

Christianity and Buddhism

Thoughts on the Possibility of a Dialogue

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As a counterfoil to many of the other presentations at the Symposium, Odagaki Masaya questions the covert rational agenda at the bottom of the interreligious dialogue and argues for a return to the “naturalness” of religious experience as the true meeting ground for Christianity and Buddhism.

Implied in the theme of this symposium is the question of what Christian theology in Japan has to learn from Buddhism. As soon as we frame the question in terms of “learning,” we are no longer talking about a *dialogue* between Christianity and Buddhism, and for that reason, learning at the most fundamental level cannot take place. When we speak of Christian *belief* or Buddhist *enlightenment*, it is senseless to point to similarities or parallels in the two religions, or to engage in mutual criticisms and acknowledgement. Belief and enlightenment are not things to be learned by transcending their essence and concepts, and then studying them comparatively. I am persuaded that it is only when we recognize the futility of trying to study the religions in this way that real learning can take place. I begin my exposition from this point.

In Acts of the Apostles 9:18, Saint Paul is said to have experienced conversion while on the road to Damascus “as though scales fell away from his eyes.” My own conversion experience is similar, and like Paul’s, one for which I can specify the time and even the place of the event. I did not believe that Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected as Christ, but in a moment of revelation it suddenly dawned on me that the death of Jesus, the Son of God on the cross, meant that I was *accepted by God in my unbelief*. Underlying God’s acceptance of my “unbelief” was the premise that Jesus is the Son of God. It is precisely because of this that “unbelief” has meaning.

A few days prior to my experience, Pastor Akaiwa Sakai 赤岩栄, from the Uehara Church in Tokyo, spoke in his Sunday sermon about Kierkegaard’s

idea of religiosity A and religiosity B. Kierkegaard said that the leap from religiosity A to religiosity B was not a further leap beyond the aesthetic level from which religiosity A arose, but rather a move downwards to encompass all things. These words set me thinking. If a leap to a higher level were possible, then that higher level must already exist, and a higher level beyond that, and so on indefinitely. This is why Akaiwa saw religiosity B as a *downward* leap that encompasses everything from the aesthetic and ethical level—including disbelief. Indeed, it is because unbelief is also embraced that it must be called a “leap.” In other words, religiosity B is a belief that embraces unbelief. At the same service, the novelist Shiina Rinzō 椎名麟三 also stressed the need to reclaim one’s right to *not* believe, since the very act of belief that rejects or excludes unbelief is already somehow bound up with unbelief.

Looking back on it now, I have no doubt that this “conversion” of mine was a religious experience, but at the same time it was the recovery of what is most “natural” to me, my own “humanity.” It seemed reasonable that one not believe that Jesus, the child of a human, died on the cross and was then resurrected. Others may believe this, I myself could not. Leaving aside the question of whether my own feelings were acceptable from Christianity’s point of view, that was the way I saw things and I had to be honest with myself. This was, if you will, my ineluctable “naturalness.” I had no choice but to acknowledge my unbelief “just as it is.” This was a rejection of the traditional Christian belief in Jesus Christ; it also implied abandoning all further effort to believe. Faith was not something I had been merely toying with. I was just coming off of seven years of convalescence from an illness, during which I had faced the terrors of death any number of times, as when I began to vomit large quantities of blood. In such circumstances the question of faith was a matter of absolute necessity for me.

At the same time as I followed my naturalness and distanced myself from the fixation of wanting to believe, I came to understand the meaning of the self-denial of Jesus, the Son of God, on the cross. In order to be true to the naturalness of my unbelief, if Jesus was the Son of God then that was something that had to be rejected. *That* was Jesus’ cross, and it was I who hung him on it. The instant I realized the meaning of the cross I had recovered my “naturalness.” By acknowledging my unbelief, I was able to understand the meaning of the cross of Christ: belief and unbelief are simultaneous and correlative. Up until that time, I had had no confidence in my actions or thoughts, and I would always later regret that I had not acted differently than I did. I have never felt that way since my “conversion experience.”

Therefore, my recovery of naturalness was at the same time my human recovery. Nishida Kitarō says that when the relative confronts the absolute,

there is always a death. The self dies in the presence of the absolute because it is finite. This liberates us, I believe, from the illusions that beset the fundamentally impossible and illusive quest of faith in which finite humans seek the infinite. In the history of ideas we refer to this as the collapse of the modern ego as the subject of knowledge. The modern ego was posited as the center of a basically artificial environment with itself at the center. The subject-object model broke down by seeing objective things as dependent on subjective perspectives; there is no objective knowing of a “whole” or “absolute.” The modern ego believed that God and absolute truth could be reached through the efforts of science, academia, and even religion. It was the loss of this conviction that lay behind the collapse of that ego.

