

## In Search of a Context for the Merton-Suzuki Dialogue

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The meeting between Thomas Merton and Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki is legendary, almost an icon. Two venerable truth-seekers, one emerging from the stout walls of a medieval Christian monastery, the other appearing from behind a majestic stand of peaceful cryptomerias, recognize each other as "fellow citizens"<sup>1</sup> and set the dialogue between East and West in a transcendental context, beyond the accidents of history and culture.

In the summer of 1991 I went to Japan in order to discover more about this meeting.<sup>2</sup> I imagined that I would interview a few people who knew D. T. Suzuki, find out how, when and where he contacted Christianity, and which Christians he met, inspect the library in his former home, the Matsugaoka Bunko in North Kamakura (now officially a museum), so as to list the Christian books I found there, and return to the United States with a clear portrait of "D. T. Suzuki's understanding of Christianity" to supplement our already fairly detailed knowledge of Merton's understanding of Buddhism.

I was able to do both less and more than I anticipated. There was much less on Suzuki's contact with Christianity than I had supposed, and contacts with informants sometimes proved impossible to set up; but as I searched, I unearthed mysteries, half-truths and innuendoes which indicated that beneath the meeting of two eminent

1. The phrase is Merton's. See *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968) 138.

2. I gratefully acknowledge the support of the director and staff of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture at Nagoya, who welcomed me as a visiting scholar during June and July 1991.

and apparently open-minded persons were many layers of ambiguity and hidden agendas. To sort all this out would require a book, or at least an extensive monograph. What I will attempt here is something much less ambitious—the raising of a number of questions and a public rumination on where my research on this topic might take me next.

### What is Christianity?

Suzuki was not backwards in coming forwards to express his opinion of what Christianity is all about. What he meant, however, was not always clear. Consider the following:

As long as God is content in himself he is non-existent; he must be awakened to something which is not himself, when he is God. God is God when God is not God, yet what is not God must be in himself too. And this—what is not himself—is his own Thought or Consciousness. With this Consciousness he departs from himself and at the same time returns to himself. You cannot say that Thought is by Being and that Being has its basis in itself; you must say that Being is Being because of Thought, which is to say, that Being is Being because Being is not Being.<sup>3</sup>

In a letter to Merton, dated March 31, 1959, Suzuki was somewhat more intelligible:

I am trying to write my understanding of Christianity. Some of the ideas I have are:

We have never been driven out of Eden;  
We still retain innocence;  
We are innocent just because of our sinfulness;  
Paradise and original sin are not contradictory;  
God wanted to know himself, hence the creation;  
When we know ourselves we know God;  
etc. etc.<sup>4</sup>

When I showed this quotation to Mrs. Mihoko Bekku, who was Suzuki's secretary for many years (when she was Miss Okamura), she

3. D. T. Suzuki, *Living by Zen*, ed. Christmas Humphreys (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1972) 12.

4. Robert E. Daggy, ed., *Encounter: Thomas Merton & D. T. Suzuki*, (Monterey, Ky.: Larkspur Press, 1988) 12–13.

exclaimed, "That is exactly what Dr. Suzuki thought," and began to explain the "etc. etc."<sup>5</sup> One of the "etceteras" was the resurrection. Why did not Christ resurrect immediately? Why did he wait three days? This, said Mrs. Bekku, was a question which Suzuki asked Merton when he met him, and Merton tried to answer him, but could not do so to Suzuki's satisfaction. From a Zen point of view, Suzuki had said, spiritual life should come immediately from spiritual death; bodily resurrection was not the point.

Further, Mrs. Bekku felt that Suzuki was probably thinking of three of his favorite Biblical passages—Exodus 3:14, John 8:58, and Genesis 1:3.<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew of Exodus 3:14 (אֲנִי הַיְהוָה), which is in incomplete or dynamic mode (the so-called "imperfect tense") is usually interpreted on the basis of the LXX, which uses the Greek present tense (*Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν*), from which we get the static English statement I AM THAT I AM (according to the King James version which, said Mrs. Bekku, was the translation Suzuki usually read). In 1957 Erich Fromm met Suzuki and told him about the difference when the Hebrew was read rather than the English. "I am becoming I am becoming" (as, Mrs. Bekku said, Fromm had translated) seemed preferable to Suzuki because it fitted the Zen experience better. Similarly, he liked the saying of Christ in the Fourth Gospel "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58) because of its Zen feel.

