NANZAN SYMPOSIUM III

ABSOLUTE NOTHINGNESS AND GOD
THE NISHIDA-TANABE TRADITION AND CHRISTIANITY

From March 30 to April 1 of 1980, the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture hosted its Third Inter-religious Dialog Seminar. In April of this year, a full report of the seminar was published in Japanese by Shunjūsha of Tokyo. The present essay is a summary report of the event.

For the general aims and organization of these symposia, the reader is referred to reports published in previous issues of this *BULLETIN* ("Religious Experience and Language," 1:28-36; and "Mass and Elite in Religion," 2:4-14). Like its predecessors, the present symposium also centered on Christianity and Buddhism, and consisted of six sessions of two hours and twenty minutes each. In five of these sessions, the general discussion was preceded by the presentation of a paper and a commentary by a participant of a different religious affiliation.

Participants

ISHIDA Yoshikazu, Professor at Ryūkoku University, Kyoto (Buddhist)
MORITA Yūzaburō, Professor at Dōshisha University, Kyoto (Protestant)
MUTŌ Kazuo, Professor Emeritus of Kyoto State University (Protestant)
NISHITANI Keiji, Professor Emeritus of Kyoto State University (Buddhist)
ONODERA Isao, Professor at Seisen Women's College, Tokyo (Catholic)
ŌMINE Akira, Professor at Osaka University (Buddhist)
SAIGUSA Mitsuyoshi, Professor at Tsukuba State University (Buddhist)
TAKEUCHI Yoshinori, Professor Emeritus of Kyoto State University (Buddhist)
UEDA Shizuteru, Professor at Kyoto State University (Buddhist)
Jan VAN BRAGT, Professor at Nanzan University, Nagoya (Catholic)
Hans WALDENFELS, Professor at Bonn University, Germany (Catholic)

Professors Nishitani, Takeuchi, and Ueda should be singled out from among the participants as the generally acknowledged most eminent representatives of the "Nishida-Tanabe Tradition" under discussion. That

tradition is often referred to as the *Kyoto School of Philosophy* since its founding fathers, Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945) and Tanabe Hajime (1885-1962), both taught at the Kyoto State University, where their thought persists with great vitality to this day.

The strong involvement of the Nanzan Institute with the Kyoto School is clear from the fact that among the volumes of our English-language series (*NANZAN STUDIES IN RELIGION AND CULTURE*) published, in press, or in preparation, no less than four aim at the introduction of the Kyoto School to the English-speaking world: *Absolute Nothingness* (an introduction to a Christian dialog with this tradition, by Hans Waldenfels, published in 1980 by the Paulist Press); *Religion and Nothingness* (an English translation of Nishitani Keiji's major work, to be published in spring of 1982 by the University of California Press); *The Buddha Eye* (a collection of essays, mostly by writers of the Kyoto School, edited by Frederick Franck); and *Problems of Buddhist Meditation* (the provisional title of a translation of Takeuchi Yoshinori's central essays). The reasons for this concern and the reasons why this philosophical tradition was singled out as the theme of the present Buddhist-Christian dialog are, of course, identical and should become clearer in the course of this report. Let me only repeat at the outset an opinion I wrote elsewhere: "I do not know of any place where Christian and Buddhist theologies meet more intensely than precisely in the philosophy of the Kyoto School."

The present report will comprise two parts: first, a summary of the papers presented, not so much with a view to digesting their contents (for which my apologies to the speakers) as to highlight some of the ideas that came to dominate the discussions; and second, an attempt to recapitulate the main points of the debate under seven headings.

I. Summary of the Papers Presented

Hans Waldenfels: "The Buddhist-Christian Dialog in the Current World Situation."

From the start of his paper, Prof. Waldenfels drew our attention to the ever-present "third partner" in the dialog between Christians and Buddhists: the world, dominated by a technology rich in possibilities but

no less teeming with the gravest of dangers. He singled out "three problematic areas which are of great importance in the doalog of Christianity with Zen Buddhism and for the scrutiny of which the ideas of the Kyoto School could be of great help."

1. Concerning *the role of language in Zen Buddhism and Christianity and its possible role in their encounter*, Waldenfels noted the deep gulf that separates the fundamental distrust of words in Zen from the great reliance on doctrinal formulations in Christianity. He concluded that Buddhism challenges Christianity to follow the mystagogic direction: the constant return from words to the unutterable mystery. Inversely, Christianity invites Zen to allow the light of its enlightenment to be refracted in the multiplicity of human words and deeds.

