

In Memoriam:
Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990)

On November 24, 1990, Nishitani Keiji (born February 27, 1900) quietly passed away in his Kyoto home. His death leaves an uncanny empty space for us, scholars in religion from Japan and abroad who visited him from time to time in his little parlor; and, trite as it may sound, appears to mark the end of an age—the age of the Kyoto School giants.

For the last 25 years, Nishitani had been the moderating spirit and unofficial dean of Japan's religious thinkers. His *Collected Works*, which are still in the process of publication, will eventually comprise some 26 volumes. But, rather than presenting a sketch of his life and work—something that will be done in *The Eastern Buddhist* and elsewhere, we want to focus on *who* Nishitani was for the Nanzan Institute.

Nishitani never occupied an official position with us—in a sense, he was too “big” for that—but still, the Institute would not be what it is without him. In groping then for a fitting epithet to define the role he played, the words “inspiration,” “guiding light,” “most valuable resource person,” and “encouraging and challenging presence” may have to be bundled together to come anywhere near the reality. A glance at the “Works by or about Nishitani Keiji published by the Nanzan Institute” on the opposite page suffices to give an idea of the depth of the Institute's involvement in Nishitani's thinking. But, for the record, we may add that, on June 3, 1977, he was one of the first to come to the Institute for a Colloquium (on “Japanese Religiosity”), and that, from March 30 to April 1, 1980, he participated (and presented a paper) in our Third Nanzan Symposium.

The reason for this, possibly excessive-looking, involvement is to be found in the fact that Nishitani was the living epitome of the Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Japan. A convinced and practicing Buddhist, he remained forever a *kyūdōsha*, a seeker of the meaning and role of religion in the nihilistic present, and thereby envisaged a crucial role for Christianity. In the footsteps of Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime, he had been living the inner *Auseinandersetzung* of the two religions long before the dawn of the “age of dialogue,” but once this age arrived, he was an ardent participant (for instance as president of the CORMOS meetings) from the beginning till a few years ago, when physical weakness did not permit it any more.

The loss is ours and it is great. May he rest in peace and his spirit continue to live in us.