MUTO Kazuo*

"IMMANENT TRANSCENDENCE" IN RELIGION**
Translated by Jan van Bragt***

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together with the philosophy of religion of Hatano Seiichi, Tanabe
Hajime's Philosophy as Metanoetics, the works of Hisamatsu
Shinich, and What is Religion? by Nishitani Keiji, Nishida Kitaro's The
Logic of Place and a Religious Word-View1 — a work of his latest
years — can be considered one of the great and immortal works of
philosophy of religion which Japan has produced in this century. We
can be proud of them before the world.

Hatano's philosophy of religion is written from beginning to end
from the standpoint and with the methodology of reflective self-under­
standing of religious experience, and it can be said that its basic current
is Christian faith experience. On the other hand, while Tanabe's case
is a little different, it can be said of the works of the other three,
Nishida, Hisamatsu, and Nishitani, that Buddhist (and especially Zen)

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tetsugaku no atarashii kanôsei, (Nishinomiya: Kokusai Nippon Kenkyûsho,
1974), pp.131-150.

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1. Nishida Kitaro Zenshû, (Second edition; Tokyo: Iwanami, 1965), XI,
pp.371-464. An English translation of the second of the five parts of this
essay can be found in Monumenta Nipponica, Vol.25 (1970), pp.203-216.
I use this translation (with slight revisions) when the second part of the essay
is quoted. (Translator's note)
experience forms their basis. However, in the case of Nishida and Nishitani, it might be better to discern Buddhism as the "invisible undercurrent." But still, the expression "invisible undercurrent" does not seem to fit completely either. As Ueda Shizuteru observed, speaking of Nishida's philosophy, one can, indeed, say that Zen determines this philosophy, but it is important to notice "the particular way in which Zen is at work here: Zen enters the field of philosophy, not as Zen, but 'recast', as it were, into a philosophical first principle; Zen here 'sheds its own mind and body' into a principle that constitutes a standpoint of self-determining philosophy." 2 I believe that this thread runs unchanging through all Nishida's works, from his first, The Study of Good, right up to this essay of his latest years, The Logic of Place and a Religious World-View. Almost the same thing can also be said of Nishitani, although the character and tone of his philosophy are rather different from Nishida's.

In the latter work, Nishida says, "Religion is a matter of heart and soul. The philosopher does not have to fabricate religion on the strength of his system; he has to explain this spiritual given reality"3; and again, "Before we discuss religion, we should first clarify what kind of reality religion is . . . . Without God, there is no religion. God is the fundamental concept of religion. But, even as colors appear as colors to our eyes and sounds appear as sounds to our ears, so God appears to our selves as a reality of the spirit." 4 In this way, the "reality of the spirit" is stressed but, on the other hand, the raison d'être of our selves is radically put into question: "Only when we are conscious of profound self-contradiction at the very ground of ourselves — when I am aware that my self is a self-contradictory existence — does the very existence of the self become problematic." 5

When we reflect on this, it appears that, in Nishida's way of thinking, the raison d'être of our selves must essentially be found in our very selves. Still, in the final analysis, the raison d'être of our selves does not lie within ourselves. Therein would lie the reason that our selves are here called "self-contradictory existence." "The fact of the fundamental self-contradiction of our self-existence lies in the self-consciousness of death (the self-consciousness of eternal death)." 6 "The self-consciousness of the eternal death of the self would seem to arise when the self faces absolutely infinite being, i.e. the absolute. We realize the eternal death of the self by facing absolute negation. But if merely that, I would still not say that there is the fact of absolute contradiction. To know the eternal death of the self in this way is the fundamental reason for the very existence of the self. For only a being which knows of its own eternal death truly knows that it is an individual." 7

