure and functioning of the ordinary person or ego being superseded by the impacted (and so nonregressive, nonbifurcating) Great Doubt Block that then breaks-up in the Great Death—which Great Death, as already noted, is the Great (Re-)Birth or Great Awakening. I think you are familiar with Bunan Shidō’s “While living, become a dead man, thoroughly dead!” In this same vein, I may tell you about Zenkei Shibayama. (He wrote, among other things, *A Flower Does Not Talk* and *Zen Comments on the Mumonkan*.) I was once sitting beside him at a ceremonial luncheon in his temple (Nanzen-ji) in Kyoto. When I offered, at the end of the meal, to refill his sake cup, he declined politely, saying, “No, thank you; I am quite full.” I simply could not resist, and so I said, “Oh? But you are supposed to be Empty!” Without an instant’s hesitation, he shot right back: “Even when I am full, I am still Empty!”

DEMARTINO: Consider: Heraclitus (who, as you know, had his own version of what is referred to as a "unity of opposites") spoke of everything being in unceasing flux such that one can not step into the same river twice. I would stress, however, that because whatever exists in time and space in Nature is unceasingly in flux—or in some kind of change, one can not step into the same flowing or un-flowing river once. For since any temporal-spatial existent is always changing, there is no instant in—or instance of—time in which it simply is itself. To the contrary, in constantly changing, it always (i.e., concomitantly or nonsequentially) both is and is not itself.

In other words, perpetual change, in this view, means coming-to-be and—at the same time—ceasing-to-be in an unintermittent shifting array of balances between the building-up and breaking-down processes of growth and decay, accretion and erosion, integration and disintegration. This means that at every level throughout Nature, there is at all times an "is" that is no longer, and—simultaneous with that—a "not" or "not yet" that is coming to be: either as a new or different form of an older enduring being, or as some form of a newly emerging being.

Especially to be emphasized is that at the level of the most elemental constituents of Nature, whatsoever they may be, because of the unrelenting dynamic change going on and the absence of any statically fixed or unchanging elemental building blocks, the simultaneous "no longer" or "not being" is never solely a matter of being something different either akin to itself or wholly different or even antithetical to itself. It is always also a matter of ceasing to be at all—e.g., as the terminal endpoint of a change that brings about or results in a dissolution, dissipation, or decomposition. For whatever the sort of change involved in their activity—or interactivity, the breaking-down, decomposing, or disintegration of any of the most elemental constituents can not be a dissolution into some more elemental constituent. It has to be a dissolution into the constituent's own sheer nonbeing. But this terminal endpoint of Nature's breaking-down and disintegration into (some particular constituent's) sheer nonbeing is, at the same time, the seminal beginning-point of Nature's integration and building-up (of some other particular similar or dissimilar form) into being.

Being together something in time-and-space and so changing, as well as nothing at all and so, not in time-and-space and, in that sense, not changing, are, consequently, coterminous-cofeatures of what can be characterized (in its simple unbrokenness) as the terminal-seminal nonfunctioning-functioning—or changeless-changing—of Nature. Taken in its entirety—i.e., in the simultaneous and ongoing complementarity of its being, its being different, and its sheer not being, Nature could be said to be in a continuous—and coincident—self-generation, self-degeneration, and self-

DEMARTINO-KRAMER DIALOGUE

regeneration.

Nature, I would submit, may be regarded as the dynamic or ongoing simultaneity of the being and nothingness of a self-impelled coming to be and passing away of everything that was, is, and will be. (I would suggest, by the way, that this is what is intended by the interdependent coorigination-co cessation of Buddhism's *pratitya-samutpada*.) In any case, relentlessly undergoing—in its endless building-up and breaking-down— manifold changes that include transformations from one form to another form, along with an outright ceasing to be and recomposing at the level of its most elemental constituents, Nature, in its synchronically encompassing changing being and unchanging nonbeing, simultaneously is and is not in a simultaneity that is ongoing—albeit in a pristine unbroken timeless-time and spaceless-space of changeless-change.

To recapitulate, Nature in its temporal-spatial being—or in its spatial-temporal forms—is always changing. But in changing, it is always ceasing-to-be even as it is simultaneously coming-to-be. For any one form in ceasing to be what it was by changing into another form, ceases to be at the most elemental level in changing into no form. So exactly in its changing, pristine unbroken Nature is and is not—ever changing and not changing.