2. *The relationship of the practice of Zazen to Buddhism and to Christianity* is a question directly arising out of its practice among Christians and the recent propagation of Zen Buddhism in the West. Can the praxis of Zazen by Christians be recognized by Buddhism as genuine Zen, and by Christianity as genuinely Christian? Wandenfels suggested that this inter-religious praxis invites Zen to formulate norms for orthopraxis, and Christianity to relearn the art of fulfilled silence.

3. *Christian God-talk and the Zen Buddhist negation of the Holy*, a further focusing of the first problematic area, gets to the heart of the matter. Can the Word of God meet the non-word Emptiness? Whether Zen can be religious in the rejection of all religious language, and whether Christianity can encounter Zen in mystical wordlessness, transcending its God-talk, are basic issues. But the more immediate task, Waldenfels asserted, might be for the Christian side to endeavor to speak of God in a language that leads to original experience; and for the Zen side not to close off from the very start the non-word from the Incarnation of the Logos.

Ueda Shizuteru, "Religion in Nishida's Philosophy."

Prof. Ueda began by showing how strongly Nishida, despite his evident Buddhist inspiration, relied on Christian insights and terminology to define the essence of religion, especially in his later years. He then tried to clarify how Nishida sought a standpoint from which both Buddhism and Christianity could be reflected on, and how he strove to

speak a language that could be understood by Christianity as well as by Buddhism.

If we grant that Nishida succeeded in doing just that, it is then of utmost importance for us to analyze *how* he achieved his results. In Ueda's view, Nishida was able to "go out" from Zen into philosophy and into Christianity as well. On the one hand, there is something in the particular nature of Zen that enabled him to make that move. On the other, he was the first to make it, and thus to effect a serious encounter of Zen with Western philosophy. To clarify these relationships, Ueda offered a three-tiered schema whose levels interact dynamically with one another (and which also admits of leaps from one to the other): (1) the level of enlightenment or pure experience (as such wordless); (2) the level of self-awareness, where the experience of the first level breaks into an original word or *Ur-satz*; and (3) the level at which the *Ursatz* becomes the principle for the explanation of all reality. This final level is no longer Zen but philosophy.

Onodera Isao, "Commentary on Prof. Ueda's Paper."

What had been planned as a commentary on Ueda's presentation in fact proved to be the most far-reaching probe, from the Christian side, into the compatibility of Nishida's philosophy with Christian ideas. For that reason, it deserves special mention here. For the sake of brevity, I should like to press Onodera's main points into four short theses:

1. The most original trait of Nishida's philosophy is that it developed in the midst of a spirituality, and is thus capable of embracing religious reality.

2. Nishida conceived the relationship between God and man from the "and," which he saw as the point of an absolute mediation of the Absolute and the relative. At first sight, this looks foreign to Christianity where this relationship is traditionally thought of as starting from God. Onodera, however, expressed his conviction that:

3. The essence of Christianity can also be understood in this way. Christianity, too, is about the meditation of God and world, and not simply belief in an outer revelation. Nor is it simply a religion of objective transcendence but, at the same time, a religion of self-awareness and immanent transcendence.

4. The question is then: where do we find in Christianity the point of the "and," the point of mediation of God and world? For Onodera it is to be found in spirituality and the Holy Spirit as a *coincidentia oppositorum*. The holy Spirit is then the (transcendentally) immanent principle whereby one sees God through the self. And Nishida's philosophy can, in turn, be characterized as a "pneumatological approach" to religion.

Onodera concluded his remarks with the claim that Nishida's philosophy allows for a profound interpretation of Christianity, and can lead to a truly Japanese theology.

Mutō Kazuo, "Demythologization and Natural Theology."

1. *Tanabe Hajime's Philosophy and Christianity.* In the dialectics of Tanabe's most Christian-oriented period (1946-1948), a fundamental ambiguity is to be seen. While maintaining that the doctrines of Christ and the Trinity fall outside the scope of philosophy, Tanabe was nevertheless convinced that his dialectics could be instrumental in a salutory "cleaning out" of Christianity, through a further radicalization of Bultmann's demythologization process. In so doing, the personal God becomes Nothingness-*sive*-Love; the Trinity becomes the tri-unity of God's love, man's love for God, and man's love for neighbor; and eschatology turns into thanatology—an existential living of death-resurrection in one's own life.