What we can understand from various texts like the above is, on the one hand, that religion is a "reality of the spirit" and religious sense "the reality of religious experience" and, on the other hand, that the investigation of these "realities" coincides fundamentally with the essential task of philosophy, namely the radical and existential self-consciousness of the individual (at the very least one of the most important tasks of philosophy). Notwithstanding the generally seen phenomenon that "People are not religionists; people that are really committed to religion are rare," 8 it may still be granted that the investigation of religion, that "reality of the spirit," is a universally human task — a philosophical task, and that this is precisely based on the fact that man as man is radically a self-contradictory existence. One could say that here the problem which during the last few generations is more and more becoming a topic of heated discussion — namely, whether man is by nature religious or not, whether man has

5. P.393 (Italics are mine).
7. P.395.
religious sense as a "natural predisposition" (Naturanlage) or not; and if so, how this shows itself — is fundamentally and in principle transcended right from the beginning. In a word, it is maintained here that the philosophical investigation of religion as "reality of the spirit" is, originally, the most essential and fundamental task of philosophy. The point wherein this matter, which to us essentially appears as having to be radically discussed — namely, whether man is originally religious or not, whether we can comprehend man as essentially "religious man" (homo religiousus) — is transcended in radice, is the starting point of Nishida's thought. And still it can be thought that, in fact, this matter is on the point of being elucidated here and to be given a foundation in a most fundamental way. This is not an easy task, and a desperate fight for it seems unavoidable. Still, this task is performed, in Nishida's case, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. This means that the investigation of religion as reality of the spirit has become an investigation in the form of "becoming oneself the act of philosophizing without residue." (Nishida)

I already quoted the texts: "Without God, there is no religion" and "God is a reality of the soul and spirit." Further Nishida says that the relationship of man and God is a relationship of the relative and the absolute. In connection with the "death (eternal death)," mentioned above, he says: "That the relative is opposed to the absolute means death," and "The self encounters God and is linked to God only in a relationship of inverse polarity, only through dying."9 (The term, "inverse polarity" takes on a rich meaning and plays an important role in this essay, but I cannot go into this in this article).

Since my specialty is the study of Christianity, I am naturally inclined to interpret the relationship of the relative and the absolute from a Christian viewpoint. This is unavoidable. However, the fact itself of considering in this way the question of God and man (or God and world) as a problem of the relationship between the absolute and the relative, is already stepping outside the inner circle of the study of Christianity, going beyond the proper sphere of investigation of this academic field. It is, at the same time, stepping into the philosophical realm. A study which, to the very end, stays loyally within the viewpoint of Christian faith is called theological. To stick from beginning to end to such a theological standpoint could provisionally be called "theologism." And this "theologism" could find one of its prototypes, e.g., in Karl Barth, whose theology completely obliterates all philosophy, philosophy of religion, and natural theology. Karl Barth also radically bans every endeavor to work out, e.g., a theology of revelation ("theology of the Word of God") in connection or continuity with natural theology. Furthermore, he does not want any part of a natural theology that has become completely independent by severing all links with theology of revelation; or again of the kind of modern metaphysics which could be described as a natural theology that, seeing itself in the role of handmaid of theology or the church, reshaped itself completely in a self-denying metamorphosis — what Heidegger calls a "metaphysics of subjectivity" (Metaphysik der Subjektivität). Even if, in Christian eyes, this may appear as a very pious philosophy of religion, it is still incompatible with Barthian theologism.

I, too, as in fact a Protestant, cannot but pay my deepest respects to the theological purity of this Barthian theologism, and to the sincerity of its Christian faith, which surrenders its complete existence to the absolute sovereignty of the Word of God. However, on the other hand, I cannot but feel that I should develop ears to listen attentively to and try to learn deeply from a philosophy (of religion) which, like Nishida's present essay, overcomes the limitations of such theologism. For me this does not mean, of course, to go away or even to deviate from my Christian faith. It means to become radically immanent in my Christian

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9. P.396. "Inverse polarity" stands for the Japanese gyaku taiō, which might also be translated as "counter-correspondence." (Translator's note).
faith and precisely thereby to go out into a world that transcends it, or at least into a place where a mutual understanding of Christianity and Buddhism becomes possible. And this, in turn must mean to take upon myself the philosophical task of thinking about the relationship of God and man, God and world as the problem of the relationship of the absolute and the relative without, however, rejecting or losing before-hand the theological standpoint.