Similarly, then, with the True (or Selfless) Self, which is the nondualistically Self-actualized-Self-awakening of this Nature. It, too, at once is and is not, is at once changing and unchanging—not, however, in a pristine, non-reflective, or simple unbrokenness, nor, then, simply as a matter of the ongoing simultaneity of the degeneration-regeneration of elemental components but furthermore, in what may be termed an onto-existentially Actualized or Awakened not-twoness-of-the-two or nondualistic-duality. (Compare—or contrast, again, a statement from Heraclitus [Fragment 81]: “We step and we do not step into the same river; we are and we are not.”) Now, whether you agree or disagree with any of this, is this not a rationally intelligible explanation?

KRAMER: Merton writes that this freedom is contingent only upon one condition—that Adam remain in perfect spiritual union with the creative source of his freedom. This is interrupted by the “fall” which is marked by a radical shift in Adam's (humankind's) behavior, from a self-emptying-mirroring of agapé to a self-grasping-mirroring of unfreedom. Created to mirror the loving nature of the creator, Adam relinquishes his original nature and comes to image or manifest himself only. Christ, as the image of the invisible God (or as the Second Adam), empties himself of the form (or image) of God, and restores our original nature (or the original logos). In Christ, the image of God is perfectly identified, perfectly sustained, perfectly communicated. In this sense, it is not “I” but Christ who lives in, and as, me.

DEMARTINO: But all this, again, must be explained further. And it may be of interest to recall your question to Akizuki: "Am I awake even though I am not aware of being awake?" In this understanding it could be said that initially there is, unawakened to itself, primordial Nature-in-itself functioning in an unreflective and so unbroken absence of duality in what may be deemed the ongoing simultaneity of its self-creation, self-destruction, and self-recreation—or, in other words, of its self-affirmation and its self-negation. This simple, pristine unbrokenness persists, as regards Nature-in-itself, despite the rise of the ordinary human person or ego and the dualistic splitting of Nature and the human ego by the human ego.

That is to say, duality (when something "is not" its reflectively discriminated negation) arises with the emergence of the human person, "I," or ego. It is with the advent of the ego and its dualistic reflective consciousness and being that Nature first comes to be known as Nature—but not to (or by) Nature-in-itself. In what may be called this first awakening, Nature becomes known to—or by—the ego as a split, broken, or dualized Nature-for-the-ego that stands, in part, outside or against the ego. For in the ego's dualistic differentiation of itself from not-itself, it distinguishes itself dualistically from Nature—and this notwithstanding that the ego finds itself partially arising from and continuing to stand within Nature even as it stands outside of Nature. Exactly because of this, however, it can entertain the notion of Nature without, or before the appearance of, the human person, "I," or ego in terms precisely of a simple unreflective and so unbroken primeval Nature-in-itself.

The dualistic reflective breaking or splitting, then, is due to the ego's inherent dualistically bifurcating, regressively reflective, un-self-sustaining—and, hence, self-deceptive—separatist (or excluding) would-be rooting of itself in itself against its own negation: I am not not-I. But if this ego-engendered dualistic structure can cease to be regressive and become impacted-in-itself as what Zen calls the Great Doubt Block and this undergoes a nondualistic onto-existential break-up, there then occurs the break-through to one's Selfless-Self as a Self-actualized Self-awakening of Nature by, to, and as Nature.

In this, Nature's primordial unbroken absence of duality, which to (or for) the ego becomes as well a broken duality, is now, to (or for) Nature Awakened to Itself as Nature, a nondualistic-duality of Itself and Not-itself, its Being and its Not-being, its Form and its Formlessness—and, therewith, of any one changing spatial-temporal form and any other changing spatial-temporal form. This, I would submit, is the meaning of Hua-yen's *ri-ji-muge* based *ji-ji-muge*: the nonobstruction between any spatial-temporal form and any other spatial-temporal form that is based on the nonob-

DEMARTINO-KRAMER DIALOGUE

struction between any spatial-temporal form whenever-wherever and its own negation.

That is, on the one hand, the specific, changing, spatial-temporal, formless-form regarded as a discrete form is not not-itself: “a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose” and not a tulip or a flowerpot. On the other hand, the specific, changing, spatial-temporal formless-form regarded as a form of Nature (at least with respect to the most elemental constituents in the case of human artifacts) is but one instance of Nature’s perpetual, simultaneous, all-inclusive self-negating-self-negating or self-formation-deformation-reformation.

