



Religion and Science in Nishitani Keiji

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“The Problem of Religion and Science is the most fundamental problem facing contemporary man.” (Nishitani)

INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to summarize and present, as objectively as possible, Nishitani Keiji's thinking on the relationship of religion and science. The presupposition thereby is that N. is one of the world's thinkers who have pondered the problem most deeply and, moreover has the advantage of bringing to the debate a distinctively Eastern (Buddhist, Zen) perspective. The real objective of the paper, however, is to introduce a discussion which would also involve the Christian options and which might prompt N. to further clarify his views on the subject and, possibly, enunciate further insights gained in later years.

My exposé is mainly based on the following three texts:

- 宗教とは何か (*Shūkyō towa nani ka*, 1961; *Religion and Nothingness*, 1982; *Was ist Religion?*, 1982; quoted as R.N.)
- 科学と禪 (“Kagaku to Zen”, 1961; “Science and Zen,” 1965; quoted as S.Z.)
- 科学と宗教 (“Kagaku to shūkyō”, 1966 ; “Science and Religion” — no translation available; quoted as S.R.)

A question which can immediately be asked: Is there any important evolution in N.'s thought on this point in the twenty years elapsed since the last of these texts?

Before tackling our problem directly, two preliminary observations may be useful to put the analysis in the right perspective. First, one of the characteristics of the thinkers of the so-called “Kyoto School of Philosophy” which N. shares in a high degree is the fact their way of thinking is deeply, intrinsically religious. For these philosophers the *locus* of truth is to be found in religion. In this respect, Hans Waldenfels, for instance, has been able to write: “For Nishitani, it is a question of a fundamental religious option that he sees our historical situation

grounded in a realm beyond space and time, a realm which is proclaimed in the mystical experiences of all times and in the basic Buddhist standpoint of emptiness. Nishitani's intention is to direct our modern dilemma to a solution through that basic notion of emptiness." (H. Waldenfels, 1980, p.52)

Indeed — and this is the second point I want to make — in the line of his predecessors, Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime, N. looks for the "saving truth," the solution of the problems of the present world, in the direction of the Buddhist, and at first glance very negative, idea of *śūnyatā*. When asked then, what would characterize N.'s thinking amid his colleagues of the Kyoto School, several things could be adduced but the most fundamental one might be his constant preoccupation with the problem of modern nihilism. In an autobiographical essay, he writes, for instance: "It seemed to me that the problem of modern nihilism in Nietzsche and others was probably connected with all these matters [discussed by Nishida and Tanabe]. This problem provided me with the starting point for my philosophical engagement and has been growing bigger and bigger for me, until it came to envelop nearly everything." (Nishitani, 1963) And it is significant, in our context, that N. explicitly adds: "I am convinced that the problem of nihilism lies at the root of the mutual aversion of religion and science." (ibid.)

How, then, does N. conceive, in general, the way out of the morass of nihilism, in which direction does he point? We must first remark here that, for N., nihilism is not absent from the civilizations of the East, but that it is in the West, where also modern science originated, that nihilism has emerged as the fundamental historical direction of an entire culture. Western culture, which is originally affirmative-oriented, is falling into the abyss of negativity, nihility, through the loss of God, its "absolute center." From there it can never save itself through a simple return to affirmation. Nihilism, or the "relative nothingness," as N. then calls it, can only be overcome by a "conversion" to absolute nothingness or emptiness, a radicalization of the negativity. "The negative direction must be pursued to its very end...where the negative converges, so to speak, with the positive." (S.Z., p.102)

It is within this overall thought-pattern that N.'s proposal for the solution of the "Religion and Science" problem must be seen.

I. Diagnosis: What Happened to Religion in Modern Times? To What Extent and How Is Science Responsible?

These questions are certainly much debated in our times and a great number

of authoritative thinkers, among whom many eminent scientists, have made statements about them. The opinion that something very serious has happened, or may still be happening — at least in the West — in the field of the relationships of human beings to traditional religion seems to be rather generally accepted. I am going to presuppose that as a fact, since I do not have the means or the time to prove it and, anyway, N. himself is very much convinced of it. This process of alienation from traditional religion is often called, in theology as well as in sociology, "secularization," but this ambiguous term — which does not play a significant role in N.'s treatment of the question — is of little help if we want to know wherein this process of alienation exactly consists and where its fundamental cause may be located. So, we might as well put our first question point-blank.