2. *Nishitani Keiji's Understanding of Christianity.* Nishitani has pursued no less the radicalization of the demythologization process. But, Prof. Mutō asked, do not Tanabe and Nishitani follow a fundamentally different line from that of Bultmann who was a kerygmatic theologian intent on leaving Christianity with its basic paradox or scandalum: the Incarnation of the Word as an historical event in which the transcendental God takes on a this-worldly form? Taking the Virgin Birth as a test case, Nishitani has objected to its interpretation as a unique historical event that occurred only in Mary, since this would entail an opposition (an "unnaturalness")between the natural-historical and the supernatural. Instead, he sees the universal religious truth of the Virgin Birth to lie in the fact that all men are born of a virgin birth, since the birth of God in man does not rely on human origins. This is a truth of "no-nature" which, in horizontal transcendence, does not stand against any

natural truth. This truth is not seen by the *lumen naturale* that functions in natural theology, but by what is called in Buddhism *prajñā*.

3. *Bultmann's Demythologization and Natural Theology*. This brought Mutō to a question that is central in his thinking and likewise crucial for the thematics of the present symposium—the relationship between reason and faith. For Bultmann, faith does not suppose a *sacrificum intellectus*. The knowledge of natural theology stands to faith-knowledge in a paradoxical relationship whereby the contradiction itself becomes the point of connection (in Nishida's language, a relationship of inverse correspondence.) The intellect that is not sacrificed in faith is an intellect of a higher order, mediated by a negation of the *lumen naturale* (in the language of the Kyoto School, a "knowing of non-knowing" or a metanoetical intellect). However, natural knowledge on the one hand, and faith-knowledge on the other, demand reciprocal mediation, a movement back and forth. Here the Kyoto School would suggest that the locus where this movement comes into being must be a "place of Nothingness" that is neither the one nor the other, but a point at which both originate. In Christian terms, this might be called "the locus of the Holy Spirit."

Nishitani Keiji, "The *Excelsior* Standpoint in Buddhism."

The present "dean of the Kyoto School" took the floor next to present a sort of diptych. On the left, he drew a highly universalized picture of the problem constituted by the present inter-religious dialog. On the right, he elaborated an extremely detailed exegesis of particular Zen sayings. Its very pictorial structure evoked in forceful manner the single message he wished to offer: the encounter of religions, and indeed the very essence of religion itself, demands that we rise above the particular.

1. *Encounter and Dialog*. The various world religions, universal and unique as they are in principle, are *de facto* limited each to one part of humanity, and thus particularized and relativized. In the present dialog, these respective particularities must be fully brought to light and held to. But at the same time, lest they render dialog impossible, they must somehow be transcended.

Progress in the relationships among the religions (from Holy War to dialog) is mostly due to extra-religious factors, and in particular to the emergence of the idea of universal humanity in natural philosophy, made possible by the emancipation from religion. It is this *anti-* or *a*religious

world, together with the technological dangers it involves, that represents the situation, the responsibility, and the task that all religions have in common. As such, it must form the frame and the starting point of the dialog.

2. *Excelsior: reaching out beyond the Buddha.* Prof. Nishitani then explained why, for him, Zen is the core of Buddhism. Rather than rely on Buddhist doctrine, Zen aims directly at the "heart" of the Buddha, the wordless core from which the doctrines spring, and thus points finally to the true self of man. This characteristic of Zen is often expressed by the word, *kōjō* (*excelsior*): the constant tendency to rise to a level one step higher than the ordinary standpoint. The term *Butsu-kōjō* thus expresses more explicitly the rising above the standpoint where one speaks of the Buddha (or of God).

I will not even attmept here to render in digest form the painstaking exegesis of Zen texts whereby Nishitani tried to clarify what such an attitude might mean and imply. Suffice it to remark that he amply doccumented how going beyond the Buddha in order to reach the true self supposes an existential presence to everyday reality so intense that the habitual meaning of all ordinary words—one's own name, one's seeing, hearing, speaking, etc.—is broken through. In the midst of this exegesis, and as if *per transennam*, Nishitani dropped the remark, "If we wish to come to grips with the problem of Zen and Christianity, we must go back to that place." In the ensuing discussion, Nishitani approved of a formulation suggested by one of the participants: "In Zen, on the level of *Butsu-kōjō*, the particularity of Buddhism as a religion is overcome, and it is this transcendence that permits Zen to 'go out' freely into philosophy and other religions."

Takeuchi Yoshinori, "Tanabe's Philosophy and Absolute Nothingness."

Since, from the Buddhist side of the Buddhist-Christian dialog, Absolute Nothingness is a central idea, Prof. Takeuchi stressed the overriding importance of further clarifying the notion. "Tanabe's conception of Absolute Nothingness is peculiar and subtly different from that of Nishida and Nishitani. I would like to present his conception and in particular to address the question: How does Absolute Nothingness, for Tanabe, relate to Love and Person?"