As for Genesis 1:3 ("And God said, Let there be light: and there was light"), Mrs. Bekku said that when Suzuki read these words he asked, "Who was there to witness this act?" He often asked Christians about this, but none could answer. His own answer was "I was there!" This was the Zen answer.

Suzuki gave an extended commentary on his interpretation of Genesis 1:3, in which, further, he identified the Hebrew כֹּחַ ("good") with the Chinese *miao*<sup>a</sup> ("fine" in the senses of, as in English, both "subtle" and "marvelous," and used in Buddhist texts to translate Sanskrit *sat*<sup>\*</sup> in compounds such as *saddharma*, true, real, full or "good"

Buddhism), in a 1965 interview with Richard De Martino (who was his secretary prior to Miss Okamura):

... in the Old Testament Book of Genesis it is written that God commanded, "Let there be light," and there was light; and the light was separated from the darkness. God saw this light and said that it was "good." Now this "good," in my view, is a "good" that precedes the differentiation between good and evil. I disagree with those Western thinkers and theologians who would maintain that this "good" is the good of good-and-evil. In my understanding, as a "good" that is "before" or "prior to" all dichotomous discriminations—including that between good and evil—this "good" is what would be characterized in Buddhism (and, coincidentally, in Taoism) as *miao*<sup>a</sup>. From such a vantage point, looking upon this "Let there be light!" as a Zen injunction or a Zen command, it would mean: "Dispel—or Awaken from—your delusion!"; or, "See—or be at—the time 'before' heaven and earth were divided into two!" Indeed, if re-interpreted as a Zen challenge, this fiat could be reformulated as: "Be with God in His workshop 'before'—or 'prior to'—His saying 'Let there be light!'"

Examples could be multiplied, but enough has been quoted, I believe, to show that Suzuki approached Christianity not so much as a curious enquirer as a "Zen" interpreter. (Just what he meant by "Zen" we shall examine shortly.) If we realize this, we are not too surprised when we see him identify the Christian God with the Buddhist *nen*<sup>b</sup>, the dimensionless present moment of enlightenment:

... when Christians stand all naked, shorn of their dualistic garments, they will discover that their God is no other than the Absolute Present itself.<sup>8</sup>

Merton, for his part, does not seem to have protested these (as we must call them) distortions of the Christian message. It is particularly odd that, as far as I can find out, Merton does not insist on Suzuki taking the cross seriously. The cross is spectacularly missing from Suzuki's interpretation of Christianity—and for good reason—he found

5. Interview with Mrs. Bekku and Dr. Masao Abe in the Palace Side Hotel, Kyoto, June 19, 1991.

6. These passages occur again and again in Suzuki's writings. The importance of Exodus 3:14 and John 8:58 to Suzuki's thinking was independently stressed to me by Dr. Eshin Nishimura in an interview which he kindly granted me at his temple, Kōfuku Zenji, in Notogawa (Shiga Prefecture), later that same day.

7. "Reflections on Zen and the West," originally published in Japanese in the *Asahi Journal* 7:11 (March 14, 1965). Translated, edited, and annotated by Richard J. De Martino. Privately circulated manuscript.

8. *Living by Zen*, 65.

it disgusting.<sup>9</sup> Mrs. Bekku said that Suzuki was repelled by the image of Christ crucified, especially by the roadside crucifixes which he saw in Germany, with blood realistically streaming down—and in Spain and Mexico it was even worse! When he asked people about them, they said, “They make us feel grateful.” But, he thought, how could one be grateful for blood? Surely there must be a sadomasochism in the psychology of such cultures?