As a changing formless-form of this self-negating-self-negating of Nature, it not only is also not-itself, formless, or without form, but precisely as the unceasing, simultaneous, ubiquitous functioning of Nature’s formless formation-reformation, it at once includes or encompasses—and, therefore, is—every changing spatial-temporal formless-form. Thus, “a rose is not a rose is a tulip is a flowerpot is the entire cosmos is a rose” (*ri-ji-muge* based *ji-ji-muge*). These interrelated features in what is, as primordial Nature-in-itself, their unbroken not-twoness—or, now, as Nature-Awakened-to-Its-Self, their nondualistic-duality—make of each and every limited, particular, changing spatial-temporal form an unlimited-limit, a nonparticular-particular, or a formless-form. So, as stressed in Zen, a single flower (with or without a flowerpot) is the whole universe.

To recapitulate in a way that may relate to your query about how self-emptying includes its opposite: in its self-composition-decomposition-recomposition Nature is never a onesided or dualistic matter of forms or formlessness. Quite the contrary, it is always the nondualistic, simultaneous, ongoing self-emptying-self-emptying of every formless-form in an interlocking nexus with every other formless-form. As one such formless-form of Self-Awakened Nature, the egoless-ego as a nonparticular-particular is thus at once Everything and Nothing, at once the entire universe (Everything and Nothing) and the particular form that it is. In no sense, then, is there anything left out or left over.

Whether Nature-in-itself or Self-Awakened-Nature, in the continuing simultaneity of the being and nonbeing of all of the changeless-changing formless-forms of Nature’s self-manifestation, nonbeing as it permeates Nature is an indigenous constituent of the very make-up of Nature. To repeat, Nature’s negative-mode, not-being, or self-negation is never a matter of its being other to—or other than—Itself. Its self-negation is, to the contrary, an integral feature of its self-affirmation.

Hence, Self-Awakened-Nature too, as with unawakened Nature-in-itself, may be characterized in terms of the ongoing simultaneity of the self-genera-

tion, self-degeneration, and self-regeneration (at least in the most elemental components) of everything that was, is, and will be. In the case of either unawakened or awakened Nature, then, one can speak of Nature's self-affirmation-negation or self-negation-affirmation.

Consequently, since it can be said of Nature that even-as-it-is-it-is-not, one can also speak of Nature in terms of the fullness-*qua*-emptiness of a Beingless Being, or the emptiness-*qua*-fullness of a Being-full Nonbeing. There is nothing more beyond, behind, inside, outside, over or above, under or below, to the right, to the left, to the East, to the West, before, during, or after! Nothing! And you and I—as with each and every single thing in the universe—are in our own personally fulfilled Self-awakened or True Nature a Selfless-Self expression of this Nature. *Tat Tvam asi*: That Thou art! The question is, are we consummately, Actually-Awakened to this, or not.

KRAMER: In Tanabe Hajime's *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, he triangulates Zen's self-power, Jōdo Shin's other-power and Christianity's death-and-resurrection power. Self-emptying, for Tanabe, is true self-surrender. This is a continuous process of faith and action, of realizing salvation. What he calls *zange* (translated as "metanoetics"—absolute other-power mediated through the death-resurrection of action, faith and witness) arises, for him, from awareness of his own limitations (of learning, practice, realization and sinfulness). In this sense, *zange* is impossible to understand, or realize, because of our deeply rooted estranged ignorance. Yet, through the grace of Great Compassion, *zange* "passes through" the imperfection of our personal ways through "Great Negation-*qua*-Great Compassion."

Is this, he wonders, comparable to the satori of the great Zen masters? Though he does not deny the existence of masters and sages, he realizes that he still remains "conditioned" by an in-the-world ego. His voluntary submission to despair (at not realizing satori) becomes the gate of spontaneous freedom mediated by nothingness. While his "Nembutsu Zen" is reminiscent of William Johnston's "Christian Zen," what utterly intrigues me about Tanabe's rhetoric is its implicit, if not explicit, interreligious reframing of Christian theology. He, himself, speaks of "The self-determination of the human person obedient to God" (118), and of "an inner action determined by other power" (175).