1. *Tanabe's Philosophy and Hegel.* At the start of his philosophical career, Tanabe came to a formulation of his idea of Nothingness through an *Auseinandersetzung* with Hegel's Absolute Knowledge, i.e. absolute negativity in a system of Absolute Being. Absolute Knowledge is the product of the act of self-awareness of an Absolute Self. This, however, is an abstraction over against the ever-momentary, self-negating act whereby the self identifies with others and with objects. On the level of pure act, the Absolute appears not as Being but as Nothingness, not as Absolute I or Self, but as Absolute non-I or non-self. The I-Thou and subject-object dichotomies can be overcome not in a static system, but only in a dynamic unity realized from moment to moment by the I sacrificing itself to the Thou, or disappearing into the object.

In a word, the unity in the acting self is decisive for Tanabe, and this unity is obtained by self-negation on the basis of Absolute Nothingness. With the *Philosophy of Metanoetics* (1946) he reached a critical turning point. His own life experience had taught him to despair of a unity with the Thou through a self-powered self-negation. Self-negation can only come from the side of the Absolute. Absolute Nothingness here appears as self-negating Love, as Nothingness-*sive*-Love.

2. *Nothingness and the "Logic of Species."* The latter part of Takeuchi's paper seemed to center on the question of whether Tanabe himself was able to contain his own life experience, and its subsequent philosophical elaborations, within the framework of Nothingness or Buddhist Emptiness. This problem took on two forms:

First, through the experience of World War II and the confrontation with Marxism, social reality became the central concern for Tanabe. While philosophy up to that time had built its logic around the universal (genus) and the individual, Tanabe wanted a "logic of species" (of the particular, social reality). However, even when the self finds unity in the abandoning of self to Absolute Nothingness, the social dichotomies do not seem to enter into that unity.

Second, in the *Philosophy of Metanoetics*, Absolute Nothingness may be said to appear as a self-negating vertical Thou. Later, the role of the "horizontal Thou" commanded Tanabe's attention. On the one hand, this Thou came to appear as opposed to the I not simply as a person, but as the embodiment of an opposing social element. On the other hand, reflection on the death of his wife, who had sacrificed herself for him, made Tanabe

see the self-negating subject in the horizontal Thou. It might be that here, for the first time and contrary to the traditional understanding of non-self, the self was no longer central. However this may be, two things are clear. First, in the midst of these problems, Tanabe found himself more attuned to the prophetic stance of the Judaeo-Christian tradition than to Buddhist Nothingness. And second, all his life Tanabe continued to probe deeper and deeper into the problem of the unity of I and Thou, of subject and object in Absolute Nothingness, the understanding of which was always connected for him with the problem of Love and the Person.

II. Focal Points of the Dialog

1. The Philosophy of the Kyoto School and its Unique Relationship to Religion.

The full report of this symposium may well be, for some time to come, required reading for any serious student of the Kyoto School. For one thing, the relationships between the three representative thinkers—Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani—have seldom been treated as lucidly as they were at this meeting. For us, however, all of this is of interest only insofar as it throws light on the central question: Why does the philosophy of the Kyoto School attract the attention of people interested in the inter-faith dialog? What exactly can this style of philosophical investigation contribute to the mutual understanding of Christianity and Buddhism? Very summarily put, the milestones of the symposium might be set up as follows.

The philosophy of the Kyoto School has an intimate relationship with religion. Its founding experience of spiritual awareness, and its whole logic is one of mediation of the Absolute and the relative. It might be noted in passing here, that this feature sets it off from most of Western philosophy, which Charles Hartshorne recently branded as a "technique of reasoning which will not allow the religious idea even to be expressed."[1] At the same time, it makes it heir to most Eastern speculation with its underlying conviction that true reality reveals itself only to the spiritual individual. Indeed, the present dialog was carried along by the expectation that this philosophy can bring rational thinking to bear on reli-

gious experiences and doctrines long relegated, in the Western tradition, to the realm of "spiritual reading."