1/ Would the fundamental cause of the present alienation from traditional religion be science, together with the technology which derives from it and possibly reveals its deepest intentionality?

We may have to distinguish here, of course, on the one hand, science itself with its legitimate authority and results and, on the other, the abuses of science, say by an undue extrapolation of its spirit and methods to other domains of human life. If we take the word "science" in a broad sense, encompassing both of these meanings, many thinkers would hold science responsible for the present state of religion. To quote only one, the American philosopher, Huston Smith: "If our age is theologically on the defensive, what drove it into the corner? Many things, one can assume, but it seems clear to me...that its chief assailant has been modern science...Method has mushroomed into metaphysics, science into scientism, the latter defined as the drawing of conclusions from science that do not logically follow." (H. Smith, 1985, p.110)

I do not think that N. himself puts the question anywhere exactly in the form I just molded it in, but it is clear enough that for him the entity basically responsible for the alienation is science itself *and* the abuse of science, in the context of modern nihilism. He writes: "It is a matter of fact that as a result of science and of certain philosophies, both scientific and 'scientistic,' the religious sentiment of mankind has been more and more attenuated, and skepticism and indifference toward religious faith have gradually spread." (S.Z., p.83)

Theology and philosophy have, of course, tried to answer these attacks from science, but N. is not overly impressed by these defenses, for he writes: "In short, the various attempts on the part of modern philosophy to bring about a resolu-

tion to the conflict between science and religion have thus far yielded unsatisfactory results." (S.Z., p.85)

And in another context: "The history of Christian dogmatics does not, I think, provide us with a ready-made theological apparatus for coping with this manifold problem... I cannot see that...Christianity has produced any thought capable of making deep enough contact with the issue or confronting it authentically." (R.N., p.61) What kind of depth N. is here thinking of is made clear by another word of his: "As long as the problem of religion and science does not reach a level so fundamental as to render the question of God itself problematical, we cannot say that the issue has really been faced. It is as serious as that." (R.N., p.47)

2/ It may be necessary — although at first sight it looks like a detour — to ask ourselves next: What exactly is being threatened by science (always in the broad meaning of the word). Is it only religion or might it be something more general with which religion is essentially connected, or with which traditional religion has, de facto, been intimately linked? Not a few people seem to think that science and technology are in the process of turning us into "one-dimensional man," "iron man," or as *Life Magazine* once had it: "It is not the existence of the human being which is threatened with destruction by this crisis, but the quality of human life. Survival is not enough...It could be that the human being will be condemned to survive as something less than human." (July 24, 1970) Some would say that the whole spiritual side of the human is in jeopardy. We shall let Edward Conze, the famous Buddhologist, speak for this in his vitriolic fashion: "...a new breed of men who care for none of all this [spiritual knowledge] has crowded the earth with their presence. Looking at the surface of society, one may well believe that in spiritual matters the age of the moron has dawned." (E. Conze, 1962, p.9)

Here again N. is basically in agreement with the authors quoted. He develops the idea of a dehumanization by science most clearly in his "Kagaku to shūkyō," but here I must content myself with a short quote from *Religion and Nothingness* that hints at something similar: "This total lack of eye for any ground beyond time belongs to secularization in its preeminent sense and is characteristic of an age and a world dominated by science and technology." (p.227)

3/ Our third question then could be: What is the nature of the change which science operates in the human mentality?

First of all, would the influence of science on religiosity be comparable to that which the successive atheistic philosophies, rationalist and existentialist, have exerted on our Western spirit? There are, of course, common points and deep complicities, some of which N. points out in R.N., but one has the impression that the influence of science, for being less direct, is more pervading and somehow deeper. It becomes even possible to think that science is in the process of undermining that strange dichotomy in our modern Western civilization between theism and atheism, belief in God and belief in reason or, as it is sometimes put, between the Semitic and Greek roots of Western culture. Because of that dichotomy, the West has for long shown a rather schizophrenic attitude toward science and the erosions it appears to some to work in the human soul. On the one hand, we have the lamentations of religion and, on the other, the joyful cries of the optimism of progress. In the dangers which fully came to light only recently — total destruction of our planet, pollution of the life milieu, etc. — science now reveals itself as totally neutral to these two human options or, as Nishitani himself would say, ready to throw them both equally into the abyss of nihilism.