In Shintō, and therefore Japanese culture in general, blood is regarded as polluting, so that the biblical notion of blood as purifying is largely inaccessible. An intelligent Japanese man to whom I was trying to explain the Mass studied my missalette with interest, but gave out a yelp and dropped it in alarm when he came to the words *kore wa watashi no chi no sakazuki* (“this is the cup of my blood”). Even Japanese Christians tend to be uncomfortable with the Blood of Christ. The retelling of the life of Christ by the modern Japanese Catholic novelist Shusaku Endo manages to finesse the crucifixion and portray Jesus largely through Taoist images of strength-in-weakness.<sup>10</sup>

It is perhaps significant that the Christian teacher with whom Suzuki felt most at home was Meister Eckhart.<sup>11</sup> The Meister has a lot to say about Zen-compatible things like divine sparks, nothingness, and paradox, but the cross is conspicuous by its absence. I raised this point with Matthew Fox,<sup>12</sup> and tried, without success, to sell Mother Julian of Norwich to him as a greater *Christian* mystic than Eckhart, because Julian sees the blood, and lots of it (“The copiousness [of the blood] resembles the drops of water which fall from the eaves of a house after a great shower of rain, falling so thick that no human ingenuity can count them”<sup>13</sup>) and she sees it as both horrifying and healing.

9. The problem of the absence of the Cross in the discussion of Christianity by the Kyoto School is examined by James Heisig in “East-West Dialogue: Sūnyatā and Kenōsis,” *Spirituality Today* 39:2 (summer 1987) 137–47, and 39:3 (autumn 1987) 211–24.

10. *A Life of Jesus*, trans., Shusaku Endo, Richard A. Schuchert, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1973).

11. Eckhart was chosen as the Christian referent in Suzuki’s *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (New York: Harper; London: Allen and Unwin, 1962).

12. Interview at the College of the Holy Names, Oakland, Calif., December 19, 1991.

13. Chapter 8 of the long text: see Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans., Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., and James Walsh, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press) 188.

## What is Zen?

I have presented evidence, partial though it must be at this stage, that Suzuki expressed a greater interest in interpreting Christianity in “Zen” terms than in understanding Christianity on its own terms and that Merton did not seriously object to this procedure. Indeed, if, in this light, we re-read *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*,<sup>14</sup> especially the dialogue between Suzuki and Merton in the appendix, we might be persuaded to believe that Merton was even eager to *accept* a “Zen” interpretation of Christianity.

But what, after all, did Suzuki mean by “Zen”? He uses the word as if it referred to an unproblematically unitary tradition of transhistorical, transcultural, translogical, and indeed altogether transcendental, yet deeply personal, experience of non-duality. Anyone familiar with the rich variety of lineages and sub-lineages in Buddhism in general, and in Zen (and its variants in China, Korea and Viet Nam) in particular, must wonder at this approach. Yet, in the West, for many years, his interpretation went unquestioned. Merton called him “the chief authority on Zen Buddhism.”<sup>15</sup>

There seem to be two ways of contextualizing Suzuki’s interpretation of Zen as transcendental experience: personal, and political.<sup>16</sup>

On the personal side, Suzuki’s father was a medical doctor who was a Confucian scholar and an adherent of Rinzai Zen, and his mother was a follower of a sectarian form of Shinshū (True Pure Land Buddhism, founded by Shinran [1173–1262]) called *hijihōmon*.<sup>17</sup> *Hijihō-*

14. See n. 1.

15. Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967) 207.

16. My reflections on Suzuki’s personal life are an expansion on an intriguing remark by Professor Hisao Inagaki that Suzuki’s great interest in direct religious experience may have come from his mother, “who belonged to an obscure, heretical group of Shin Buddhists who emphasized direct experience of Amida Buddha.” (Interview with Professor Inagaki at the Kyōto Dai-ni Tower Hotel, Kyoto, July 17, 1991.) However, the views expressed here are entirely my own.

17. See Suzuki’s own remarks on this (where it is spelled *hijibomon*) on pp. 14–15 of *A Zen Life: D. T. Suzuki Remembered*, ed., Masao Abe (New York: Weatherhill, 1986). He calls it, rather vaguely, an “esoteric strain of Pure Land Shin Buddhism,” recalls “a kind of *hijibomon* ‘baptism’” which he underwent when nine or ten years old, and admits that “. . . I may have been influenced by my mother’s involvement with *hijibomon*.”