This philosophy is intrinsically bound up with the Buddhist (Mahāyāna) tradition, and in particular finds its inspiration in Zen. This is most poignantly expressed in a soul-searching text by Nishida cited in one of the papers: "It is said that Zen forms the background of my thought. That is absolutely correct.... Zen's very life is the true grasp of actual reality. Impossible as this may seem, I want to bring this together somehow with philosophy. That has been my dream since my thirties."[2] Clear and uncontested as it is, this relationship is rarely attended to for what it is that makes it possible, for the ways it works in the concrete, and for the kind of philosophy it is supposed to produce. In the symposium, Prof. Ueda, after having shown how Nishida lived the opposition between Zen non-thinking and philosophy as a science in an existential "being torn apart," offered a piercing analysis of this relationship.

It was intimated, from different angles of approach, that *Zen is able to allow for this exodus from itself because of its unique characteristics as a religion.* In this connection, the following expressions were used: Zen is *voraussetzungslos* (without presuppositions); Zen is absolute respect for reality as it is; in Zen there is found a unique synthesis of concern for the momentary experience, for true reality, and for the true self; Zen can combine with philosophy in its conception of self-awareness; Zen is only itself in a transcendence of itself.

Related to this is the question of whether the Kyoto philosophy is truly representative of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It could certainly be maintained that all the great themes of Mahāyāna Buddhism find a modern treatment here. But the question is perhaps rather whether the religious mystery is sufficiently respected here. It was remarked in this regard that from its very beginnings, Buddhism has shown a built-in critique of myth, and that Zen in a special way may be characterized as "the most secularized spiritual movement in the world."

2. The "locus" of the Buddhist-Christian Encounter.

When speaking of the encounter among different religions, the question of "where" (at which point, in which medium) they can meet arises naturally enough. This is certainly the case with the Kyoto School, which is wont in any event to ask after the "place" at which things first become possible;

and which speaks, for instance, of the individual and the universal, the Absolute and the relative, the I and the Thou, in their absolute contradiction, as only able to coexist in a locus of Emptiness or Absolute Nothingness. At the same time, the idea of a break-through or transcendence of the particularity of each religion ran throughout the seminar like a steady undercurrent that surfaced from time to time, most clearly in Nishitani's "beyond the Buddha." A rather tricky dilemma, however, was conjured up in the process. For while the impresson was strongly left that the meeting of particular religions would pose no fundamental problems provided they were all able to effect a self-transcendence similar to that described in connection with Zen, nonetheless the possibility of self-transcendence was somewhat strongly bound up with the particular traits of Zen. The question then becomes: can Christianity, for example, rise above its particularities? Prof. Nishitani for one appears to believe that Christianity will be able to do so in the future, and sees this possibility prefigured and partly realized in the Christian mystics, especially in Eckhart.

What, then, could self-transcendence mean for a religion? And into what kind of locus does a religion emerge by transcending its particularity? In this symposium, several times a finger was pointed at this "ungraspable moon." For instance, from the viewpoint of the Buddhist conception of language as essentially deforming and dividing, it would seem that the locus of a transcendence of pluriformity could only be a realm of communion in mystical silence. Prof. Mutō stressed the point that it should be a place where Christianity can meet Buddhism as a Thou and not simply as an object. Introducing Kierkegaard's distinction between "natural religiosity" and a religiosity attainable only in a leap of faith-wisdom, he made the weighty statement that, in order for that I-Thou relation to obtain, this latter sort of religiosity must also be recognized in Buddhism.

But it was Nishitani who did most of the pointing. He spoke of a return to one's birth, where one is not yet either Christian or Buddhist (in Zen, this is often used as a symbol of a turn to one's True Self). He pointed to a real "hearing," "seeing," and "speaking" in a place beyond the Buddha, and to a radical demythologization whereby the really religious is discovered in the interiorization of outward religious forms and in the universalization of particular religious events. At first sight, all of this might look like a wholesale return to nature and to

the religiosity inherent in the "natural man" (the first form of religiosity). But is it?

Here again Mutō reminded us of Nishitani's talk of a "no-nature," that leaves the natural completely behind while being identical with it, and of a *prajñā* beyond natural reason that is the agent of this turn-about. He then went on to insist that the point of encounter for Buddhism and Christianity should be a locus reached by the two religions not through a rational reduction to natural religiosity, but through each radicalizing its character as a leap of faith-wisdom, and yet immanently transcending it. In the same vein, Onodera later remarked: "I want to reach the universal by losing myself in the particularity of Christianity."

