

## Reviews

TAKEUCHI Yoshinori, *The heart of Buddhism: In search of the timeless spirit of primitive Buddhism*. Edited and translated by James W. Heisig, with a Foreword by Hans Küng. New York: Crossroad, 1983. xxii + 165 pp. with notes, glossary and index. \$17.50

THIS VOLUME, the fourth to appear in the series Nanzan Studies in Religion and Culture, offers a selection from the writings of Takeuchi Yoshinori, a member of the "Kyoto School" perhaps less known to the English-speaking world than Nishida or Nishitani, in the able translation of the General Editor of the series, James Heisig. Though spanning some twenty years of the author's work, the pieces have been interwoven with care so that the whole betrays less repetition than one might expect of collections of this kind.

For a Westerner encountering such a work the first question—and one often difficult to answer—is: what is the writer doing? what is he about? The Kyoto School is normally taken to be a form of "philosophy," an attempt to make a uniquely Japanese contribution in a Western-style format (though often in the form of an "anti-philosophy," or an "over-coming of metaphysics.")<sup>1</sup> In the case of the present volume, however, I find it more congenial and helpful to read Takeuchi as a "fellow theologian" than as a "fellow philosopher." This is not to say that he would agree, preferring as he does to refer to himself as a "philosopher of religion" (p.3). I suspect in any event that none of these terms preserves its full connotation in being transferred from the one context to the other, a point Takeuchi

---

1. For a recent survey of the Kyoto School, see Thomas P. Kasulis, "The Kyoto School and the West: Review and evaluation," *The Eastern Buddhist* XV: 125: 44 (1982).

himself confirms by suggesting that the "philosopher of religion" must do for the East what the "theologian" is doing for the West (p.69). Still I make the suggestion in order to clarify what it is I think he is doing; or, at the very least, to clarify what it is I am doing when I interpret his work.

If theology is a disciplined reflection upon religious experience, accomplished from the viewpoint of the religious vision itself (or "faith seeking understanding" in the Anselmian formulation), then this is precisely what Takeuchi is about. His concern with religious experience (p.8, p.100) and with conversion (p.4, p.109, p.123, p.125) is quite clear. He even characterizes himself as "a Pure Land believer of extremely conservative stamp" (p.132), which incidentally sets him off from other members of the Kyoto School, who tend to the Zen tradition. In addition to Eckhart, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and the phenomenologists, the favored partners in dialogue of the Kyoto School in general, Takeuchi draws equally upon such figures as Kierkegaard, Bultmann, Tillich, Bonhoeffer, Robinson, and Cox.

Takeuchi also displays his theological leanings in the way he envisages the relationship between theology and philosophy. Granting that religion and philosophy need to engage in creative dialogue with each other, he in no way means to allow philosophy an outside and sovereign viewpoint from which it can dictate to religion (p.3). Rather, believers are to use philosophy to their own purposes, reminiscent of Western medieval theology where philosophy was seen as the *ancilla* or handmaiden of theology. Takeuchi takes the Western pattern of the relationship to be marked by mutual hostility (p.4), apparently and unfortunately unaware of this earlier tradition where philosophy and theology often co-existed in fruitful harmony.

Much of what Takeuchi is doing in these pages could be classified as theological interpretation<sup>2</sup> or the

---

2. The terms "interpretation," "history," and "systematics" adopted in these pages refer to the integrating parts of theology as discerned by

hermeneutics of sacred texts. Often, it must be admitted, he seems to know more about the meanings and purposes of "primitive Buddhism" than the evidence we possess would allow, but even here he is not without his own answer to the charge. Well aware that he might fall accused of anachronism, at the same time he senses something lacking in many scholars using historical and literary criteria—namely, that they do not share the Buddhist faith. For any religious genius, like Jesus or Buddha, points to more than can ever be exhaustively captured in words, and the texts which record their message can be shown to preserve this same openness and potentiality (pp.67-68). What Takeuchi is proposing, then, is a "spiritual sense" in the texts which can be discerned only from the viewpoint of a believing and practicing faith.

THE BOOK is divided into two parts, entitled respectively "Centering" and "Freeing." The first is focused in a general way on the meaning of Buddhist meditation or contemplation. The opening essay, "The Silence of the Buddha," revolves about an apparently simple interpretative question: what do the texts mean when they show the Buddha refusing to respond to metaphysical questions? But in fact this hermeneutical question is fraught with consequences for theological method, and indeed may even be said to raise the question of the very possibility of theology. If the Buddha's silence is interpreted as a repudiation of speculation, and this attitude is then taken as prescriptive for his followers, then theology is impossible, and the would-be theologian is advised to keep silence as well and repent of his urges to verbalization. While Takeuchi does not go as far as Watsuji, who sees in the Buddha's silence a highly refined philosophical position akin to Kant's criticism of metaphysics with the antinomies (pp.70-72), he is obviously following the Kyoto School in allowing some scope to spec-

---

Bernard Lonergan in *Method in theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

ulation within the Buddhist tradition.