In the "Nihilism and Sūnyatā" chapter of R.N. (pp.79-84), N. offers us a deep-probing and rather Heideggerian analysis of the relationship of technology and the human. The same human being who has succeeded in emancipating himself from the laws of nature and has learned to control them, precisely by a total and interiorized submission to these laws, — in a new and curious reversal of controller and controlled, on the one hand, comes to be mechanized himself and, on the other, ends up finding himself totally estranged from nature, with the result that he throws himself head over heels into an irrational freedom and has no ground left to stand on. Nihilism has opened up under his feet.

4/ Whence this mighty influence of science?

There can be little doubt that the highly visible efficacy of the natural sciences plays a big role here. To quote again Huston Smith: "The achievements of this thrust toward truth...have been so dazzling that they have blinded us to the fact that they are products of an exceedingly restricted kind of knowing...Science is what the modern world believes in." (Ibid., pp.66 and 68) And again: "The triumphs of science have turned our attention [exclusively] toward the world's material aspects." (p.71) N. too thinks along the same lines. He speaks of "the air of absoluteness that always accompanies scientific knowledge": its truth appears as absolute and unassailable in its perfect "objectivity" and its practical results. (R.N., pp.78-79) In this guise science "blocks off the horizons of the

religious quest." (R.N.,p.47)

Referring back to an earlier quotation we might say that the authority of science, operating as a kind of "spiritual pollution" (A. Toynbee), robs the realm of the spirit of its credibility and the human being of its eye for spiritual things. N. says further: "The scientific point of view displays a tendency — probably an essential tendency — to overlook not only religion but philosophy as well...Science thus seems to regard its own scientific standpoint as a position of unquestionable truth from which it can assert itself in all directions...[so that] things like religion, philosophy, and the arts appear as no more than subjective opinion." (R.N.,p.78) Lastly, we might refer to another of N.'s observations: "The scientific enterprise is based, in terms of Hegel's distinction, upon 'certainty' and not upon 'truth'." (S.Z., p.82) We must then only add that we, humans, are forever ready to exchange yards of truth for the much more alluring inches of certainty.

To me, as a Westerner living in Japan, these problematics evoke a supplementary question. Granted that Western people are prone to letting all aspects of their lives be dominated by this scientific or scientific spirit, would also Eastern people, especially the Japanese, show that tendency to the same degree? I often have the impression that there is a difference here. In many instances, the Japanese seem to have mastered the art of compartmentalizing their lives into different domains, each with its own spirit and specific laws, without getting the impression of falling into self-contradiction. In other words, the Japanese do not seem to show the Western compulsion to be "consistent," of unifying the totality of their lives according to one and the same principle. Could this save them, at least partially, from the onslaughts of the scientific spirit?

We must now come to the decisive question:

5/ Is there, or is there not, incompatibility, contradiction, between religion and science?

Up to this point we have found N. marching pretty well in the company of the majority of Western thinkers, but now we seem to come to a decisive bifurcation of the roads. While Christian thinkers in general — with the notable exception of the fundamentalists — endeavor to show that there is no contradiction between religion and that which science can say and prove legitimately, i.e. with its own methods, N. maintains that there is a real contradiction between the scientific acquisitions and the doctrines of religion — not necessarily of religion as such, of true religion, but at least of "traditional religion," represented

first and foremost by Christianity.

N. starts out by rejecting two possible, and much employed, loopholes as illusory. First, the idea that religion and science cannot contradict one another, on condition that both stay in their own respective domains, which are totally different, occupy different levels. To take an illustration again from the same work by Huston Smith: "Only when...the successes of science are wittingly (as in positivism) or unwittingly (as in modernity generally) used to erode confidence in realities other than these science can handle...does opposition appear." (ibid.,p.71) No, says N., these domains may be different but they have a common boundary. "A boundary separates one area from another and yet at the same time belongs to both of them. The foundations of the conflict between religion and science lie securely concealed in just such a boundary." (R.N., pp.77-78) And secondly, the idea that science contradicts, not the essence of religion itself, but only the world view which religions have traditionally adopted and which is not essential to religion. Here, N. says "no" again: "There is an element of truth in this, but it is not the whole truth...For a religion this basic 'philosophy' is not something that can be changed at will, like a suit of clothes. It is to a religion what water is to a fish: an essential condition for life." (R.N.,p.77)