3. Breaches in the Circle of Emptiness?

In a sense, our symposium was haunted by the ten Oxherding Pictures, that journey inward that arrive at the empty circle without world, without self, without God. As a whole, it might be said, the Kyoto philosophy points in the direction of Buddhist Emptiness. There it finds its inner relationship to religion in general, and a standpoint from which to understand and to give an original interpretation of Christianity. There, too, it sees a possible meeting place for Christianity and Buddhism. The Oxherding Pictures, however, do not stop at the empty circle, but break out of it into the market place. Would it make sense to try to associate this with the "discordant notes" in the Kyoto symphony of Emptiness? Provisionally, and for the sake of this summary, what I have in mind might come to a question like this: Does the meeting place of Christianity and Buddhism not perhaps lie in the direction of these "breaches of Emptiness" rather than in the direction of Emptiness itself? In any case, it is along such a line of thought—admittedly still somewhat of a foggy conjecture—that I should like to bring together a number of remarks not connected with one another during the talks, and not taken up directly in the discussions, but which nevertheless seem to merit mention.

There were, for one thing, Takeuchi's misgivings as to whether the Kyoto School did full justice to Buddhist Emptiness, and whether in a philosophy of Nothingness the existential rawness of religious life does not evaporate. Ueda had earlier described the Zen life as a "two-tact" process. The Zen *samādhi*, which can be described as an Absolute Nothingness wherein all

otherness and discrimination disappear, has its counterpart in a "going out from *samādhi*," whereby again the other appears and worship is practiced. Along with this Ueda stressed Nishida's tendency in later years to speak of an "absolute God" that is "facing me" or "calling me," and to put a new emphasis, in his *coincidentia oppositorum*, on the contradictories in their contradictoriness. This in turn led Nishida to question whether this *coincidentia* must not be seen not only as bottomless Nothingness but also as (sustaining) Being.

Again, as Takeuchi pointed out, Tanabe never looked on nothingness *integrally* as an embracing place (a circle?) or absolute standpoint, but *differentially* as a point. His concern with the particular proved resistant to an interiorizing tendency. And on the Christian side, while much seemed to favor the view of Nothingness as the place of the relationship of God and man, the tragedy of the Cross, appeared to resist reduction to a death-resurrection dialectics as required by a philosophy of Nothingness.

4. Emptiness and Love.

All of this may be seen as a preparation for an important question broached explicitly in the symposium: What is the relationship in the Kyoto School between Emptiness (or Absolute Nothingness) and Love? Needless to say, this brings us to the crux of the dialog. How does the Buddhist journey into the Void relate to the Christian journey of Love?

Ensuing discussion on this problem can conveniently be summarized, I think, around two questions. First, *Is the idea of Emptiness necessary for the expression of Christian Love?* The gist of the thinking of the Kyoto School on this point could perhaps be caught in the following propositions: The overcoming of the boundaries of the I, which Love implies, can never be obtained in a direct interplay of I and Thou, but only on the basis of their common non-ego relationship to a common ground. Further, the identity of I and Thou in Love can never be considered as metaphysically real in an ontology of being, but only in a philosophy of Emptiness as the locus of the self-identity of contradictories.

Although not expressed in so many words, it was my general impression from the tone of the discussions that the Christian participants were prepared to go along on these points.

During the symposium, however, a few additional touches were made by

representatives of the Kyoto School. In brief: Love is essentially the overcoming of the illusory discrimination of I and Thou as two egos. It is non-ego or selflessness. Thus, self-love (seen fundamentally as the seeking of the True Self) and other-love are identical. A critical observer might be tempted to speak here of a "reduction" of Love to Emptiness, as a particular reduced to the more universal and basic, or perhaps to speak of an identification of the two. It should not be forgotten, however, that the formula "Nothingness-*sive*-Love" also means, inversely, that the conception of Nothingness in the Kyoto School is often influenced by the idea of Love. This leads us to the second question:

Is the idea of Emptiness sufficient to express and underpin Christian Love? Prof. Ueda probably expressed the consensus of the Kyoto School when he noted, "The problem of Love is treated in a fundamental way in 'self and other are one,' and in 'non-ego.'" On this point, however, the Christian participants were surely left with some reservations. While these did not come to light in complete and direct formulations, I should like to try to state them in my own terms.

1. Can the dialectics of the love of God and the love of neighbor really be caught in a "non-ego" tending to absorb the horizontal Thou into an impersonal Absolute?

2. Can non-ego or selflessness, no matter how dynamic it is said to be, express the dramatic act of self-negation or self-emptying for others of the crucified Christ, wherein bodily and socially real barriers had to be overcome? In other words, can "I and Thou are one" be taken as equivalent to the positive and self-sacrificing recognition of the other as other?