On closer examination, this is precisely what goes on when the “absolute other” faces humans. Human explanations like Barth’s statement that “God is the Absolute Other” should be refuted precisely because God is the absolute other *for humans*. The very idea of absolute otherness is a human creation. Allusions to God of this sort need always to be negated absolutely and on every level because they are made by humans. Recent deconstructive theology has taken this kind of line. Or again, we have the idea of divine kenosis. The act of kenosis in which God “empties himself” (Philippians 2:7), is not meant to promote a sense of peace and relaxation within our human condition. If that were the case, the idea would be a hollow human soliloquy; indeed, all theological terms would be relative and useless on such terms. Unless the speaker go through a process of self-denial, God-talk cannot touch directly on the meaning of God. Why?—because God is absolute. Precisely because God is absolute, all human explanations need to be negated, and we need to recognize that God is present (and at the same time absent) in those very negations. God-talk is always a duality of affirmation and negation. It is the same with recovery of one’s naturalness and humanity, and the sense of reassurance that this brings.

Ultimately the point where Christian faith comes about does not depend on a fixed and objective religious base. Of course, Christianity would not exist without some such basis. We have the grand events recorded in the Old Testament and passed down through myth and legend. In the aftermath of Jesus’ deeds and the kerygma of the early church, we have the story of the establishment of doctrine and the history of the Christian Church. These have made Christianity what it is today, and there would be no Christianity had they never occurred in the first place. The same can be said of Buddhism, of whose similarities with and differences from Christianity comparative religion teaches us. Insofar as we have to do with the search for something fundamental that transcends culture, it stands to reason that there should be unity

between the two religions. Therefore it is vital that believers of the religions learn from each other, and are able to do this. Faith is another thing. It arises when human endeavors lose their significance, when human conceptions, culture, and scholarship are negated. It is at the same time belief and unbelief in Christ, which is not something that can be dealt with through language or religious dogma. As the scriptures say, it is “not a covenant of written letters but of the Spirit” (II Cor. 3:6); it is “a special transmission outside the scriptures, not founded upon words and letters” (attributed to Bodhidharma). This is the level on which we must ask what Christianity can learn from Buddhism.

At this point the reader may be wondering what all this has to do with my faith. My faith arose because of a conversion experience centered on the self-denial of Jesus on the cross, not because I embraced the soteriological and rationalistic Christian model of the dualism of God as opposed to human beings. The facts that I happened to become ill as a young man, to read the writings of Kierkegaard, and to hear Pastor Akaiwa’s sermon at Uehara Church are all secondary.

In life, we expect things to occur by chance. It is mere chance whether one is born in the East or born in the West with its long tradition of Christianity. That faith is a matter of chance is what makes it inevitable, absolute, and exclusive. Inevitability without chance, an absolute without a relative, are human devices that do not merit the names of “inevitable” or “absolute.” Faith falls into an obsessive and rationalistic structure when we forget this.



In the above section, I stated that Christian belief is a duality that transcends dualistic structures and de facto religiosity, and is not therefore a question of comparison. The same is true of Buddhist enlightenment. And if belief is not a question of comparison, it belongs to (and yet at the same time does not belong to) a level that transcends comparative or mutual learning between Christianity and Buddhism. It seems to me that the Holy Spirit theology of Mutō Kazuo 武藤一雄 provides a Christian philosophical explanation of this. Mutō’s philosophy of religion preempted modern “theology of religion” and questions on the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity. It also made suggestions in the line of current postmodernist speculation. Actually, the problematic of whether Christianity is able to learn something from Buddhism is not just an objective question about two traditions, but is very much a part of the *Zeitgeist* of modern culture as a whole.

As is suggested by the titles of Mutō’s works, *The Between of Theology and*

the Philosophy of Religion (1961) and the three volumes of *Essays on Theology and the Philosophy of Religion* (1980, 1986, 1993), the fundamental framework of his philosophy was to pursue the “between” of theology and philosophy. Despite a firm personal conviction in Christian faith, he sought a middleground that would actually transcend his own beliefs. We might say that the Christian-Buddhism dialogue belongs to this “between.” Further, Mutō insisted that no substantial object of faith exists apart from or floating above the “between.” In this sense, Mutō’s *theology* is an exclusivistic discipline where faith is irreplaceable and unique. It is natural to think that belief is unitary and exclusive in as much as we are unable to change the reality of life and death. But because this is the way things are, we would expect faith to have universal meaning, albeit not in the sense of a conceptual generalization. For Mutō, the *philosophy of religion* is related to this universality; its aim throughout is to locate the “between” of theology and philosophy.

“Religiosity A (?)” an expression unique to Mutō, begins from Kierkegaard’s distinction between “religiosity A” and “religiosity B.” For Kierkegaard religiosity A is universal religiosity. From the standpoint that “subjectivity is truth,” it stands opposed to objectivity in the sense of being publicly available. It is religion in the primordial sense. In this sense there is a standpoint inherent in religiosity A that transcends its own objective universality and, as we see in examples like that of Socrates, is not something limited to Christianity. In that sense, religiosity A would be universal and publicly available, and something within the realm of philosophy of religion.