The lengthy chapter on "The Stages of Contemplation" may be considered an essay in "ascetical theology." In it Takeuchi traces "the stages of the spiritual life, making explicit reference to the "purgative, illuminative, and unitive" ways of the Western tradition (p.16). It is interesting to note here that like Teresa of Avila he draws on images of water to describe the degrees of contemplation. The concluding chapter of Part One, "Centering and the World Beyond," in a sense turns to "eschatology," but in following Shinran (the founder of the Jōdo Shin sect), who correlated the stages of human history with the stages of personal growth, it also fills out the treatment of the previous chapter.

Part Two, "Freeing," gathers together the author's reflections on the fundamental Buddhist idea of liberation from the causal chain that holds all things bound to the wheel of birth and rebirth. "The Problem of Dependent Origination" introduces one of the main preoccupations of the book. In a preliminary treatment, Takeuchi presents the notion of dependent origination in the twelve-fold line of causality: Ignorance begets volitional impulses, volitional impulses beget consciousness...names-form...six senses...sense contact...feelings...lust...clinging...becoming...birth...old age and death. This teaching, Takeuchi holds, is the root and trunk of Buddhist thought (p.63), and indeed the whole development of Buddhist thought is adumbrated in the developments of this single notion. What is more, this exercise in theological history can be extended even to the West, for in Takeuchi's view the person of the late Heidegger represents the culmination of the whole development of Western thought in a position akin to the idea of dependent origination (pp.76-77). In other words, where the rest of the Kyoto School concentrates on exploiting Nāgārjuna's notion of *śūnyatā* for its philosophical potentialities, Takeuchi proposes to base a theological systematics on the notion of dependent origination.

The next chapter, and the key to this second part,

deals specifically with "Dependent Origination and Co-Dependency." In it the author proposes a clear hermeneutical question: does primitive Buddhism read the twelve-fold line of causality uni-directionally, as Watsuji held, or does it rather involve a reciprocal mediation such that each link in the chain mirrors the whole, as interpreted by Ui? Takeuchi undercuts the debate by offering a bold proposal that would unite the two positions. He does this by seeing the succession of dependent origination as a theory of conversion according to which "the uni-dimensional chain of causes eventually gives way to a deeper reciprocity of co-dependent causes, which then in turn serves as a springboard for the attempt to leap free of causality altogether" (p.89).

The essay entitled "An Existential Interpretation of Dependent Origination" might at first seem misnamed because dependent origination is hardly referred to directly. Instead it reads like a meditation on the impermanence of things, a *memento mori*. In fact, here we come to the very core of Takeuchi's argument about reversing the chain of dependency, about liberation from life and death. The chapter centers on the conversion story of the Buddha, and the way in which his early confrontation with old age, sickness and death led to an insight into radical impermanence. In this context mention is also made of the conversions of Francis of Assisi and Ignatius of Loyola (p.125).

The final essay, "Freeing and the World Beyond," at once returns to the treatment of Shin Buddhist eschatology, and represents an attempt to dialogue with the "Death of God" and "Secular City" theologians. Here Takeuchi shows his "conservative" stamp. Where Robinson proposes abandoning a "God up there" for a "God in here," Takeuchi refuses to dispense with the transcendence of the Pure Land, or simply to demythologize that symbol. It remains for him irreplaceable (p.135). Judging from the rapidity with which such Western fads pass into oblivion one after the other, Takeuchi may have made the correct choice. The book ends on a note of heavenly liturgy: earthly believers

join in with all the Pure Land and all the Buddhas in the ten quarters in proclaiming the cosmic hymn of the *nenbutsu*.

WHAT IS perhaps most striking about the volume as a whole are the vivid images that the author has scattered across its pages. The images of the pond on an autumn's eve (p.114), the friend leaving on a train (p.115), or the man with the sick wife (p.112) have the suggestiveness of *haiku*: they insinuate much more than they say literally. Perhaps most arresting of all is the image of the journey through history as a drive in an automobile which has a single great mirror for a windshield, thus reflecting the road behind as it gradually recedes into the distance, but leaving the future that lies ahead to mere guesswork based on what has already passed (p.117).

In a sense Takeuchi is less dramatic than Nishida and Nishitani, who are constantly pulling down Western edifices of thought to rebuild on a foundation of absolute nothingness. Not that they are alone; the West has its own philosophical wrecking crews, of course. But to this reviewer Takeuchi seems to be moving in a more fruitful direction. The West has specialized in logical and scientific knowing; the East in contemplation, silence, the intuitive knowing of religion and art—a knowledge many contemporary Western philosophies show a hunger for. Within human knowing as a whole there is room for both logic and intuition, and collaboration on an epistemological level seems to hold more promise than confrontation on the metaphysical field.

*The Heart of Buddhism* is not only of value for those interested in the contributions of the Kyoto School, but may be especially profitable for religious thinkers of other traditions who wish to see how a contemporary Buddhist responds to present-day dilemmas from traditional resources.

Terry J. TEKIPPE  
Notre Dame Seminary  
New Orleans