

says about the editor of the volume, Yasuyo Furuya. Furuya has long been a spokesman for the need of the Japanese church to move beyond its world-denying "Barthianism" as well as a strong voice for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue in a pluralistic age. Like Pannenberg, for instance, he insists that the claims of Christianity must be brought into the public sphere for the needed encounter with other religions and world-views. However, while attempting to interpret Furuya's commitment to Christian uniqueness and universality under the category of Nishida's "self-identity of the Absolute Contradiction," Odagaki completely ignores the fact that Furuya is, at heart, an evangelist/apologist of the gospel. It is hard to understand why Odagaki does not even mention the ecclesiological commitment which undergirds Furuya's theological work. In the Epilogue, Furuya quotes from *Theology of Japan*, a book which he co-authored with Hideo Ohki.

The *Theology of Japan* is made possible by the establishment of theological existence through "conversion," and at the *topos* of theological existence provided by the "event of the resurrection." That *topos* is the "Church." In that sense, the "theology of Japan" is Church theology, who's *Sitz* is the "Church."

This historical grounding provides a much needed balance to Odagaki's rather speculative abstractions.

Though there are still some vestiges of the so-called "German Captivity" of Japanese theology in this book (i.e., the use of obscure academic terms to explain concepts which could be stated more plainly and the fashionable sprinkling of untranslated German words), it is an important witness to the depth and variety of theological reflection which has occurred in Japan since the Meiji period. On the question of whether or not Japanese theology has "come of age" or not, this reviewer wants to sound a note of hes-

itation based on the recent trends as depicted in the book's final chapter. If, as Odagaki claims, Japanese theology is developing its own distinctive character under Nishida's influence, we might wonder how such a theology, which roots its identity in a convergence or integration of Buddhist and Christian mystical notions of Nothing/God, will give new direction and strength to an already overly individualistic Japanese church (cf. Furuya's more recent *Nihon Dendoron*). On the question of whether or not there is any such thing as Japanese theology, we want to conclude with a resounding yes and, in this reviewer's opinion, that theology finds its primary expression in the worship of the churches and, secondarily, in the tomes of academia insofar as they have their taproots in that worshipping community.

Someone or Nothing? Nishitani's Religion and Nothingness as Foundation for Christian-Buddhist Dialogue

Russell H. Bowers, Jr.

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Christian-Buddhist dialogue is a thriving enterprise, both academically and in terms of the interaction between faith practitioners in everyday life. The appearance of yet another study which seeks to deal with some of the basic, introductory questions of this dialogue may thus strike one as needlessly repetitious, offering nothing new to an ongoing research task that demands focused attention on more advanced details and issues. The goals and presuppositions of a study as thorough as the one under review here,

however, offer implicit insights instructive to any careful reader, no matter what level of familiarity or expertise the reader may have. Along with a lucid presentation of a vast amount of material, it is the assumptions embedded within *Someone or Nothing?* which make for a stimulating read that is worth the time and effort of anyone interested in Christianity, Buddhism and the various facets of their interaction.

While any reader will find the book worthwhile, this published version of Russell Bowers' doctoral dissertation for Dallas Theological Seminary undoubtedly will be greeted with a variety of responses. As is the case with most any academic work, general readers will find the extensive and detailed references throughout the text quite daunting. On the other hand, readers who are largely unfamiliar with, yet interested in, the overall topic of interreligious dialogue will be rewarded if they muster the courage to take on the challenge of reading this work. Not only will they learn a great deal about some of the recent history of interfaith encounter, they will also become more familiar with how the Kyoto School of Philosophy as a whole, and how the thought of Nishitani Keiji in particular, has become a major topic of discussion in many quarters of religious and philosophical research. As for those who are already familiar with Nishitani's *Religion and Nothingness*—the work Bowers considers in some detail as a possible foundation for Christian-Buddhist dialogue—what will prove more helpful than the explicit content is the implicit message within this sympathetic but critical attempt to examine Nishitani's thought.

North American evangelicals will feel most at home with this book. That is Bowers' own stated position as he attempts to "raise one more voice calling for interreligious interaction on the part of evangelical Christians" (19). Bowers goes to great lengths to allow Nishitani to speak for himself. Practically an entire, substantial third of the

book's five chapters is devoted to giving "A Synopsis of *Religion and Nothingness*" (47–91). Before reaching that point in the book, however, the perceptive reader will already have noted the U.S. foundation of the book, e.g., in certain telling statements such as, "Until mid-century there was no systematic study of Buddhism here" (26; Bowers has just mentioned America in the previous sentence). The reader who is sensitive to the depths of human interaction inherent in interreligious dialogue will also have encountered some of the occasional, irritating expressions that betray the book's monocultural perspective, e.g., "Grasping Kyoto thought is not easy because *the Japanese* hide their feelings...." (42; emphasis is reviewer's).

Even so, the reader who is more persuaded of the religio-philosophical viability of Nishitani's thought than is Bowers' own conclusions to his study will be able to overlook some of these limitations. For one, the book's thoroughness, while carried out within its own self-described "Christian worldview" (95), leaves the reader with a sense of the tremendous effort exerted to understand Nishitani on his own terms. Moreover, the kindness of tone helps to keep the book's bite on its intellectual conclusion ("Christianity and Nishitani are talking about utterly different and even contradictory *Weltanschauungen*"; 140) instead of on any pejorative rhetoric.

Thus more than these relatively insignificant slips of the pen (including a thesis writer's dreaded typos, e.g., the misspelling of "Abilmelech" [34], a missing parenthesis [180, n.80]), what does not satisfy those readers more sympathetic than Bowers with the Kyoto School in particular, and Mahayana Buddhism in general, are the book's "two basic presuppositions [which] underlie the discussion" entitled "The Question of Truth and Religious Truth": "First, it is assumed that there is an external reality to which, if one is interested in knowing the

truth, one must conform his ideas.... Second, it is assumed that the law of noncontradiction holds in religious matters as it does in all others" (36). Quite naturally, Bowers appeals to these two assumptions later in the book, and his study's conclusion inevitably follows. Hence while he makes a genuine, even valiant effort to give Nishitani a fair hearing, Bowers' framing of these basic presuppositions prevents the book from going any deeper than it does in terms of assuming a posture of self-criticism that arises within the kind of dialogue which the book advocates (at least on the surface) right up through the last sentence (155).

One factor contributing to Bowers' unwillingness—or inability—to take the risk of questioning the allegedly unbreakable alliance between the book's basic assumptions and Christian theology is the shocking fact that he has not dealt with Nishitani in the Japanese language, but only via English translations. There is brief interaction with certain, crucial Japanese terms, e.g., *mu*, *ku*, and *soku* (46–47). However, a glance through

the extensive Bibliography (213–44) will confirm the total absence of Japanese materials, as well as only a minuscule sampling of non-English, European materials. One must not, however, quickly brush aside this book as being unworthy of any consideration. Besides the winsome manner in which he presents evangelical theology's critique of Nishitani, Bowers does a remarkable job of representing—without ever having directly encountered it linguistically or in actuality—the Kyoto philosopher's thought. One hopes, however, that the next evangelical attempt at examining Nishitani or his like will be equipped to do so in the thinker's original language. Not only would such a study provide the non-Japanese reader further insight into the true nature of such a philosopher's thought. It might also indeed interact with the power of a philosopher like Nishitani in a way that will help evangelical theology further realize its potential to thrive beyond the confines of modern, North American and European categories of thought.