Religiosity B, in contrast, can be understood by way of Barth’s theology.¹ Barth stressed the radical particularity and exclusivity of a faith whereby human beings are saved only through the particular revelation of God in Christ. This is not a problem restricted to Barth’s theological system. It arises naturally because faith is related to our own life and death and to the foundation of existence. If a substitute were possible, it would not be faith. Therefore, Mutō’s religiosity A (?) is universal in the sense that it has passed through and overcome the radical exclusivity of religiosity B. Moreover, in the case of religiosity B, it is not that religiosity A is extinguished but rather that, in Mutō words, “in a sense, it is radicalized and intensified.”² We might say that Mutō’s explanation of religiosity A (?) is contained within Akaiwa’s understanding of religiosity B referred to above.

However, since religiosity A (?) is neither universal nor particular, it is a universality that is “presence in its absence.” Simple religiosity A is a rejection

¹『宗教哲学の新しい可能性』[New possibilities for the philosophy of religion] (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1974), 5.

²『宗教哲学』[Philosophy of religion] (Tokyo: Nihon YMCA Dōmei Shuppan, 1955), 135–6.

of faith. A neutral standpoint that sublates religiosity A and religiosity B merely becomes another religiosity A. It is an absolute and contradictory self-identity of the opposites of the particular and the universal. Mutō himself acknowledges the influence of Nishida's logic of locus at work here. He paraphrases Nishida's "standpoint of nothingness" in human terms to speak of an "unfathomable homologos." In order for *dialogos* to be possible, there must be such an "unfathomable homologos" at its base.³ Adopting this terminology, we would say that the point at which Buddhism and Christianity can learn together from each other is the point at which each confirms its own religiosity B and passes through it into a religiosity A (?), which is "present in its absence." Thus does dialogue depend on the unfathomable homologos.

At this point, two things bear mention. First, as mentioned above, there is the explanation of the philosophy of religion in terms of the duality of belief and unbelief in faith. Mutō took up various themes on different occasions to explain his idea of the "between" and "duality." For example, in Kant's philosophy of religion, God appears as "a question" within the limits of practical reason. Mutō said that this "is also the point of entry into a perspective that, on the basis of this question, neither confirms nor denies religion outside the limits of reason."⁴ According to Mutō, the "question" is a duality in that it lies within the limits of reason—the domain of unbelief—*and* outside the limits of reason—the domain of belief. We see here a mature philosophical explanation of the duality of belief and unbelief that I was trying to describe in recounting my own conversion experience. I noted that in accepting this duality of belief and unbelief, one recovered a sense of peace and naturalness, and at the same time is liberated from distortions arising through rationalistic structures. I see in Mutō's homologos, a humanistic expression of the logic of locus, a similar suggestion of restoration of the human and a reinforcement of naturalness.

The second point is that Mutō's Christian philosophy of religion of the "between" has a profound connection with the Oriental notion of "nothingness," as witnessed in his reliance on Nishida's philosophy. This unity of Christianity and Oriental philosophy is already to be seen in his talk of "presence in absence."

As to whether his philosophy contained anything new, Mutō writes:

³ *New Possibilities for the Philosophy of Religion*, 20

⁴ 「カントの宗教論について」 [Kant's idea of religion], in 『神学的・宗教哲学的論集』 [Essays on theology and the philosophy of religion], vol. 2, 446.

it takes us one step beyond speculation and an understanding of Christianity. based on the Holy Spirit. I wish to declare here that there is an inseparable relationship between “Christ mysticism” and “faith mysticism.”⁵

In the context of the structure of Mutō’s religious philosophy, this Holy Spirit theory is the inevitable result of his ideas of “between” and duality. If we look at this closely, for example, in the case of Saint Paul’s “Christian mysticism” or “faith mysticism,” we see a deep and total relationship of cyclical mutuality that surrounds Paul as a religious man and Paul as a disciple. In other words, Mutō says that Pauline mysticism is the mysticism of cyclical, mutual “duality” that stands in the “between” of the universal aspect of religion in general, and on the particular aspect of “being in Christ.”⁶ Furthermore, “Christ mysticism” is both inseparable and simultaneous with “God mysticism”—in other words, it is dual. The former is the epistemological foundation of the latter, and the latter is the ontological foundation of the former. Mutō notes:

Despite being hidden in the extremities of divine transcendence, God is immanent and all things are in God’s hands. The advent of this hidden God is what we call the advent of God’s spirit or the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the Holy Spirit is the greatest encompassing being (*das Umgreifende*).⁷

For Mutō, this type of Holy Spirit thought cannot be separated from Trinitarian theory. Only in the Trinity is encompassing possible. For an encompassing to be true, it cannot include only some of the parts and set itself over and above others. It must embrace individual parts and at the same time transcend the opposition between the parts and that which encompasses them. There are three elements here: “While the God that is Father, Son, and Spirit is three parts with each having its own distinct person, we may be permitted to understand this oneness, more than anything else, as something that comes with the Holy Spirit.”⁸ If we understand this type of expression to mean that the Holy Spirit is a third party that takes precedence over the Father and the Son, however, we have not grasped its true meaning.