What I learned from Nishida’s essay, *The Logic of Place and A Religious World-view* is legion. (There are, of course, not a few points wherein I cannot follow its ideas. The main reason thereof is its impenetrability — let us say its loftiness and profoundness — but there is more: I find it hard to place myself in a standpoint that transcends, from the outset and in principle, the Barthian theologism mentioned above.) When it comes, however, to what I managed to learn from it, I want to mention here only one point, namely “the immanent transcendence in religion.” Granted that theologism must be overcome, then it should be overcome in the direction of immanent transcendence. This is, in fact, the proposition that Nishida makes to Christianity. In the advent of Christ in the dramatic poem of “The Grand Inquisitor,” (in Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*), Nishida sees Christ as “immanent transcendence.” And he writes the follows: “The new Christian world might be opened up by the Christ of immanent transcendence. To think of going back to the Middle Ages is an anachronism. Naturally and truthfully, we see the true God in the absence of God.” Moreover, I think that the following words by Nishida fit not only Christianity, but also the conventional traditional Buddhism: “I think that the religion of the future lies in the direction of immanent transcendence rather than of transcendent immanence.”

But he warns that, of course, this is completely different from “deducing religion rationally from the immanent world of man.”

Originally, religion and culture are negatively opposed (so-called “dialectical theology” stresses this point above all else). This is especially the case with a secular culture like the present one, which is determined and shaped by technology. Nevertheless, Nishida says: “True culture must be religious, true religion must be cultural.” But when Nishida tells us this, he means undoubtedly that, thereby, religion as well as culture must become truly new; and that, consequently, man and also the world wherein he is placed must be shaped anew. According to Nishida, just as with the new religion of the future, so too the road to the new culture must be that of “immanent transcendence.” In this connection, words like “naturally and truthfully, we see the true God in the absence of God,” and “We see God hidden at the back of true culture” have a profound meaning. This amounts precisely to saying that the world which does not see God any longer, or which appears to be rejected by God, encounters God in the very pole of its God-negation in a relationship of inverse polarity. And further, this must be identical with the fact of man himself — man who is “co-origin with the world” — penetrating into his own finitude (relativity); identical with the self-awareness wherein man “ultimately sees the ground of nothingness of the self, the fountainhead of sin and evil.” Nishida’s expression, “The self encounters God only in a relationship of inverse polarity,” also means the same. (The “co-origin” of world and self can be clearly seen in the New Testament, in texts like the following: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone; lo, the new has come”, and, “I reason that this

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10. P.462.
11. P.463.
13. P.460.
15. P.460.
17. P.396.
18. II Cor. 5:17. Quoted from Revised Standard Version, CTS.
temporal suffering is not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation eagerly awaits the revealing of the sons of God.”

Nishida says, “Absolute means, of course, the fact of having severed all opposition-relation.” It is precisely because there is such “severing of relations” that “the fact of having severed all relation,” it can at the same time be said that “that which merely destroys the relative is nothing at all; it is mere non-entity.” It must be said that the absolute itself contains within itself a self-contradiction. In order to be truly absolute — absolutely absolute, so to speak, the absolute must contain within itself absolute negation, its self must be absolute nothingness. “Since God is an absolute self-negation, He exists for Himself — by inverse polarity; since He contains within Himself absolute self-negation, He exists by Himself; because He is absolute nothingness, He is absolute being. Since He is being as absolute nothingness, He is omnipotent, and omniscient. Therefore — just as it is said: because there is Buddha, there are sentient beings; and because there are sentient beings, there is Buddha — I think that there is a world as creature, because there is a God as Creator, and that there is a God Creator, because there is a world as creature.” And Nishida then says that this way of thinking is not pantheism “all is God,” but panentheism, “all is in God.”