*mon*, literally "Secret Buddhism," is classified by Shinshū as a heresy (*i-anjin*<sup>d</sup>, literally "un-peaceful mind," "peaceful mind" being a technical Shin term for orthodoxy), with the following characteristics:<sup>18</sup>

- it spreads in secret, in a cell-type organization, which helps to preserve its secrecy;
- it holds its ceremonies at night, meeting in storehouses;<sup>19</sup>
- it is very critical of the establishment, especially of Shinshū, and calls for its downfall;
- the members elect laypersons as leaders, to whom they are fiercely loyal, disregarding the official Shinshū priests;
- the members interpret doctrine freely, according to their own inclinations, e.g., they say that one can become a Buddha in this very body, and that this world, just as it is, is the Pure Land.

Professor Taitetsu Unno of Smith College described the method of initiation as follows:<sup>20</sup> The neophyte is covered with a blanket and taken, at night, inside the storehouse, where s/he hears the chanting and is told of the wisdom-light of Amida Buddha. Suddenly, the blanket is removed, and the abrupt experience of physical light precipitates (it is hoped) an equally abrupt experience of the wisdom-light of Amida. Thus, contrary to the orthodox teaching of Shinshū, which defers enlightenment until after death, one feels oneself to be a Buddha right now, in this very world.

The tradition started under Hōnen (1133–1212, Shinran's teacher), and Shinran disowned his son Zenran for similar practices. Later, both Kakunyo (1270–1351) and Rennyō (1415–1499) wrote against it. However, the somewhat remote location of the sect, mostly in Noto Peninsula on the north shore of Honshū, and its popular appeal, made it difficult for the authorities to eliminate it.

18. "Hijihōmon," *Nihon Rekishi Daijiten* (Encyclopedia of Japanese History), Tokyo, 1975, vol. 8, p. 186, cols. 4–5. I am indebted to Fr. Jan Van Bragt of the Nanzan Institute for this reference.

19. The storehouse (*dozō*), sometimes called in English a godown, is the structure in the traditional Japanese house where treasures are kept. Built of stone, and separate from the main dwelling (which is wooden), it has no windows, and is thus an ideal structure for secret meetings.

20. Personal communication, Buddhist Study Center, Honolulu, August 8, 1991.

The features of the sect which are important for our discussion are its concentration on immediate experience, and its objection to doctrinal and institutional control as irrelevant, or even an obstacle, to this experience. Suzuki, who was born near the Noto Peninsula, seems to have been deeply influenced by these characteristics. He interpreted, dare we say, the Zen of his father in terms of the experiences of his mother. And, it may be that here we have also the clue both to his attraction to Eckhart, and (although it was not at first his idea) his willingness to spend long hours translating Swedenborg.<sup>21</sup>

Again, if Suzuki was attracted to the *hijihōmon* experience but, perhaps, wary of its heretical reputation, it might explain why he occasionally claimed that there was no "mysticism" in Zen. According to Fr. Heinrich Dumoulin, Suzuki understood "mysticism" as an Eng-