Professor Onodera will later address us on the Holy Spirit and the logic of locus, so I restrict myself here to Mutō’s remarks. In simple terms, his claim was that “the locus of the fullness of the Holy Spirit” (i.e., where the Holy Spirit makes itself fully present) and Nishida philosophy’s “locus of nothing-

⁵ *Essays on Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2.

⁶ 『神学と宗教哲学の間』 [The between of theology and the philosophy of religion], ch. 5, “Faith and Mysticism,” 421.

⁷ 『脚下照願』 [Reflecting on what is underfoot], *Essays on Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, 104.

ness” are analogous. The point I wish to make here is that this idea of the Holy Spirit is both a self-reflection for Christian faith and something that transcends the religious necessity of seeing Christianity as the only true religion. This is so not because of Nishida’s logic but because the very notion of encompassing requires a transcendence of particular religions in order to be immanent in them. God is an immanence-in-transcendence. This is what is meant by the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit were an external object, it would not be a true encompassing but only a partial that could be defined through human explanation. I remember Mutō jibing me once, “I am stuck in Christianity, but you don’t seem to be.” I told him I could not see the difference—and he agreed. The point was that if one separates oneself from commitment towards the particularity of Christianity, the place of the fullness of the Holy Spirit is immediately reduced to an idea. But the locus of the fullness of the Holy Spirit is at a dimension that goes beyond the religious need for Christianity to be the sole religion. It is a dimension that is not restricted to Christianity. The place of fullness of the Holy Spirit is immanent within Christianity and at the same time transcends it. It seems to me that it is at this point that the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism can take place.

The significance of dualities like immanence-in-transcendence, the relative and the absolute, or belief and unbelief may seem to stem from the fact that human beings are limited. Mutō has said the “encompassing” Holy Spirit is actually a “panentheistic” God that includes both pantheism and theism. In his view, stated frankly, a creationism that synthesizes pantheism and theism also transcends Buddhism and Christianity. Panentheism, we may note, is also part of Nishida’s religious understanding. Stated in other terms, such a belief would require a Christian to give up the faith; it would become dualistic and revert to a mere rational concept. On the other side, if this kind of transcendence is true transcendence, then its meaning is not limited to the dialogue between religions; it becomes a question that takes up human culture in its entirety. For if the modern age were persuaded that the *limits* of reason and the *contradictions* of science were a true treasure, it would seek them. Mutō himself made no such connection, but the idea of the locus of the fullness of the Holy Spirit in his thought seems to me to nudge us in that direction, which I shall pursue in the following section.



While I am the first to admit my own limited understanding of Buddhism, I would like to take up a discussion of Morita therapy.

Morita Shōma 森田正馬 (1874–1938) developed his healing method as a

way of treating obsessive compulsion. Theoretically it is based on a radical critique of the modern ego and an idea of natural and human recovery that is necessarily accompanied by deep religiosity. It also contains a clear, foundational recognition of the duality of human life. Although Morita said that his therapy was devised without any particular religious connection, after reading the methods of introspection and the path to enlightenment in the writings of Zen Master Hakuin, he discovered “some points that coincide with my own work.”⁹ Despite having no religious connection, his ideas nevertheless contain deep religiosity and are religious in the purest sense of the term. Before the words come along to make distinctions, there is no grounds for assuming that the truths of reason and the truths of religion are different things. In this sense, Mutō’s “religiosity A (?)” is a religiosity that transcends established religious ideas, which is to say religion in its primordial sense. As I have already stated, the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhist is only possible on this level. Whether one happens to agree or not, the fact remains that numbers of psychiatrists both within Japan and abroad, including persons such as Uchimura Yūsuke 内村祐之 and Doi Kenrō 土居健郎, emphasize this point when discussing Morita therapy and its affinity with Zen Buddhism.¹⁰

The condition of compulsive obsession is one in which the individual has become so absorbed by an idea that it cannot be resisted or let go of; this is its “compulsion.” The resulting delusion is that one does not realize the idea is meaningless. Compulsive ideas begin with something trivial and of no importance in themselves. While reading one may begin to fix attention on the tip of one’s nose; or one may temporarily lose all sense of who one is; or one may feel a sudden fear of blushing; and so on. As long as one is engaged in meaningful activity, it is easy to set these distractions aside. One cannot, however, simply set aside its *raison d’être*, for the simple reason that it has none.

Since an irrational object cannot grasped, the object itself must also be removed from one’s thoughts. But the effort expended in trying to remove this object actually causes one to feel trapped in the process, and if let alone this feeling intensifies and grows. This in turn exacts greater effort, which only reinforces the sense of being caught. Morita called this “psychic interaction,” and likens it to “trying to stop one wave and ending up creating more in the process.”¹¹ Furthermore, Morita used the Zen expression of “the tethered

⁸ “Reflecting on What is Underfoot,” 102.

⁹ 「神経質ノ本態及療法」 [The nature of nervousity and its treatment], in 『森田正馬全集』 [Collected works of Morita Shōma] (Tokyo: Hakuyōsha, 1974), vol. 2, 349.