20. P.396. The Japanese term for “absolute” is zettai, and consists of the two characters, zetsu (to sever) and tai (opposition). The term for “relative” is sōtai, whose literal translation is “mutually opposed.” (Translator’s note)
22. P.399.
23. P.399.
24. P.399.
25. P.396.

In Christianity we find the idea of the “hidden God” (Deus absconditus). To begin with Luther, many theologians have used this concept. And one could say that what is called “negative theology” is an endeavor to point to the “hidden God.” But among all these, Luther’s ideas about the “hidden God” are most worthy of our special attention. To render it in a very short and simplified way, his idea is that even in his Revelation God is infinitely hidden. The word “Deus absconditus” finds its origin in Isaiah 45:15, “Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.” (Vere tu es Deus absconditus, Deus Israel salvator)

In Christian theology, the “treatise on faith” (Glaubenslehre) and the “treatise on God” (Gotteslehre) are inseparable. It is as Pascal says, “God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not the God of philosophers and sages.” It means that the God of Christianity is a God who can be encountered on the road of faith, not a God who can be sought on the road of thinking. A characteristic of the Hebrew-Christian idea of God is that God cannot be “viewed” (geschaut) by Nous, or proved by arguments of natural theology or metaphysics. The Christian God is different, He is a God that essentially reveals Himself. Such a God is correlative to the faith that receives this revelation as revelation. According to Luther’s famous dictum, “God and faith belong together” (Gott und Glaube gehören zuhauf) we can express this also with the words, “correlation of revelation and faith” — aware then that this correlation must be taken as a radically personal event. In Paul Tillich’s terminology, we must speak of a correlation of “God for us” and “We for God.” This is comparable to Nishida’s “because there is Buddha, there are sentient beings; and because there are sentient beings, there is Buddha.” However, Tillich also speaks of the “abysmal character of God” that transcends the above correlation. This is precisely what Luther means by the Deus absconditus as Deus nudus, Deus ipse, Deus a se25 (Could we find a parallel in the Buddhist idea of Buddha-kāya — the theory of the (three) “bodies of Buddha” — whereby the Dharma-body as the body of Buddha’s self-nature is not simply
However this may be, it is noteworthy that in Luther's theory of the "hidden God" there appears, besides the correlation of God and man, something that, while being forever mediated by this correlation, still surpasses that correlation. On the one hand, the following must be said: In Christ, the God who reveals Himself, i.e. the absolutely absolute God, becomes immanent in man and world, in beings which, as "relatively relative," have no absoluteness (in whatever sense of the word) in themselves; consequently, this absolutely absolute God becomes absolutely relative. This amounts to saying that, hereby, a road is opened, for man and world, to become "relatively absolute" by penetrating into their relative relativity. Would not this situation ideally fit the term "inverse polarity"? And would it not be possible to conceive here of the idea of correlation or belonging together of the kingdom of God and of this secular world, this "de-divinized" (entgöttert) world wherein God has become completely invisible? At the very end of his Logic of Place and a Religious World-View, Nishida quotes a word from Suzuki Daisetz's Treatise on Pure Land Thought, and says: "Samsara reflects the Pure Land; the Pure Land reflects Samsara. They clearly illumine and mirror one another. This idea points to the interpenetration or belonging together of Pure Land and Samsara."