When trying to pinpoint the place where N. localizes the contradiction between science and religion, I can begin with a short quote: "...science has revealed a world-physiognomy entirely different from that which has been presupposed by most traditional religions;" and further summarize in my own words. On the one hand, the traditional religions have operated with a structure: God - world - the human, wherein nature is governed by God in function of the human, and therefore seen essentially as a teleological reality along the axis: life, spirit, person. Science, on the other hand, reveals a world totally devoid of teleology and orientation on life and the human, a world essentially impersonal and dead, so that the actual existence of life on our minuscule planet appears like an anomaly or freak. From there N.'s conclusion, again in his own words: "Traditional religions have become radically problematical." (S.Z.,p.105)

I must apologize for reducing N.'s penetrating analyses, coated in a highly literary language replete with striking images, to this bare skeleton, but time does not permit me to do otherwise. For discussion's sake, I am going to distinguish two antinomies (or aspects of one antinomy) indicated by N., the first of which could be the *crux* of his argumentation.

1) Traditional religions have been built on a *teleological* vision of the relationship: God - world - the human. Science has definitively excluded teleology

from the natural world. — N. expresses this in various ways but the most striking formulation may be found in “Science and Zen.” It is a rather long text, but I better quote it to prove that I am not misrepresenting N.’s ideas on this important point. “[We cannot any longer], as philosophers heretofore have done, stop at the stage where we discriminate between the world to be ruled by mechanism and the world to be ruled by teleology, and then either regard the latter as transcending and comprehending the former, or try to reorganize the whole system anew into a teleological hierarchy under the absolute nature of God. We must have the courage to admit that the ‘spiritual’ basis of our existence, i.e., the ground from which all the teleological systems in religion and philosophy up to now have emerged and on which they rested, has been completely destroyed, once and for all. Science has descended upon the world of teleology like an angel with a sword....” (S.Z., p85)

I suggest that for somebody who wants to argue with N. and refute his whole conception of the relationship of religion and science, this is the jugular vein to go for. One could then distinguish four different propositions, for example:

- a. Science explains nature and arrives at remarkable results without recourse to teleology.
- b. Science has proven that recourse to teleology is not necessary — and, on the contrary, harmful — to foresee and control the course of nature.
- c. Science has proven that one can really understand (“verstehen”) nature without teleology.
- d. Science has proven that there is no teleology at work in the world of nature.

Now, I believe that Nishitani needs this fourth and last statement for his argumentation, and that leads me to a few questions. First, is it really true that “the teleological world view has been excluded by science”? (S.Z., p.88) Does science have the competence to do that? I confess that I am not convinced of the truth of statements “c” and “d,” and am ready to admit that my reluctance to allow them may have something to do with my misgivings on the next point.

Secondly, can Christianity ever accept a world without divine teleology? But again, what could that mean? A world completely beyond or outside of the divine Will? An uncreated world or possibly a world only linked to the “impersonal side” of God? Or again: A world where the divine Will does not leave any traces detectible even with the “eyes of faith”? Or lastly: A world where the divine Will does not leave any traces detectible with scientific methods?

Nishitani then goes on to put a question which is much more central to his preoccupations than the above question of logic: “But is the attitude of religions correct when they try to challenge science holding on to their teleological world

view?” (S.Z., p.84) N.’s answer is unambiguous: Religion is wrong, and hurts itself, in resisting science on this point, because precisely here science offers the religions a chance of purification and deepening of their traditional ideas, of correcting their overly unilateral, anthropomorphic vision; or, as he puts it, more plastically, a way out of the “hothouse” they have built for themselves into the open air of reality. But the cathartic influence of science and its religious value appear maybe in a clearer way in the other aspect or formulation of the Nishitanean antinomy.

2) The traditional religions have found their axis exclusively in *life*; they see only an ascending line: matter - life - soul - spirit - personal God — a “human, all too human view.” (S.Z., p.84) Science, on the other hand, has its axis in *death*; it knows only the descending line of reduction of everything to inanimate things. “In many religions, the deity has often been conceived as the bottomless fountain-head of life. The face of bottomless *death* appearing in the universe seems scarcely ever to have cast its shadow upon these religions.” (S.Z., p.84)

In an effort to gain time, I would summarize N.’s reasoning on this point as follows. This one-sidedness does not permit these religions to be completely true, and keeps them from reaching the real depths of religiosity — or, at the very least, of accounting, in their theologies, for the moments of death, impersonality, and negativity which they necessarily contain and encounter: the death of the individual, evil in the world, the absence of God in natural, historical and personal catastrophies, the dark night of the mystics, the cross of Christ.