21. Suzuki translated Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* (1916), *New Jerusalem and its Doctrines* (1914), *Divine Love and Wisdom* (1914), and *Divine Providence* (1915). (Curiously, *Heaven and Hell* is not included in the *Suzuki Daisetsu Zenshu* [Collected Works of Daisetz Suzuki].) He also wrote *Suwebenborugo* ("Swedenborg") (1913) which the *Zenshu* says "relies heavily on" (*oku yotte*) *Emmanuel Swedenborg: The Man and His Mission* by B. F. Barrett (Philadelphia: The Swedenborg Publishing Association, n.d.). Benjamin Fiske Barrett (1808–1892) was a well-known editor of Swedenborg's works but, although the *Swedenborg Researcher's Manual* by William Ross Woolfenden (Bryn Athyn, Penn.: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1988) records that the Swedenborg Publishing Association was "an independent publishing body founded by Barrett" (197) it makes no mention of the book which Suzuki supposedly used, and I have been unable to find any other reference to it. Mrs. Bekku gave this account of the circumstances under which Suzuki undertook the translation of Swedenborg's works: "Dr. Suzuki spent one Christmas holiday period in London, translating Swedenborg. He was helped by a [Swedenborgian?] minister who knew Latin. The minister would translate the Latin into English and Dr. Suzuki would translate the English into Japanese. 'I worked so hard on that, Mihoko-san' he said. He remembered the gaslight and the dark streets and the cold. He used to wrap himself in a blanket. They used a room in Great Russell Street upstairs from Probsthain's [an Oriental bookshop opposite the British Museum]. The room was still there many years later when Dr. Suzuki visited. 'That's just like the English' he said." A picture of the young Suzuki appears facing p. 352 of the *Transactions of the International Swedenborg Congress, held in connection with the Celebration of the Swedenborg Society's Centenary, London, July 4 to 8, 1910* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 3rd ed., 1912), with the caption "DAISETZ TEITARO SUZUKI, Translator of *Heaven and Hell* into Japanese, A Vice-President of the International Swedenborg Congress."

lish translation of *mikkyō*<sup>f</sup>, Esoteric Buddhism.<sup>22</sup> "Esoteric Buddhism" may have sounded dangerously close to "Secret Buddhism."

From the political perspective, it should be noted that Suzuki was writing at a time when Buddhism in general had fallen into disrepute in Japan. It was seen as "corrupt, decadent, otherworldly, anti-social, parasitic, superstitious, and utterly inimical to Japan's aspirations for scientific and technological advancement."<sup>23</sup> In their own defense, Japanese Buddhist intellectuals borrowed and adapted the distinction that was beginning to be made in Europe between the pure essence of religion (what came to be known as spirituality) and its corrupt expression in history and culture. This "New Buddhism" (*shimbukkyō*<sup>g</sup>) was characterized as "'modern,' 'cosmopolitan,' 'humanistic,' and 'socially responsible.'"<sup>24</sup>

If, then, there was a pure, essential, spiritual Buddhism, where could it be found? Not in doctrines and institutions, clearly, for they are all too culture-bound (and by this move, the New Buddhists stole the thunder of their accusers), but in the innermost heart of those who have experienced true awakening. Various phrases like "No dependence on words and letters: direct pointing at the human heart" could then be selected from the Zen tradition and made to seem consonant with what we might call the psychological monism of Otto, Schleiermacher, and (especially important for Suzuki) William James. The fact that traditional Zen, while admittedly spoofing the Buddhist tradition unmercifully, always remains firmly within it, insisting on proper authentication of a teacher's lineage and being, in fact, a conservative "back to *bodhi*" reform movement, was ignored in favor of packaging it as a non-doctrinal, pan-human awakening to reality-as-it-really-is.

It was perhaps because Merton accepted Suzuki's transcendental interpretation of Zen that he felt it might provide the needed stimu-

22. Interview with Father Dumoulin at Sophia University, Tokyo, July 19, 1991.

23. Robert H. Sharf, "Occidentalism and the Zen of Japanese Nationalism." Paper delivered at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Kansas City, Mo., November 24, 1991, 1. The paper is being revised for publication, and versions of it are scheduled to appear in *History of Religions* for August 1993 and in a book, being edited by Donald Lopez, with the working title *Curators of the Buddha: Orientalism and the Study of Buddhism*.

24. *Ibid.*, 2.

lus to revive the contemplative tradition in Christianity.<sup>25</sup> What Merton did not seem to realize is that Zen Buddhism is *Buddhism*, and to practice it sincerely entails, as with any other form of Buddhism, the giving up of belief in the Christian (or any other) God.

### What is Japaneseness?

Suzuki's discussion of what he calls Zen is intimately bound up with his defence of "Japaneseness" (*nihonjinron*<sup>h</sup>, literally "discussions of Japanese humanity"). Japaneseness is a topic of such endless fascination to the Japanese that bookstores today regularly have a *nihonjinron*<sup>h</sup> section. The axiom which, being an axiom, is not open to discussion, is straightforward: the Japanese people, and the Japanese language and culture, are unique. The debate is more complex: what *exactly* is it that is unique?