But, on the other hand, we also have to maintain Luther's idea that even in his revelation God remains the hidden God. Correspondingly, world and man too are still hidden as for their true nature. Therefore, in correlation with the "hidden God," we are probably entitled to speak of a "hidden world" (mundus absconditus), and a "hidden man" (homo absconditus). For the complete correlation or coincidence of Pure Land and Samsara to appear, we must await — to say it in terms of the New Testament — the time "that God is all in all" (I Cor. 15:28), or the time of the "Renewal of all" (apokatastasis panton) (Acts 3:21). Herein lies the eschatological character essential to the Christian view of history. One can indeed say, "Samsara reflects the Pure Land, the Pure Land reflects Samsara; they clearly illumine and mirror one another." However, we are, at the same time, painfully aware of the truth of Paul's words: "Now we see indistinctly in a mirror, but then face to face. Now we know partly, but then we shall understand as completely as we are understood."27 (In this case, the mirror of "seeing reflected in a mirror" is not a "clear mirror" but a "troubled" one). Still, the author of these words is the same Paul who could say: "I no longer live as myself, but Christ lives within me,"28 and again: "If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old is gone; lo, the new has come."29

Indeed, Luther's idea of the "hidden God" itself is deeply determined by eschatology. As Rudolf Bultmann said, the mythology of the New Testament must be demythologized. And he thinks that especially the apocalyptic eschatology stands in need of demythologization, since it is certainly mythologically determined. The demythologized form of eschatology of the New Testament, as Bultmann interprets it, is an eschatology "radically reduced to the present." (Although it is also a fact that in this eschatology the moment of the future is, in a sense, preserved in the mode of living of the individual existence.) Bultmann is of the opinion that such a New Testament eschatology in demythologized form can be detected in the New Testament itself, especially in St. John's gospel. Anyway, we can say that in Bultmann there is an insight in and awareness of the eschatological present, of an eschatology brought down into the present as "a self-identity of contradictions of the transcendent and the immanent." Here, a profound thought which comes very near Nishida's.

25. M. Luther, Der Grosse Katechismus, 1529.
27. I Cor. 13:12.
29. II Cor. 5:17.
“eschatological everyday,”30 is propounded as an existential-interpretation-qua-demythologization of the New Testament. Nevertheless, I think that the element of future eschatology, as we find it in the apocalyptic eschatology does not sufficiently show its moment of truth in the form wherein it appears in Bultmann’s theology. In my opinion, futuristic eschatology must have the meaning of rejecting all immanence in present eschatology, while becoming immanent in it; of “immanently transcending” all reduction to immanence, while radically mediating it.

In Luther’s idea of the “hidden God” there are at least two kinds of elements, so that it does not necessarily allow of an unambiguous interpretation. One can find this idea in various places throughout Luther’s many works, but it is hard to maintain that it is everywhere treated in the same way. Among these many works, especially two, The Heidelberg Disputation (Die Heidelberger Disputation, 1518), and On the Bondage of the Will (De servo arbitrio, 1525) must be considered; but even between these two there is a not to be overlooked difference in thought content with regard to the “hidden God.” In the massive number of Luther studies we can find all kinds of clarifications on the “hidden God” idea, but again these clarifications are not all of a kind. According to W. von Loewenich, one of the best interpreters of Luther’s thought, there is no fundamental difference in thought on the “hidden God” between the two above cited works; both can be understood in a unified way from the point of view of the “theology of the cross” (theologia crucis) expounded in Die Heidelberger Disputation. But on the other hand, Paul Althaus, equally one of the most outstanding Lutheran theologians (recently deceased), also compared the two works and thinks that therein “two different lines of thought” appear. I myself have read the two works by Luther and, while I am not unwilling to see the true points in Loewenich’s interpretation or, at the least, to recognize elements of truth in it, I think that, rather than Loewenich, Althaus has many points worth listening to. I shall now try, while borrowing rather much from Althaus’ insights, still to propose in my own words — of course, as simply as possible — my own interpretation.

On the one hand, the following meaning must be preserved: from the viewpoint of the “theology of the cross,” the “hidden God” (Deus absconditus) and the “revealed God” (Deus revelatus) completely coincide in a mutual mediation (this in nothing but Loewenich’s thesis). Namely, the God who is revealed in Christ, especially the suffering Christ (Christus in passionibus) is, at the same time, the hidden God; God, especially the God of glory (Deus in gloria) reveals Himself as a hidden shape in the suffering Christ — and it is only the knowledge of faith, at work in our own suffering that unites with Christ’s passion, that makes us know this.