At this point, I would like to suggest that, at the bottom of the divergence in the evaluation of science between N. and most Christian thinkers, there lies, evidently, a profound difference in the conception of *shūkyō towa nanika*, of what religion is all about, and consequently, that a fruitful discussion of our problem must come to grips with that basic difference. In the meantime, we must ask ourselves: What, then, does N. present as the true solution to the problem of Religion and Science? Which remedy does he offer for the malaise created in the religions by science?

II. The Remedy Presented by Nishitani Keiji — His Conception of True Religion

1. True Religion and its Relationship to Science

In summary: For N., the true and only remedy for contemporary religion lies, not in resistance to science, but in the courageous act of making the vision of science existentially one's own, and thus to come, at the same time, to a true conception of reality and to true religiosity.

In trying to explain this sentence, I shall let N. speak as much as possible himself. The usual attitude of the religions is one of opposition to the vision of science in the name of the divine and the human. "Resistance against the tendency toward the loss of the human has up until now assumed the form of setting limits to the standpoint of science from a position based in the realm of things religious." (R.N.,p.89) Over against this, N. maintains that the true and saving attitude is "to take science upon oneself as a fire with which to purge and temper the traditional religions and philosophies." (S.Z.,p.87) Now, why is this?

As long as one lets religion function as a cozy refuge (a "home," a "nest" or an "inner world") against the glacial world of science, one does not go to the bottom of the human self, because one does not fully face the reality of death; and similarly, religion does not reach its true stature, which it reaches only through a thorough negativity. On the contrary, if one lets science destroy all refuges and really assumes its message of death and negativity existentially, a chance is offered to reach the true self and authentic religion.

It is clear that this kind of "assuming science" carries us beyond the limits of science itself into the realms of philosophy and religion. It is a question of "pursuing the consequences resulting from the establishment of modern science thoroughly and uncompromisingly to the end" (S.Z.,p.87) and to "think existentially of science" — something which cannot be done by science itself and not even by a "scientific" philosophy that wants to "philosophize scientifically and objectively about science." (S.Z.,p.86)

We must push through to a point where "the life-inhibiting universe of modern science is exposed as a field in which death in the religious sense, or the Great Death as it is called in Zen Buddhism, is to be realized existentially." (S.Z.,p.91) "That the usual state of the universe is explained by science in terms of lifeless materiality means for a thinker who faces science existentially, i.e., who accepts it as a problem concerning his own existence as such, that the universe is a field of existential death for himself and for all mankind." (S.Z.,p.88) What is open

to us after the rise of science — what is urged upon us by the vision of science — is a "religious existence which accepts the universe as a field for the abandoning of oneself and the throwing away of one's self; it can open up only through the Great Death." (S.Z.,p.96)

N. speaks explicitly here of the Great Death of Zen, but he also hears echoes of the Gospel, wherein he who wants to save his life must abandon it, and this world is not the real "home" of the human being. (cf.,e.g.,S.R.,pp.343-344) In the scientific world, he further finds intimations of the religious world of Buddhism with its distance from the human subject's likes and dislikes. "The world of science is a kind of world of great death, a world wherein all the discriminations of love and hate, suffering and joy, good and evil, and even the distinction of self and other, have all been swept away. One can call this a world without the human. But the strength of the scientific standpoint lies precisely in the fact that, by being based on such a world of great death, it leaves behind all "human" things. It is a position wherein, away from the human subject, one sees and grasps things objectively." (S.R.,p.347) "To see things as they are has always been stressed in Buddhism too, in expressions such as *nyojitsu chiken*. To see things straight, directly in their real shape, without interference of such human feelings as love and hate, like and dislike, good and bad or, in modern parlance, objectively, is considered as very important also in Buddhism. On this point, the standpoint of science shows a similarity with the Buddhist view." (S.R.,p.334)