It is usual to say that Japaneseness became a subject of enquiry during the Meiji era (1868–1912), but it seems to me that it can be said to have existed, perhaps under different names, or even without a name, long before that. My suggestion is that Japaneseness is the true "religion" of Japan, and that it has been the true religion of Japan ever since the archipelago was united into a nation. This has something to do, in my opinion, with the survival of Shintō, or perhaps it is the survival of Shintō that has ensured the survival of Japaneseness.

Shintō has most of the features of what we used to call primitive religion, and which we now call tribal, preliterate or (the term I prefer) pre-Axial. That is to say, it is local, pro-cosmic, and celebratory. It has no notion of a profound break between nature and humans, or humans and deities. It gives unity not to those who believe in its doctrines but to those who feel that the *kami* (deity) is their Parent (*oyasama*). The only way in which Shintō differs from other pre-Axial religions (such as the religions of ancient Greece or Egypt) is that it is still living.

25. In my article "Fire on the Seven Storey Mountain: Why Are Catholics Looking East?" *Toward an Integrated Humanity: Thomas Merton's Journey*, ed., M. Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O. (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1988 [Cistercian Studies Series, no. 103]) 204–21, I suggest that Merton went through a number of stages, slightly ahead of, and more lucidly than, the Catholic Church as a whole, and that when he met Suzuki he was at the "Romantic Orientalism" stage (see 211–15).



Japaneseness then might be seen as a modern form of the pre-Axial split between tribe members, who alone are called "human," and the rest of the world, who are, if not enemies, certainly strange and sub-human; of war against such non-tribe members; and of a monistic or quasi-monistic identification with nature.

All of these values are discussed by Suzuki as "Zen" in his *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton N.J.: Bollingen Series, 1959) and even more clearly in his *Japanese Spirituality* which, published in Japanese in 1944, has only been available in English since 1972, and in America since 1988.<sup>26</sup>

Suzuki makes a distinction between spirit (*seishin*<sup>i</sup>), which is the opposite of matter, and spirituality (*reisei*<sup>i</sup>), which is "non-discriminatory wisdom."<sup>27</sup> He then sees spirituality as something which awakens after a people has "proceeded a certain degree up the cultural ladder"<sup>28</sup> and concludes that "Zen typifies Japanese spirituality."<sup>29</sup> But it is not alone, for Shinshū is also thoroughly Japanese, although "it is necessary to distinguish distinctly between Shinshū the Shin Sect, which is a group entity, and Shinshū experience, which is the foundation of this group."<sup>30</sup> (Do we hear in this statement the echo of mother's *hijihōmon*?) Japanese spirituality is superior to that of India and China, for only in Japan has Pure Land Buddhism advanced to term as a "transcendental experience" whereas "the Chinese Pure Land school of fifteen hundred years ago is the same as the Pure Land school of today."<sup>31</sup> As for Zen:

Zen traces its source to the Indian thought of the southern tradition. It materialized within the northern tradition as seen in the Chinese people, where nurtured by a northern temper, it possessed a quite positive and practical nature. Going eastward across the sea, it touched the southern tradition as present in the spirituality of the Japanese people. Japanese spirituality thus on the one hand accepted the practical, logical nature of the Chinese people; but more than that, it perceived in Zen what should be

26. Daisetz Suzuki, *Japanese Spirituality*, trans., Norman Waddell (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988).

27. *Ibid.*, 15.

28. *Ibid.*, 16.

29. *Ibid.*, 18.

30. *Ibid.*, 19.

31. *Ibid.*, 20.

termed the intuitive nature of the Indian people as well, with its southern character. . . . This explains why Zen sympathized so directly and deeply with the mentality of the Kamakura warrior class.<sup>32</sup>

We are treading on dangerous ground. With these words, the gentle mystic begins to turn into the mighty warrior who will die for the *kokutai*<sup>k</sup>, the Spirit of Japan which can never be wrong.<sup>33</sup> It is from this perspective that Suzuki can make what Robert Sharf calls "occidental" statements as, for example, his characterization of "East and West" in "Lectures on Zen Buddhism."<sup>34</sup> Suzuki hangs his argument on two poems—a haiku by Basho, and a stanza from a poem by Tennyson:

Basho—  
When I look carefully  
I see the *nazuna* blooming  
By the hedge!