¹⁰ 大原健士 Ōhara Kenshi et al., eds, 『現代の森田療法: 理論と実際』 [Morita therapy today: Theory and practice] (Tokyo: Hakuyōsha, 1977), ch. 8, sec. 3.

¹¹ “The Nature of Nervosity and its Treatment,” 350.

donkey” to describe the symptoms of compulsive ideas.¹² This phrase refers to a donkey which, when tethered to a stake, tries to free itself by circling round the stake, only to end up being tied even tighter to it. Morita sees compulsive ideas in the same way. But to really understand what these ideas are, one must really have experienced the terror of their possession firsthand.

Morita therapy, a method he devised to deal with compulsive ideas, is divided into four stages of treatment.¹³ The first stage is bed-rest therapy, during which the patient does nothing but sleep in a private room. The purpose of this stage is to cause the patient to experience an environment of “liberation-in-suffering.” When the patient does nothing but sleep, the psyche has no place to escape to, as there is nothing to interfere with the patient’s feelings. The result is that the compulsive ideas bring the patient still more suffering. Morita remarks:

It is when anguish reaches its most intense point that the purpose of the therapy has been achieved. The very moment the patient reaches the extremes of anguish, the clouds vanish quite naturally and suddenly, and the exhilaration of the spirit is awakened. I call this state of mind “liberation-in-suffering.”¹⁴

While Morita gave virtually no logical explanation for this stage of the process, his term “liberation-in-suffering” points to a recognition of the duality of suffering and liberation. There is no “exhilaration of the spirit” for having rooted out the compulsion. Rather, as the image of the tethered donkey reflects, the whole point of bed-rest therapy is to make one to realize that eradicating the compulsive idea is impossible. Compulsive ideas do not “just disappear.” At the same time as one realizes that a compulsive idea exists, the “exhilaration of the spirit” based on this rises simultaneously with the suffering. Hence, we have a “liberation-in-suffering.”

The second and third periods are work therapy, the second period focusing on light work and the third on heavy work. In the second period, the work is performed in seclusion. The purpose of this is for the patient “to reach a ‘work-*samādhi*’ state of mind of ‘without thought or form’.” In the beginning it is natural for patients performing the routine of this simple light work in a secluded environment to harbor doubts about its effectiveness in treating their obsessive compulsion. But doubts or not, patients are required to perform the prescribed work for a fixed period. Seeing these doubts as rooted in “apprehension” and a distortion of insight, Morita states that “the chief focus

¹² “The Nature of Nervosity and its Treatment,” 329. See also 『禪語辭典』 [Dictionary of Zen sayings] ed. by 入矢義高 Iriya Yoshitaka (Tokyo: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 1997), 23, 103.

¹³ “The Nature of Nervosity and its Treatment,” 348.

¹⁴ “The Nature of Nervosity and its Treatment,” 350.

is to break down this apprehension.” Furthermore, through continuing this work one comes to a state of mind in which “one’s only enjoyment is work and one works for the sake of work ...like a child amusing itself by following its impulses.”¹⁵ In the third stage, the aim is to cultivate perseverance through heavy work and to help the patient gain self-confidence.

Clearly the aim of these two stages of treatment is for the patient to let go of the ego. Ultimately, both the fret of the compulsive ideas and the desire to be liberated from them are based on a preoccupation with the ego; so, too, is the apprehension the patients feel towards the effectiveness of Morita therapy. According to Morita, however, many patients report that after undergoing the two stages of work therapy, they felt confident that their psychological confusion, physical fatigue, and other physical abnormalities would “pass away after a time.”¹⁶ The paradigm described in this passage of the book is roughly the same in terms of content and order as that in an essay Morita wrote for a Festschrift in honor of Kure 呉.¹⁷ In my opinion, the phrase “forgotten” in the latter is a more accurate way of describing the outcome than “passing away.” The compulsive idea itself has not ceased to exist but only been erased from active memory. In other words, the simple absence of not being present is not the kind of total obliteration of a compulsive idea that would satisfy the ego. In my own experience, I find that in the course of work that I am obliged to perform, such as lectures or even trivial tasks, any apprehensions I feel tend to slip out of mind by simply not paying attention to them or trying to do anything about them. But because they have not been destroyed, they can always resurface. This leaves a residue of concerns to deal with, even if temporarily set aside. All of this is a clear preoccupation with ego. There is no solution that will solve the problem once and for all. If my apprehensions resurface, I simply start work again and hope that they will leave me alone. Such forgetting is healthy. In this regard, the fourth stage of Morita therapy is the preparation for returning to daily life in the world. Its aim is to “break attachments to one’s interests, to let go of all preoccupations, and to adjust to the outside world.”

This aspect of Morita therapy has a strong affinity with the Zen ideas of “just sitting” 只管打坐 and “just working” 只管作務. In my view they are essentially the same thing. Dōgen talks of Dharma-in-sitting, which is easy to misunderstand as implying that one attains enlightenment *by means of* the conscious act of sitting. It means rather that just sitting is itself enlightenment.