3. While Nothingness-*sive*-Love tends to appear as an enveloping locus of non-discriminating benevolence, it seems difficult for the insistence on Christian Love in the particular to finds a place here. Tanabe's struggles with this problem might be called on as witness to the point and to suggest the formulation: Is not Christian Love rather differential than integral?

It was suggested that Nishida's "locus of Absolute Nothingness" lends itself to a pneumatological interpretation as the "locus of the Spirit as the Love of Father and Son enveloping man." Much as I hate to see the magnificent panorama this opens up marred by the utility poles of sticky questions, the symposium as a whole suggested that their unceremonial re-

moval would not really serve the further progress of the dialog.

5. Emptiness and Social Concern.

The problem of Love tends to shade off, imperceptibly as it were, into the problem of social commitment. In a sense, this brings us up against the age-old problem of the relation of the mystical to the prophetic, in the form of the question: Can a philosophy of Nothingness incorporate social concern and action? Or again: Can Zen come to grips with the contemporary problems of mankind? Before getting down to technical matters, let it be noted in passing that, as on previous occasions, the Buddhist and Christian sides showed a markedly different reaction to the bringing together of the religious and the social.

The problem was raised most sharply by Prof. Takeuchi when he described Tanabe's failure to unite the reconcilaition of the individual in Nothingness and the effective solution of social antinomies. It was also remarked that in Zen the going out from Emptiness to affirm reality "as it is" is usually couched in natural imagery—"The rose is red, the willow is green." The fear was expressed that this could imply two questionable attitudes: one, a lack of discernment of natural reality and socio-historical reality, with a concomitant lack of concern for the latter; and the other, a wholesale affirmation of reality as it is, lacking a principle of discernment between the "is" and the "ought," or a basis for a critical social attitude. In reply to these issues, two points were stressed in the main.

The central importance of a right attitude to nature in the present situation of mankind (with its problems of ecology, the depletion of non-renewable energy resources, and the like). On this point, the consensus was that Christianity, which since modern times has paid scant attention to nature, has much to learn from Buddhism. It was, however, noted that while the problem of nature looms large within the advanced nations of the world, seen form a global context, and from within developing nations, the problem of social exploitation is first and foremost.

An I-it relationship underlies every I-Thou relationship. Finally, the discussion turned to the conditions of social action. In the face of apparent Buddhist impassivity before the many pressing problems in today's world (for instance, the "boat people" of Asia), the harmful results of much ill-directed "charitable" activity were underlined, es-

pecially in cases where that activity is shrouded in an ideology (e.g., "liberation theology"). The Buddhist position, rather clearly enunciated, could be circumscribed by the words, "In order to work for humanity, one must be enlightened."[3] The Christian position did not find theoretical expression, but seemed to come to something like this: "Christian Love must find the Spirit in the concrete needs of one's fellow humans."

This might be the place at least to mention a problem which cannot here be given the full attention it merits, namely the role and value of language in religion and in the inter-faith dialog. The basic Buddhist attitude in this regard was stated clearly enough: real truth lies only in silence; all language is mere expedient means. Pure Land Buddhism, with its saving Name of Amida, was spoken of as a silence speaking out for the salvation of the masses. In the present context, this would seem to leave us with two questions. First, can language in general be seen in the prolongation of that compassionate speaking out, and thus as a bridge from silent religious experience to the historical world? And second, what then can the ontological status of both that saving word and that cultural word be?

6. Zazen Practiced by Christians.

As Prof. Waldenfels had asked, can a Christian practice Zazen without losing Christian identity? Can Zazen, practiced while invoking God (or even simply, "in the presence of God"), be recognized by Zen Buddhism as authentic Zazen? Briefly, and I trust objectively, the answers given to these issues by the Buddhist representatives may be summed up in the following points listed *seriatim*.

It it is only a question of borrowing a technique, there can be no problem. But by the same token there can be no question of real Zen or of authentic dialog.

When Christians wish to practice Zazen, they must not bring their Christianity into it. Just as a philosopher must drop philosophy while doing Zazen, so must Christians "forget their Christianity and, for the time being, leave all invocation of God in the hands of God, in order to sit naked in a place where there is nothing, neither God nor man."

A religious tradition cannot simply receive an element from another tradition as a present, but must "make it its own, as something grown out of its own needs and possibilities. The fundamental question, then,

comes to this: *Why* do Christians want to practice Zazen? Where does one find in Christianity the inner necessity and possibility of this practice?

That possibility may depend on what God (or "invoking God") means in Christianity. In this regard, Angelus Silesius may give a hint of an answer when he sings: "So far beyond all words is He / I know no other way / than not to speak / Thus without words I pray."[4] The form in which the "Other" will appear to the practitioner emerging from silent meditation may depend on the depth of inwardness reached in meditation.