On the other hand, however — and this corresponds to Althaus’ “second line” — the “hidden God” as God himself (Deus ipse, also called Deus nudus, Deus a se, etc.) transcends the relationship of coincidence-in-mutual-mediation with Christ as the “revealed God,” and must forever be conceived of in an eschatological context. In Althaus’ words, this means that our knowledge of God as knowledge of faith has “eschatological limits” (eschatologische Grenze).

Now, how do these two sides (or two “lines”) relate to one another? It is generally known that Luther radically rejected all scholastic natural theology and related Aristotelian metaphysical theory. In his Heidelberger Disputation, Luther even tries to give a very peculiar interpretation of Paul’s words in the Letter to the Romans, “From the creation of the world His invisible qualities, such as His eternal power and divine nature, have been made visible and have been understood through His handiwork”31 — an interpretation from

the standpoint of steadfast negation of natural theology. This passage, however, is usually regarded as Paul's affirmation of natural theology. Luther explains that the possibility of recognizing God's power and divine nature “through God's work of creation, namely through the creatures” was, in fact, only there in the “original possibilities” (urständliche Möglichkeit) of man, and is withheld from man as historical existence tainted by the smut of original sin. When historical man still wants to try and do this, this knowledge becomes warped by the work of man, man falls into “justice of works” (Werkgerechtigkeit) and, as a result, man cannot but fall into the idolatry of adoring as God that which is not God. Luther thinks that, in Romans 1:20 ff., Paul radically condemns such a human venture.

Leaving aside now the question whether Luther’s views here are right or not, we cannot but admit that for us, modern man, it is important to know whether Paul, in fact, admits or negates natural theology. Although it is a very rough statement, we can say that, in general, Catholic theology leans toward the affirmation of natural theology, while Protestant theology tends to reject it. I cannot now enter into a discussion of this problem, and shall only mention my conclusion: I myself believe that so-called “natural theology” must be such that by mediation of its negation one can come to affirm it. In fact, this problem forms the most fundamental and most delicate problem of theology and philosophy (or philosophy of religion) as wisdom of this world (Weltweisheit). It is, by no means, a problem that has been definitely settled in the past; it is an ever new, and therefore utterly present-day problem. In a word, it is the problem of the relationship of theology and philosophy; one of the problems which has been continuously discussed in the history of Christian thought; a problem which even today must be discussed anew.

That Luther's thought on the “hidden God” has two sides can be explained by the fact that his thought, while, on the one hand, radically determined by his “theology of the cross,” is, at the same time and in a paradoxical way, determined by natural theology32 I call it paradoxical for the following reason. If it can be said — although it is unthinkable that he would have approved directly of “natural theology” — that Luther's idea of the “hidden God” is determined by natural theology, this can only mean that in his thought “natural theology,” while being mediated in a negation by “revelation theology” as theology of the cross, is still preserved inside that same theology of the cross as an aufgehobenes Moment; and that, as an ever remaining moment, it is never simply obliterated, but is alive as a valid force. And this is not different from the fact that Luther's conception of the “hidden God” signifies the limits of theological knowledge of God and, at the same time, also its eschatological limit (Althaus).