¹⁵ “The Nature of Nervosity and its Treatment,” 356.

¹⁶ “The Nature of Nervosity and its Treatment,” 356.

¹⁷ *Collected Works of Morita Shōma*, vol. 1. 214.

One does not set out to achieve enlightenment and then just sit. “The beginner’s *zazen* is essential *zazen*, and the initial *zazen* is the initial sitting Buddha.”¹⁸ The reason is that insofar as enlightenment is the goal, it is not something external to the self, like an object, and therefore cannot be something that belongs to the self. This is also what Eckhart referred to as acting *ohne warum*. Eckhart described “the poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3) as those who cast aside the spirit that seeks God and salvation. In this sense, faith is *ohne warum*. It is only then that heaven is not an object separate from people but something they can appropriate for themselves. They can, as Eckhart says, know bliss and see heaven. In the same way, to say that enlightenment is not the aim of *zazen* means that there is a duality of enlightenment and delusion in “just sitting”: the goal of *zazen* is no longer the attainment of enlightenment and the discarding of delusion. Dōgen notes that if one picks up the collections of *kōan* and simply “reads for meaning,” trying rationally to discern the true nature of enlightenment, one only moves further away from the path of the buddhas and patriarchs. “If you devote your time to doing *zazen* without wanting to know anything and without seeking enlightenment, this itself is the Patriarchal Way.”¹⁹ Enlightenment is useless. This is enlightenment and “just sitting.” It is the “exhilaration of the spirit” of liberation-in-suffering.

The second and third stages of Morita therapy are given to work only. The therapeutic aim is to let go of doubts about the effectiveness of the therapy and to break free of the ego that is the subject of one’s apprehensions. This is done through continuing to perform the prescribed work. In Zen Buddhism, daily life is training for the Buddha path, and mundane work constitutes religious discipline. Naturally, doubts may arise as to whether working in the kitchen or doing housework has anything to do with religious discipline. Dōgen’s *Eihei-shingi* 永平清規 (Rules for Eihei-ji) set out very strict prescriptions for work and training. These rules were not designed simply to deal with the necessities of living in a religious community. Rather, by following them one “drops off” the ego and realizes a true way of living. It is only in this way that work becomes religious discipline. This method of extinguishing the ego is the same as following a life of seclusion and strict obedience in a Catholic monastery.

In the *Genjōkōan* chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen writes that “To learn the Buddhist Way is to learn about oneself. To learn about oneself is to forget oneself. To forget oneself is to perceive oneself as all things.”²⁰ Learning

¹⁸ *Shōbōgenzō*, trans. by K. Nishiyama (Tokyo: Nakayama Shōbō, 1983), vol. 4, “Admonitions for Zazen,” 51.

¹⁹ *A Primer of Soto Zen*, trans. by R. Matsunaga (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1971).

²⁰ *Shōbōgenzō*, vol. 1, 1.

the way of the Buddha is learning the self. In other words, this hints at the duality of the Buddhist way and the self. The Buddhist way is forgetting the self and is revealed through all phenomena—this is the true self. In fact, the Buddhist way and the self are not dualistic opposites but two dimensions of the same thing. There is no enlightenment so long as the Buddhist way is viewed as the object of enlightenment of the self. The Buddhist way cannot be attained through cutting off the self from being one element in the duality. This is impossible. The Buddhist way and enlightenment mean forgetting the self and seeing the duality of the self. Learning to forget the idea of being caught in the self is the aim of Morita's therapy.

Both Morita therapy and the “between” of Mutō stress the fact of duality as fundamental. Although this duality appears in Christianity, in the therapeutic treatment of neurosis, and in Zen, it points to a dimension that transcends all of these things. Put the other way around, it is in virtue of this dimension that these religions and this therapy come to life. This is originally the meaning of duality. This dimension is the fundamental locus of dialogue; it is the opposite of what are generally viewed as acts of asceticism or religious austerities. Enlightenment is not something attained through great physical strain. Passions and agonies are not overcome by mortification, as we see in the image of the tethered donkey. However much an ascetic may try to reach enlightenment through austerities, this is misguided thinking. The Buddha himself took the firm position of rejecting extreme asceticism.

In contrast to performing austerities or engaging in asceticism, the foundation of Morita therapy is acceptance of the self “as it is” and “returning to nature.”²¹ The reality of suffering from an obsessive compulsion is accepted as it is. As Morita says:

Fear what there is to fear, enjoy what there is to enjoy. The Buddha's great enlightenment was not that he realized that life is pleasant and therefore felt peace of mind. He first awoke to the extremely pessimistic view of the impermanence of all things, and was then able to achieve peace of mind.