This, however, does not mean that N. wants to expand the spirit of science as such into religion. In the same essay, he makes an important distinction. In science, this "distance from the human, all too human" (*ningenbanare*) goes together with a total "absence of the human" (*ningen fuzai*), and that will never do, of course, for religion, because in the absence of the human the human problem cannot be solved and "from such a position the strength to truly overcome death can never arise." (S.R.,p.348) Thus, the religious standpoint must transcend the world of science, but in the sense of a *Aufhebung*, a transcendence wherein the truth and value of the transcended are preserved and brought to life. In order to be true, religiously valuable, and relevant to the contemporary human being, religion must fully accept and valorize the aspects of negativity, death, and indifference of the scientific view. Religious wisdom must incorporate scientific knowledge as one cross section of the truth of the world as it is; the divine indifference of love must embrace the cold indifference of science; religious salvation must be able to comprise scientific "salvation." (cf.S.R.,pp.350 = 351)

Only a religion that assumes the negativity of science to the full can be the

locus of truth. In it, the true self of the human can appear through the death of the ego; in it, the true reality of things can appear through the death of all man-made appearances and illusions; here, for the first time, the wall separating I and things, I and others, is removed. "The world presenting itself on such a field...lies both beyond the mechanistically viewed world and the teleological-ly viewed world. It is at once neither of them and both of them.... This world is neither the merely "scientific" world nor the merely mythical world, neither the world of mere "matter" nor the world of mere "life"; in other words, neither the world merely in its aspect of death nor the world merely in its aspect of life. Although these conflicting viewpoints...respectively partake of one side of the truth, the truth rather demands a single vision that can grasp both sides simultaneously." (S.Z.,pp.99-100)

In R.N., N. calls this a "vision of double exposure" (like two images projected on the same piece of film). In it, one catches "the point at which the orientation to life and the orientation to death intersect." (R.N.,p.93) N. sees this double vision realized, for example, in a poem by T.S.Eliot's *Wasteland*, wherein London, in its throbbing life, is seen at the same time as dead and unreal:

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought that death had undone so many (R.N.,p.51)

2. Zen as the Prototype of Religion

What kind of a religion is a religion which can really incorporate within itself the truth and value of the scientific world view, and transcend it into an attitude of taking human reality as it is? A religion which does not recognize any priority of the teleological view over the mechanistic view, but transcends both equally?

From the totality of N.'s oeuvre, it is abundantly clear that N. views Zen Buddhism — and, I am inclined to add, probably Sakyamuni's original position, although I do not find this directly in N — as fulfilling the above conditions, at least potentially, and on the contrary, all other "traditional religions" as not fulfilling them. What then is the distinguishing mark of Zen over against these "traditional religions?"

I cannot think, here, of even summarizing N.'s views on Zen, which lie spread over many volumes and constitute a veritable *theologia naturalis* of Zen. I must content myself here with simply quoting some of N.'s propositions in an essay entitled "*Zen ni okeru anjin no mondai*" (1968, The Problem of "Stability"

in Zen) There N. argues that true religion must be able to overcome the *Angst* "which wells up from the bottom of the self," from the point where the self is born into the world. Therefore, it must be able to "cut through the root of birth and death." (p.35) This happens through a Great Death, which is death as "existential transcendence," a turn-about through death to life.

"However, in the realms of religion and philosophy, where such a turn-about is considered, the motive power for this kind of death and for the turn-about to resurrection, is generally sought in an, in some sense, absolute being — let us say, a God or Buddha. It is thought that only an absolute and eternal being can make the human being truly overcome death, resurrect into a life that does not fall again into the cycle of birth and death, become a 'New Man'" (p.36). For it is felt that death becomes death-resurrection only "by throwing oneself into such an absolute and eternal being, that appears from beyond the line of death," (pp.36-37) or again, "when entrusting oneself to the power coming from a "God" or "Buddha," the self becomes nothing and is assumed by God or Buddha." (p.37) Even Dōgen has such expressions, but it is clear that his real meaning is "greatly different from that of religion in general." (p.37)

"However, at the present, over against such religions, all kinds of positions have originated that negate the existence of the absolute as found traditionally in religion; these positions have even become the dominant ones." (p.37) But of all these atheisms, rationalist as well as existentialist, there is only Nietzsche's nihilism that really comes to grips with the problem of life and death as it appears in religions. But also Nietzsche does not really succeed in finding the turn-about from death to life.

