

place. He also stated that in his later years he disliked having his writings published and read by readers about of whom he had no fixed idea. He derived his greatest fulfillment from talking with small groups of students.

I once divulged to Nishitani that upon hearing the music of an outstanding conductor it suddenly occurred to me that in my next life I wanted to become a conductor. He said, "I want to become a composer."

The Spirit of Poverty

Takeuchi Yoshinori

I think it was the autumn of 1947 when I visited Sensei's home to talk with him about a request he had made asking me to write a paper on the subject of "religious poverty." He had been asked to do it but he said that other commitments and deadlines had piled up to the point that he would be unable to get around to it. The subject was unfamiliar to me, so I was hesitant about accepting the task. But in the end I agreed. Sensei lent me a number of books for reference, and I began to study up on the subject. I was at the time writing my doctoral theses on primitive Buddhism, and I found the research I did on the spirit of poverty unexpectedly useful in elucidating the spirit of the Buddha. In retrospect, I realize that Sensei's real purpose was probably to try to broaden my field of vision as I pursued my study of religion. The subject of religious poverty led me inevitably to the Christian saints, and in particular to Francis of Assisi. This is the area which Sensei, with his characteristic indirectness, must have wanted to open up to my narrow scope of interest. Anyway, although I was unable to clip off more than a branch of the large tree that is Saint Francis, my real harvest was not merely the look I got at that single branch; it was seeing a place beyond the hilltops burst into view.

As my study of Saint Francis progressed, I felt as though I had encountered a living Buddha. I recently read an essay Nishitani Sensei wrote in which he said, "Before I began to study philosophy under Professor Nishida, the writers who captured my heart the most were Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, Emerson and Carlyle, as well as the Bible and Saint Francis." What strikes me now in reading Nishitani Sensei's writings is that for him too the encounter with St. Francis began to function as a kind of axis or fulcrum. He even re-examined his understanding of the Bible from that vantage point. The structure of Sensei's thought is magnificent. The outlines of its system are at once

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complicated and well-ordered, yet possessing a fundamental ground upon which its overall unification occurs. That ground arises from an attitude of "religious resolve" and "piety"—in other words, "a religious poverty" that is surprisingly Franciscan in character.

This aspect was strongly apparent to me from Sensei's words and actions during the period when he was purged from his post at Kyoto University. At that time, his home was shared by his mother, who was about seventy years old, his wife, four daughters, and his son, who was in poor health and showing no improvement. A doctor who was a close friend of mine told me privately that unless there was a change for the better, Sensei's son would not last another year. He recommended hospitalization. In those postwar years everyone was poor, living hand to mouth. I was concerned about the difficulties Sensei and his family must have been experiencing, but it was all that I or anyone else could do to take care of our own affairs.

During that period, I heard from Sensei's wife that, barred from his teaching, he would spend half the day, and sometimes the whole day, watching the lizards in the yard. She asked my advice. "He tells me," she confided gravely, "'as long as I say that I am all right you don't have to worry about me. If I really do become distressed, I will tell you that I am, so until then put your mind at ease.' He always says the same thing, but I'm afraid that when he says he is in distress, everything will already be too late."

I said that the reason Sensei was watching lizards was that he was reflecting, with great effort, on some difficult question, and that she shouldn't worry. I wasn't really as confident as all that, but it did occur to me that Sensei might have been engaged in the kind of deep concentrated thought that was said to have been seen in Socrates when he was a common soldier at the front. The works produced by Sensei during this period—such as *A Study of Aristotle*, *God and Absolute Nothingness*, and *Nihilism*—were like intense beams of light shining from a well-polished sword. They were worthy of the praise given them by Professor Tanabe, who called them "master works of Mr. Nishitani." I think that Sensei would have avoided causing his wife anxiety if he had written works of wider interest to a broader audience. But being who he was, concerned with fundamental things, he probably could not have taken any other path.

One evening during that postwar period, I was taking an evening stroll with Sensei. A whirlwind spun up at the gateway to the Yoshida Shrine. Watching it, Sensei exclaimed, as though in wonder, "Within the course of history things on the top move to the bottom, and things on the bottom fly up to the top. From time to time, a whirlwind phenomenon like this occurs, doesn't it? The Ōnin War, for example. And the present period."

For some reason, Sensei seemed above the flux of history—even when

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events came crashing down on him, they didn't seem really to affect him any more than a smattering of mud being thrown up against a car.

Another evening, we were strolling along the street in front of the School of Agriculture, and we met a person of about the same age as Sensei. Sensei appeared to be on close terms with the man. They stood and talked to each other for a long time. I was standing a short distance away from them, and after a while Sensei finished the conversation and came over to me and asked, "Do you know him?" When I replied, "No," he said, "that's Mr. So-and-so. It has been a while since I saw him last. He has really aged. The purge has certainly taken its toll on him." Even as he sympathized with another's problems, Sensei acted as though the purge itself were a subject that had to do with others and had no relation to himself.

When Peter the fisherman met Jesus, Jesus bade him to forsake all and follow Him. Just as Peter immediately followed Jesus, the day will probably soon come when I, too, will have to follow Sensei as far as I can to get where he has gone. My feeling is that it will not be easy.

"The flower blooms on the cliff's edge"

Notto R. Thelle

Those who did not know him often shook their heads when the old man entered the circle of thinkers and philosophers. His underwear peeped out from his sleeves. In a plastic bag he carried a few slices of bread from which he broke a piece from time to time. He chain-smoked. He seemed uncertain whether or not he was he expected to say anything. He searched for words and made no haste. There was no trace of eloquence. No elegant formulations. But slowly and deliberately he circled around his theme in a continuous effort to close in on it. Some people always wondered: What is he really trying to say?

But after a while something began to happen. People around him were caught in the strange magic of wondering. They were drawn into his world and the room was filled with his presence. It was no longer a closed space. The walls disappeared and wide landscape appeared. He did not teach philosophy, but invited the participants on a philosophical journey. It was demanding, for he expected a lot from his fellow wanderers.

I met Nishitani Keiji the first time in 1972, when I was a student at Ōtani University in Kyoto, where he was teaching. For thirteen years I enjoyed his