The duality of liberation-in-suffering and “the exhilaration of the spirit” come from courage and naturalness. The acceptance of something “as it is” originally requires courage of the ego. By itself, the ego wants to confirm its own *raison d'être*; this is how the ego works. By forgetting itself, the ego experiences ontological fear. In other words, it confirms something “as it is,” and does not have the courage to “forget the self.” In this sense, Morita opposed the idea of identifying the ego with the subject. The ego is what lies behind

²¹ *Collected Works of Morita Shōma*, 2, 384–5.

neurosis: the tethered-donkey syndrome, apprehension, and the vicious circle of psychological interaction are all originally due to the ego. To cite another Zen phrase, “Mind moves with its myriad surroundings, truly its movement is very mysterious. When you recognize mind’s nature while according with its flow, there is neither joy nor sorrow.”²² This is what it means to accept something “as it is” or “returning to nature.” It entails distinguishing oneself from the ego. Within the so-called Morita school, people such as Ōhara Ken-jirō 大原健士郎 and Iwai Kan 岩井 寛 saw the concept of accepting something “as it is” as having a dual psychological structure.²³ Others like Suzuki Tomonori 鈴木知準 saw this concept as a psychological condition of “becoming part of the present.” Actually, the duality of accepting something “as it is” would seem to me to include both these elements, since even if we do not see this duality as a psychological problem, we can still speak of it as psychological concept. Furthermore, insofar as we can speak of it as a problem of “becoming part of the present,” it is something distinct from apprehension and psychological interaction.

The idea of accepting something “as it is” exists in both Pure Land Buddhism’s *jinen-hōni* (salvation worked out naturally) and in Jesus’ view of nature. In Shinran’s often-quoted phrase from the *Jinen-hōni-shō*:

As for *jinen*, *ji* means “of itself.” It is not through the practitioner’s calculation [*harakai*]; one is made to become so. *Nen* means “one is made to become so through the working of the Vow of the Tathāgata.” As for *hōni*, it means “one is made to become so through the working of the Vow of the Tathāgata.”²⁴

However, because one makes a conscious religious effort through entrusting one’s life to the “Vow of the Tathāgata,” this action has not occurred naturally but through human design. The unnaturalness of religion arises in this way. Therefore the idea of *jinen hōni* is a logical contradiction. At the same time as one entrusts oneself to the “Vow of the Tathāgata,” there is a duality of not entrusting anything to humans. Entrusting oneself to “Vow of the Tathāgata” is at least not something that depends on human religious judgment; this action or belief originally lies in the dimension that transcends religion. For Shinran, there is no doubt that it transcends religions, even though he was referring directly only to Jōdo Shinshū. At the same time, such

²² *Collected Works of Morita Shōma*, 2, 386. See also *Dictionary of Zen Sayings*, 226-7.

²³ 鈴木知準 Suzuki Chijun, 「森田療法と禪」 [Morita therapy and Zen], in his 『現代の森田療法』 [Modern Morita therapy], 392-3.

²⁴ Cited from Hee-Sung Keel, *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1995), 130.

direct reference was Shinran's way of bringing *jinen hōni* to life. It is both *jinen hōni* and accepting things "as they are." Put another way, *jinen hōni* gives logical expression to Morita's expression of accepting something "as it is" and to Mutō's "homologos." It is also the locus of interreligious dialogue. If we lose sight of this wider perspective, the terms express no more than a pitifully exclusivistic and self-righteous belief in the Tathāgata.

In the Gospel of John (3:8), Jesus speaks of people being reborn:

The wind blows wherever it pleases;
You hear its sound,
But you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.
That is how it is with all who are born of the Spirit.

We may note in passing that in Greek, the words *wind* and *Spirit* translate the same term, *πνεῦμα*. This is expressed through Mutō's idea of the "locus of the fullness of the Holy Spirit," and through Morita's use of the Zen phrase about "mind moving with its myriad surroundings." In both cases one separates oneself from the false structure of the ego and returns to the original path of the "between" of philosophy and religion, and "the naturalness of accepting something as it is." Furthermore, in New Testament passages like Jesus' reference to the God who "causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good" (Matt. 5:45), people are encouraged to accept something "as it is." This is adopting a natural lifestyle that transcends distinctions of good and evil and the human judgments on which they rely. Morita reported that the patients hospitalized under his care included people from a variety of different religions, among them Christianity and Jōdo Shinshū. Among those who were subjected to the therapy of "following one's naturalness," many patients "realized that their faith up until now was false, and for the first time came to true faith."²⁵ Morita spoke repeatedly about the contradiction of thought and the deceptiveness inherent in thinking that creates religion and its concepts. He even spoke about the ineffectiveness of rational explanations of neurosis. Like Zen, his therapy is "not founded upon words and letters."