"However, the position of Zen has the character of being a third standpoint between, on the one hand, the traditional religious and metaphysical systems and, on the other, nihilism. The "Great Death" in Zen is a deliverance from all the fetters with which the self is bound, first of all to the self, but also to the world. It requires dying to the self and to the world. But the negation does not stop there, it also demands liberation from all reliance on gods and buddhas, an abandonment of trust in or contemplation of gods and buddhas. As long as the stability of the self's existence rests on a relationship to gods or buddha it still is a conditioned (strings-attached) stability. No matter how certain this support from the side of God or Buddha is, no matter how unfaltering the conviction about it, it still is nothing but the safety of the fetus bound in its mother's womb by the umbilical cord, or the confidence of the child walking hand in hand with its parents. It is not the stability found within himself by the independent person who can walk by himself.... To that extent, in these positions, the path of

illuminating the self (*koji kyumei*) is not pursued to its very end." (pp.38-39) Eckhart too had felt that the soul returning to its ground had to let go of God, to go beyond God. With the new valorization of human subjectivity in modern times, Zen's "illuminating the self" obtains a renewed significance.

It could be remarked here that N. finds the specificity of "Zen religion" in the point which has prompted others to say that Zen "transcends religion," is not religion, or even to call Zen an atheism.

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Afterword

The Fifth Kyoto Zen Symposium was held from March 7, 1987 to March 12, 1987 at the Hotel Rantei in Arashiyama, Kyoto. We were greeted by an unseasonal snow storm on the first day, enabling the participants to enjoy the beautiful snowscape of Arashiyama. As we entered the conference room, snow-capped pine trees peering in through the windows welcomed us. For the foreign participants from Christian nations, the pines were like great Christmas trees. It was an excellent setting for a dialogue between the world religions.

There had been some doubt as to whether Professor Keiji Nishitani could attend this year's Symposium because of an injury suffered in a traffic accident last June, but he made a remarkable recovery and was able to attend a number of sessions. The committee members were granted their wish, and Professor Nishitani's presence was a source of joy for all of the participants.

Unlike last year when the Symposium was divided between Kyūzesō and the Hotel Rantei, this year we were able to hold the entire symposium at the Hotel Rantei. The dates of the Symposium were also changed from September to March, resulting in an interval of one and a half years in this event which is usually held on an annual basis. The first three Symposia took place during the latter of March, but this year's was held at the beginning of March when the plum trees are in full bloom, and they were a delight to behold as we went on the excursion around Kyoto arranged for March 8.

This year's theme was "The Meaning of Natural Science for Religion" ("Religion und Naturwissenschaft"). The first four Symposia were on: 1. "Religion and Humanity," 2. "Zen and Mysticism," 3. "Samadhi and Meditation," and 4. "The Encounter between Religion and Our Age," all with the subtitle "in the Contemporary World." The Kyoto Zen Symposium is concerned with Zen insofar as it seeks to elucidate the nature of Zen in the contemporary world and grapples with contemporary issues from the perspective of Zen. This year's theme may be analyzed in terms of three categories, "*tai* 体" (essence), "*sō* 相" (form), and "*yū* 用" (function). Essence, form, and function may be said to encompass the world of phenomena and noumena, the relative and the absolute (*ji* 事 and *li* 理), of empirical reality and the underlying truth. The first three Symposia were primarily concerned with essence, and sought to

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elucidate the ultimate nature of humanity and the world (nature). The fourth Symposium focused on the form of the essence of Zen, seeking to understand the manner in which Zen and other religions are related to our age, especially in the context of our daily lives. This year's theme was addressed to the relation between the form of religious reality and natural science. Rather than turning to scientists for a resolution to the issues contained therein, the theme was taken up from the standpoint of religion, or more precisely the philosophy of religion, and the matter was placed before the eminent philosophers of religion, theologians, and philosophers who participated this year. The committee invited one scholar from Switzerland, three from Germany, one from the United States, one German scholar residing in Japan, one Belgian scholar residing in Japan, and two Japanese scholars. The primary language for discussion was German.