The term “natural theology” is certainly ambiguous, but we cannot here try any full investigation of its meaning. The word, “nature,” itself has forever the meaning of “substratum” (hypokeimenon) of all historico-cultural reality and, simultaneously, it can denote historico-culturally formed reality. I have said already that, according to Luther, Paul's utterance concerning the capability of man to recognize God's power and nature in the creatures as handicraft of God's creation only refers to a possibility of man in his original situation; man that actually lives as historical existence, tainted as he is by original sin, has lost thatfaculty and, consequently, every attempt of man to, in a sense, “view” (schauen) God directly in God's handiwork, in reality only results in human fabrication. In that case, must not one also admit that nature itself — that nature wherein all things in heaven and earth are supposed to acclaim God's glory and testify to God's existence (see, e.g., Psalm 19); that nature which is considered to correspond to reason (ratio) as the light of nature (lumen naturae) in man — has equally lost it “original capacity” of arguing to the existence of God, by its

32. The idea of a determination of Luther’s thought by natural theology can be found, for example, in Reinhold Seeberg, Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte, Vol. 2, part 1, Introduction, and in Theodosius Harnack, Luther's Theologie, part 1.
being formed historico-culturally and, thus, being involved in the “works” of man?

However this may be, the knowledge of God by natural theology and the proof of God’s existence mean a kind of “seeing” of God (theorein, schauen) in nature and by “reason,” a faculty given to man as a “light of nature.” On the contrary, in “revelational theology” (theology of the cross) the “hearing” (hören) of God’s word is primary. To believe is to listen obediently to God’s Word.33 The “seeing” of natural theology must be “aufgehoben” in the “hearing” of revelational theology.

But, as Luther himself says in On the Bondage of the Will, in the final instance, beyond even the “light of grace” (lumen gratiae) — wherein our knowledge of God by faith originates — there remains, “in hope,” a seeing of God by the “light of glory” (lumen gloriae), whereby we shall know God as we are known by Him and see God as we are seen by Him. “Up to that time” (interim), God still remains the “hidden God.” Even for Luther, the theology of the cross is an “interim theology.” Finally, the “hidden God,” as well as the “hidden self” and the “hidden world,” must become manifest. Could we not say that, “at that time,” “seeing” will again prevail over “hearing” or, perhaps, that “hearing” and “seeing,” believing and enlightenment (seeing the real nature) will be one?

As I said above, the “natural theology” aufgehoben in the “revelational theology” (theology of the cross), while aufgehoben, is forever preserved and validly alive as a “remaining moment” at work in the revealed theology. It can be considered to have the significance of an “incognito philosophy” destined to be a constant reminder of the eschatological limit of our theological knowledge of God, a reminder of the fact that theology is nothing more than an “interim theology.”

To say that Luther’s idea of the “hidden God” is determined by natural theology and, further, by metaphysics, means that this thought, while


being fundamentally determined and aufgehoben by the theology of the cross, still “innerly transcends” this theology and is, as such, capable of uniting in depth with the standpoint of philosophical thinking. In that sense I ask myself whether we cannot seek a profound and essential connection between the “hidden God” idea of Luther and that of Nicolaus Cusanus — irrespective of the question whether there is an historical causal relationship between the two or not. But I must leave this discussion for another occasion.

According to the New Testament, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is a “revelation of mystery” (Offenbarung des Geheimnisses).34 We can consider that this “revelation of mystery” contains a double meaning.35 In short, the first meaning is that, in the revelation of mystery (mysterium), hitherto hidden mystery is now made manifest — that the mystery ceases to be mystery; and the second is that the mystery now appears really as mystery (mysterium) — that, in a sense, the mystery shows itself as doubly mysterious. We can say that, in this world of mystery, we roam as wanderers, and itinerate as pilgrims. In that “roaming” lies contained, at the same time, the fact that the secret reality becomes still more secret, and the tidings whereby the secret reality is no longer secret but shows itself now much nearer to us. In such pilgrimage, theology and philosophy come into existence as theologia viatorum and philosophia viatorum. For the self this means, in fact, that the self “step by step walks the road of contact with the Absolute in a relationship of inverse determination,” not in the direction of merely losing the self in an ecstatic escape from the self, but in a process whereby the “hidden self” precisely becomes manifest and the finite self radically lives its finitude. Nishida says: “Our self step by step walks, so to say ‘transgressively,’ the road of contact with the