The real answer will have to emerge from the practice itself. In the practitioner, Zen and Christianity will initially be wholly external to one another, but they cannot continue to run parallel indefinitely. Little by little they will penetrate one another and infuse one another, if this is at all possible.

7. Absolute Nothingness and God.

We come at last to the great problematic juxtaposition that appears in the title of the symposium itself. The question of the relationship between Absolute Nothingness and God was brought up in the very first session under the title, "Christian God-talk and the Zen Buddhist negation of the Holy." A final paraphrase was given to read: "Can the empty circle of Zen come together with the mandala of the Christian mystics in which a human figure keeps appearing?" The question is then whether the symposium built any bridges here, or at least pointed to a place on one or the other bank where footings could be laid. It must be confessed that this central issue, although constantly present in the background, found little thematic treatment in the foreground, so that a summary can do little more than glean occasional hints and put them in some kind of order.

It was sufficiently recognized by all the participants, I believe, that the experience underlying both "concepts" might be much more *one* than the obvious clash of symbolism and ideas would lead us to suspect. Still, in a dialog on the theoretical level, words have to be taken seriously. Could such differences of expression possibly point to one and the same experience? And supposing that they do—or even if they do not—could they both be necessary, in the sense of being complementary in their contradiction? We shall proceed here, too, by way of two questions.

What is the role and meaning of God-talk in Christianity? Although a

great deal of importance is attached in the Christian tradition to propositional language *de divinis*, originally—as Prof. Waldenfels emphasized—Christian language as a whole is much more one of appeal, of command, and of dialog than of information. And even when language is informative, it is much more sign-language or symbolic language (a "pointing to") than a propositional language. Called for witness here were the parables, paradoxes, and miracles of Jesus. Waldenfels then pleaded for a restoration of God-talk to its mystagogic function of guiding one back to the original mystery or experience.

Moreover, it may be said that the idea of God appeared in the symposium as the ground of actuality, as the ground of the particular, that stands behind the Christian attitude towards Love and social service. Finally, the possibility of a "mystical transcendence" of God-talk was intimated. Can there be a real Christian meaning to a "beyond God?" Would this be where the otherness of God and the True Self disappears? Would this mean that Christianity could accept Emptiness as an ultimate category? Could it be that "God-*and*-man" is not simply *Deus quoad nos*, a prelude to the purity of God in himself, but rather the ultimate consideration beyond even *Deus in se*?

What is the meaning and role of God-talk in the Kyoto philosophical tradition? Unlike the non-theistic language of traditional Buddhism, the philosophical discourse of the Kyoto School makes abundant use of the word and idea of God. In this sense, it may perhaps come as a grave disillusionment that no more direct analysis of the precise role of God in their philosophy, and in particular of the relation of God to Emptiness, was provided in the symposium. As it turned out, a number of questions were left unresolved. Which interpretation of the idea of God is most acceptable, and which most offensive, to the sensitivities of these Buddhist thinkers? Granted that the prevailing tendency is towards the greatest possible identification of God and Emptiness, on what do these attempts flounder? Is God seen here as an *upaya* (provisional means) finally to be overcome and thus clearly subordinate to Emptiness? Ueda's remarks (referred to in the summary of his paper) would lead us to believe that this is not necessarily so, but that God also appears as complementary to Emptiness.

* . * . * . *

"What does dialog lead to?" goes the question. "To more dialog," comes back the glib answer. In a sense, I do not find this in the least objectionable in our present circumstances, since much more dialog is surely called for—so long as that "more" does not simply mean a piling up of words and ritualistic repetitions of the same things, but a qualitative gain in authenticity. For those of us who shared in the symposium, I feel the encounter was experienced as just such a step towards the "more."

Let me only conclude with an "honor salute" to the representatives of the Kyoto School, as the most willing, most valuable, but by no means the easiest of dialog partners I know. There is no escaping their scrutinizing eye from the broadest notions to the smallest details. For all of which, my sincerest gratitude.

NOTES

1. Charles Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology of Our Time* (LaSalle, Ill, 1973), p.ix.
2. From a letter to Nishitani Keiji, dated 19 February 1943. *Collected Works* (in Japanese), Vol.19, pp.224-225.
3. William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love* (London, 1981), p.173.
4. Translation taken from Frederick Franck, *The Book of Angelus Silesius* (New York, 1976), p.95.

Jan Van Bragt