Tennyson—  
Flower in the crannied wall,  
I pluck you out of the crannies;—  
Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,  
Little flower—but if I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.

From these two short pieces of literature, which we are asked to regard as typical of East and West, Suzuki derives two opposite worldviews:<sup>35</sup>

32. *Ibid.*, 23.

33. Suzuki was accused of this by, especially, Takeshi Umehara who, in an article in the August 1966 issue of *Tembo*, wrote that the placement (in *Zen and Japanese Culture*) of the chapters "Zen and the Samurai" and "Zen and Swordsmanship" immediately after "General Remarks on Japanese Art Culture" . . . speaks to us of a certain tendency towards militarism in [Suzuki's] thought, the same militarism that Japan has embraced since the early Meiji period." Quoted by Daisetsu Fujioka in "Suzuki Daisetsu," *Nihon Meisō Retsuden* (Biographies of Eminent Japanese Buddhist Clerics), Tōkyō: Shakai Shisōsha, 1968. For an English translation of this biography, see *Dharma World* 19 (March–April 1992) 34–38.

34. D. T. Suzuki, Erich Fromm, and Richard De Martino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Harper, 1960) 1–10. I am indebted to Professor Jamie Hubbard for reminding me of this passage.

35. A similar point, also using the "crannied wall" poem from Tennyson,

I have selected these two poets, Basho and Tennyson, as indicative of two basic approaches to reality. Basho is of the East and Tennyson of the West. As we compare them we find that each bespeaks his traditional background. According to this, the Western mind is: analytical, discriminative, differential, inductive, individualistic, intellectual, objective, scientific, generalizing, conceptual, schematic, impersonal, legalistic, organizing, power-wielding, self-assertive, disposed to impose its will upon others, etc. Against these Western traits those of the East can be characterized as follows: synthetic, totalizing, integrative, nondiscriminative, deductive, nonsystematic, dogmatic, intuitive, (rather, affective), nondiscursive, subjective, spiritually individualistic and socially group-minded, etc.<sup>36</sup>

This is a strange list, but we are clearly meant to take "the East" (i.e., Japan) as having "proceeded a certain [further] degree up the cultural ladder," that is, as more mature or, as one might say today, more "together," and that this maturity is marked by an ability to handle paradox without qualms, and to leave nature alone, admiring it rather than dominating, managing, and insisting on understanding it fully.

Well, let me screw up my courage and say flat out that this is nonsense. It is a bad joke, as anyone who has been to Japan realizes as soon as s/he steps off the plane. Not only is Japan a serious technological rival of the West, causing CEOs in Detroit to tremble, the very "Zen" approach to nature which Suzuki praises is a manipulation of it. "Raw nature" says Donald Richie in a brilliantly perceptive article, "is simply never there."<sup>37</sup> "Natural" nature is, in Japan, always arranged, brought into the anthropomorphic circle, created. Unkempt nature is nonexistent, invisible, ignored. The hand that stunts the *bonsai* is the same that rapes the mountain for yet another underground shopping mall. If we are to compare East and West, we cannot do it like this.

The complexity of the issue is emphasized by an article in *The Japan Times* on bird watching.<sup>38</sup> There is, apparently, no indigenous

but a different haiku, is made by Suzuki in his essay "Kirisutokyō to Bukkyō" (Christianity and Buddhism) *Zenshu*, vol. 22, 272-75.

36. *Ibid.*, 5.

37. Donald Richie, *A Lateral View: Essays on Contemporary Japan* (Tokyo: The Japan Times, Ltd., rev. ed., 1991) 13.

38. Mark Brazil, "Wild Watch," *The Japan Times*, July 28, 1991, 13.

Japanese tradition of bird watching, and when, under western influence, a society for it was formed, it had to be called "Wild Bird Club" (*yacho no kai*) since the word "bird," all by itself, implied a caged or cooked bird, i.e., an anthropocentrically managed bird, not just a bird-bird. Having read the article, it occurred to me to wonder whether it was not, after all, "evil" Cartesianism which, by firmly dividing observer and observed, has allowed the West to view nature-in-itself, to propose that nature has its own inalienable rights, and so to lead the world in ecology and what Raimundo Panikkar calls "ecosophy."