In the above examples of Mutō's religiosity A (?), the homologos, Morita's idea of accepting something "as it is," Buddhism's *shikan taza*, *jinen hōni*, and also my own conversion experience, I have tried to show that we are able to restore our nature and our humanity by recognizing that duality exists, and

²⁵ Suzuki, "Modern Morita Therapy," 387.

then returning to this fact of duality through faith. In my understanding, dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity becomes possible in this place of duality, or what Mutō referred to as “the locus of the fullness of the Holy Spirit,” the place where the Holy Spirit is the “encompassing one.” We may go further and question whether there is even a need for dialogue any longer. The aim of “learning” from each other or “dialoguing together” already lands us in Morita’s “contradiction of thought.” The point is, this place of dialogue is something that can never be conceptualized or rationalized. When it is, the human ingredient has taken over and we cannot speak of accepting things “as they are,” or of duality or of a “locus of the fullness of the Holy Spirit.” Insofar as the place of dialogue has become an object of knowledge, it ceases to be a place where Christianity and Buddhism share a commonality that transcends religious ideas.

I would like to make it clear that in this place of duality, the exclusivistic absolutism of each belief—or what Mutō calls religiosity B—is preserved in a strict sense. Rather, it is precisely in this place that religiosity B is able to secure its particularity in the original sense of the term: not as a religiosity opposed to the universal or one that has escaped its dependence on the universal, but as a particularity that depends on and requires the universal. As such it is common and at the same time specific. For Mutō, religiosity A is not extinguished in religiosity B but is “in a sense, radicalized and intensified.” While he is talking of religiosity A (?), he seems to say that religiosity B is also “in a sense, radicalized and intensified.” To use Morita’s words, “liberation” is at the same time “anguish at its most intense,” unmollified. This is the original sense of the place of duality, one where the distinction between the universal and the particular is seen to be an artificial construct, where particularity and exclusivism are pure particularity and pure exclusivism. This place can also be called universal precisely for that reason and this is what seems to be faith. We should understand belief and enlightenment “as realities of the spirit,” to use Nishida’s phrase. We cannot have dialogue if we just stop at discussing standards of comparison between Christianity and Buddhism. Dialogue is only possible when dialogue is no longer needed, or in other words when we are on the level of religiosity B. (This is what Jacques Derrida means by *différance*, though it is inappropriate when discussing the common logos of Christianity and Buddhism.) My remarks are simply an elaboration on the point.

Originally duality is a necessary condition that arises between absolute contradictions like absolute and relative, exclusive and universal, anguish and liberation. It does not rise among relatives. Contradictions between relatives can be compared and sublated. Indeed, comparison and sublation only have

meaning between relatives. Duality, however, does not mean unconditional pluralism.

I disagree with the recent “theology of religions” trend that sees comparison and dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism as amounting to a religious pluralism. Faith is exclusive and absolute, else it would not be faith. My own conversion experience was a case in which “unbelief was itself belief.” This is not something that can be conceptualized or universalized, and in that sense is exclusivistic. “Being located in nothingness,” where exclusive absolutes face one another, is therefore the duality of reality itself, and this is the “locus of the fullness of the Holy Spirit.” Religious pluralism recognizes that one’s own belief is relative. The need for faith is not considered in this case. There is no neutral place where a human being can stand and survey the broad field of religion.

Similarly, I disagree emphatically with the idea of positing something to transcend this duality. This amounts to a betrayal of the duality that we have gone to so much trouble to understand. Takizawa Katsumi has given us the splendid image of Immanuel to show his dualistic view of the relationship between the divine and the human. But while the reality of Immanuel is distinct but inseparable from the human, to claim that the relationship is irreversible for human beings is an internal contradiction with the reality of Emmanuel. A relationship between things that are distinct but inseparable may not be irreversible. To say this would be a betrayal of the duality of Emmanuel. It would tether the human being up like the donkey to the stake.

I see a trend nowadays towards a kind of neoromanticism that stands opposed to the rationalistic romanticism of the enlightenment. Concern over “what Christianity can learn from Buddhism” is a product of this neoromanticism. Since the time that the study of history of religions began at the end of the last century, the so-called “Christian world” has collapsed. Exceptions like dialectical theology—which was only a response to the extremely unusual circumstances surrounding the first and second world wars—aside, the inevitable result of this was that people had to look for “a God beyond God” (Cusanus, Tillich). Neoromanticism points to an awakening to the fact that the infinite is within the finite or, in other words, that human beings have realized the infinite, or have come to know the duality of the finite and the infinite. This amounts to a fundamental critique against the Enlightenment’s perception of reality in terms of subjects and objects. In this sense, modern romanticism is a critique of modern rationalism. It sees the infinite as a basic longing that human life can never satisfy. Neoromanticism, as I am using the term, means seeing life as a basic longing which in turn generates the idea of comparing Christianity and Buddhism through dialogue.

Today we speak of living in a postmodern world, an age of awareness of the radical relativity of human knowledge that has come in the wake of the objectivity and rationalism of modernity, scholarship, and ethics—the so-called age of the “contradiction of thought.” The assumption is that in this way human beings, aware of their own relativity, can touch the untouchable and absolute God. The modern theme of harmony with nature and recovery of humanity belongs to this same viewpoint. In my view, all of this points to a fundamental religious orientation. It is the age where we are searching for “the locus of the fullness of the Holy Spirit.” It is in this context that dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism takes place.

[translated by Ben Dorman]