34. Cf. especially Eph. 1:9ff.
35. Cf. Kittel, Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, article “Mystérion.”
Absolute in a relationship of inverse determination, forever as a unique individual." 36

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As I have said already, Nishida's philosophy, on account of the loftiness and depth of its thought, and equally on account of my own unripeness and deficiencies, is extremely hard for me to understand. Still, from the study of Nishida's works, I certainly received much guidance and many precious hints. But again, on closer reflection, I cannot but think, even though I learnt much, that in many cases I have not yet “chewed” it sufficiently or made it really my own (aneignen). In my opinion, the difference of this thought from the essence of Christianity, which I have studied and understood, and by which I have lived, also plays a role here. In any case, I take Nishida's idea seriously: "I believe that the religion of the future lies in the direction of immanent transcendence rather than in that of transcendent immanence"; and accordingly, I expect that also Christianity will be able to break through its framework as conventional religion and, as it were, as a self-realization in self-negation, come to display its religious life in its genuine form.

I have very summarily explained the problem of the "hidden God," which for me is an unavoidable question, and I have thereby mainly referred to Luther's thought. I have always thought that, when speaking of the Christian God, we have to lend a very attentive ear to Nishida's opinions which — like "A God who is merely transcendent is no God" and others — are critical of the traditional Hebrew-Christian idea of God, seen as the religion of the God, Lord of hosts, or of the transcendent absoluteness of God understood from a standpoint of object logic. And I must admit that this preoccupation of mine has become an important guiding line in my understanding and interpretation of Luther. I, moreover, believe that such an understanding and interpretation, far from distorting Luther's thought, succeeds in bringing to life the true meaning of this thought. But, in order not to be misunderstood, I think that I should add that the intent of the sentence, "A God who is merely transcendent is no God," must be such that it means, at the same time, "A God who is merely immanent is no God." If not, it makes no sense any longer to speak of "immanent transcendence" in religion. In fact, the direction of "immanent transcendence" in religion must necessarily find its foundation, not in a merely transcendent God, but in the fact that the transcendent God is truly transcendent through being radically immanent in world and man.

If I now may repeat the main points of my remarks on Luther, I would say that his idea of the "hidden God" is not exhausted by the mutual coincidence through mediation of the "hidden God" and the "revealed God" in the "theology of the Cross." The "hidden God," while forever mediated by the "revealed God," still transcends this mediation — this is what is meant by God's absolute transcendence —; still, it corresponds to the fact that we too are hidden to overselves and that the world itself wherein we live is equally hidden to itself. And this means that this "hidden God" will not reveal Himself unless our selves and the world itself manifest themselves by transcending themselves, while becoming radically immanent in themselves.

Still in the same line of thought, I have also tried to advance the idea that Christian theology, by radically penetrating into its own inwardness — but without shutting itself up in a so-called "theologism" —, so to speak by breaking itself through from within in an "immanent transcendence," must take on the character of a philosophy of religion.

When all religions, and not only Christianity, radicalize themselves in that direction, a locus will be opened wherein, e.g., real dialogue and true mutual understanding become possible between Christianity and Buddhism. It could be maintained that actually Nishida developed his philosophy from such an opened locus. When the self reverts to the
fountainhead of the self and the world returns to the fountainhead of the world, or rather when they both, as such realities, are made to return to the ultimate depth of themselves, then we shall stand in the “place of nothingness” which reveals such a world — in Christian terms, we might have to call this a place filled with the omnipresent Holy Spirit. There the “hidden God,” who is “absolute Being because He is absolute Nothingness” and ground of the world, will reveal himself as in a “seeing face to face.” By fully realizing their respective particularities, and still forever “transcending themselves immanently,” the different religions will be able to be each a self-determination of the “place of nothingness” and, under this determination, each will be bound to continue to walk its own unique road. In that case, it cannot be doubted that, at least for the philosophy of religion, Nishida’s *The Logic of Place and a Religious World-View* will have been an important signpost.