### Where to go Next?

Suzuki's maverick and fiery student Ryōmin Akizuki expresses his doubts about the possibility of true dialogue:

In our Zen-Christian Colloquia in the past several years, I have been impressed by the fact that Christian participants have been more enthusiastic than Zen participants to learn from the other religion, and I have been secretly afraid that the Zen participants have been attending the Colloquia to teach others but not to learn from others, and that, while the Zen participants appear contented and satisfied with their religion, the life of Zen is running dry.<sup>39</sup>

Dialogue requires that those on both sides should both speak and listen. I have, I believe, to my dismay, uncovered preliminary evidence that Thomas Merton was a good listener but that D. T. Suzuki was not. Merton, I think, genuinely wanted to learn from Suzuki, so that he could write about how to put his own house (the Catholic Church) in order, but Suzuki, it appears, wanted to learn only in so far as it would assist him to become a better teacher of Japaneseness to the West, so as to assist it in its evolution towards true spirituality. According to Mrs. Bekku, the *real* religion would help humanity free itself: Zen was the best skillful means (*upāya-kauśalya*) to bring about this freedom, Shin was second best, and Christianity. . . . Mrs. Bekku wanted to say in closing that Dr. Suzuki really admired Christianity and that those who say he disliked it are wrong.

39. Ryōmin Akizuki, "The Zen-Christian Dialogue in Me," *A Zen-Christian Pilgrimage: The Fruits of Ten Annual Colloquia in Japan 1967-1976* (The Zen-Christian Colloquium, 1981; typeset by Paul Island typesetters [Hong Kong] Ltd.) 45-50.

In order to continue this research, the following needs to be done:

- the translation into English of the few works on Buddhism and Christianity by Suzuki which are scattered throughout the *Zenshu*
- access to the Matsugaoka Bunko<sup>40</sup> for long enough to catalogue the books and examine marginalia, in order to acquire some notion of Suzuki's exposure to Christian materials
- the writing of a complete, fully researched, and unbiased biography of D. T. Suzuki (there are at present not more than three or four short and rather hagiographic accounts) in order to set his thinking in proper historico-social context
- an examination of the nature and extent of Suzuki's involvement in western occultism (Paul Carus in the U.S.A.; René Daumal in Paris; translating Emmanuel Swedenborg), and the influence it had on him
- a rigorous enquiry into the interaction between those central to the Kyōto School, such as Kitarō Nishida, and those on the periphery, such as D. T. Suzuki, with a fearless investigation of the extent to which the School either supported or undercut Japanese militarism and nationalism through its particular understanding of *nihonjinron*<sup>h</sup> and *kokutai*<sup>k</sup>
- a re-examination of Merton's writings in the light of all the above

When this has been done we will be ready, as Professor Nishimura has suggested, to move into the "post-Suzuki age" beyond the conflict of East and West and into true dialogue.<sup>41</sup>

40. Such access is notoriously difficult. When letters of introduction (in Japanese) failed to produce any results, I resorted to the "dumb foreigner" trick and simply turned up: however, the curator had gone to Kyōto, and I was only able to see the outside of the Bunko and visit Suzuki's grave.

41. "Posuto-Suzuki no Jidai," a *geppo*<sup>l</sup> or monthly flyer which Professor Nishimura wrote for inclusion in *Nihon no Meicho* ([Selections from] Famous Japanese Authors), vol. 43 (Kiyozawa Manshi and Daisetz Suzuki), Kyoto: Chūō Kōron Sha, 1984.

## GLOSSARY OF CHINESE CHARACTERS

a	妙
b	念
c	祕事法門
d	異安心
e	土藏
f	空教
g	新佛教
h	日本人論
i	精神
j	靈性
k	团体
l	月報