The following foreign and Japanese scholars participated in the Symposium of 1987:

Beeh, Volker.	Professor, Faculty of Letters, University of Düsseldorf
Bragt, Jan van.	Director, Nanzan Institute of Religion and Culture, Professor, Nanzan University
Hart, James.	Associate Professor, Department of Religious Studies, Indiana University
Jacobi, Klaus.	Professor, University of Tübingen
Küng, Hans.	Professor of Ecumenical Theology, University of Tübingen, Director of the Institute for Ecumenical Research
Matsumaru, Hisao	Assistant, Faculty of Letters, Kyoto University
Riesenhuber, Klaus.	Professor, Sophia University
Rumpf, Wolfgang.	Physician, Kreis Krankenhaus Stornarh
Yano, Michio.	Professor, International Institute for Linguistic Sciences, Kyoto Sangyo University

We asked that the solicited manuscripts (approximately ten typed pages) be mailed to the Committee by the end of 1986. It was requested that papers be sent two or three months in advance of the Symposium in order to allow enough time to preview the papers, make copies, determine the order in which the papers were to be read, and to select chairpersons appropriate for each session; papers will be similarly requested well in advance for future symposia.

All of the papers were of great interest and stimulated the participants to discuss

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and examine a variety of important issues. The schedule of the Symposium ran as follows:

March 6. (Fri.)	Arrival of the foreign participants at Hotel Rantei.
March 7. (Sat.)	Opening ceremony; main speech by Professor Hans Küng; discussion.
March 8. (Sun.)	Excursion to Zen temples in the Kyoto area; reception hosted by Mr. Toyosaburo Taniguchi.
March 9. (Mon.)	Papers by Professors Riesenhuber, Takenaka, and Yano; discussion.
March 10. (Tue.)	Papers by Professors Rumpf, Jacobi, and Kawamura; discussion.
March 11. (Wed.)	Papers by Professors Muramoto, Beeh, Hart, and Bragt; discussion.
March 12. (Thu.)	General concluding discussion; remarks by Professors Ueda, Hirata and Nishitani; farewell party.
March 13. (Fri.)	Foreign participants stay on at the Hotel Rantei.
March 14. (Sat.)	Departure of the participants from abroad.

In accordance with the above schedule, the participants of the Fifth Kyoto Zen Symposium from Europe, America, and Japan each delivered their papers on "the meaning of natural science for religion" from the perspective of their individual fields of specialty. Professor Küng's opening speech was on "the nature of true religion" and provided an appropriate point of departure for this year's theme. As can be seen from the papers published in *Zen Buddhism Today*, Vol. 5, the presentations were of consistently high quality, and earnest debate and dialogue took place in each of the ensuing discussion periods. At the concluding discussion to this year's Symposium on March 12, Professor Ueda noted the necessity of clarifying the concepts of "emptiness" (Sino-Japanese "kū," or Sanskrit "śūnyatā") and "absolute nothingness" (Jap. "zettai-mu") and proceeded to give an explanation. Reverend Hirata also indicated the nature of emptiness by referring to an episode involving Subhuti, one of the Buddha Sakyamuni's direct disciples. Professor Ueda then went on to delineate two of the central issues which emerged in the course of the discussions: 1) the nature of modern natural science, and 2) the relation between science and religion. The

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participants carried out a free and open discussion while maintaining respect for each others' standpoints. Thus the Fifth Kyoto Zen Symposium was brought to a successful completion.

The committee of the Fifth Kyoto Zen Symposium:

Hirata, Seikō (Chairman)	Zen Master at Tenryūji Temple Professor at Hanazono College
Nishitani, Keiji (Adviser)	Professor Emeritus at Kyoto University
Ueda, Shizuteru (Adviser)	Professor at Kyoto University
Kawamura, Eiko (Secretary for the Symposium)	Professor at Hanazono College, Philosophy of Religion
Kirita, Kiyohide (Financial Manager)	Associate Professor at Hanazono College, Philosophy of Education
Horio, Tsutomu (General Secretary)	Associate Professor at Otani University, Philosophy of Religion
Kobayashi, Ensho (Member Emeritus)	Professor at Hanazono College, Buddhist Studies
Muramoto, Shoji (Information Secretary)	Associate Professor at Hanazono College, Psychology
Nishimura, Eshin (Member Emeritus)	Professor at Hanazono College, Philosophy of Religion
Takenaka, Chitai (Information Secretary)	Professor at Tokoha Gakuen University, Indian Philosophy

