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***DIALOGUES BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND BUDDHISTS:
FROM JAPAN TO THE WORLD***

Abstract: Most Japanese consider themselves to be non-religious or secular. “Ritual, but not religious” might be a useful term to describe Japanese religious characteristics. Indeed, we celebrate many religious rites throughout the year and throughout our lives, some of which are closely related to Buddhism, others are related to Shinto, and others are related to Christianity. For most Japanese, religion is not a specific belief system but a pragmatic instrument for daily life. Although Christian faith does not root itself in the Japanese community, when we look back at the history, we find that some Christian missionaries took tremendous efforts to bridge the gap between Buddhism and Christianity.

In this paper, I would like to trace these efforts. First I will present some demographic facts about religion in Japan. According to the annual reports of Japan’s Ministry of Education, Cultural, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan has had more religious adherents than its total population. Next I will trace how the dialogues between Christians and Buddhists developed. In the Meiji Era, although the Meiji Constitution guaranteed the long-cherished freedom of religious belief, the Christian churches entered a period of hardship, persecution, and retarded growth. 1896 is a remarkable turning point for the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism, because the first Buddhist-Christian conference was held in Tokyo. That was a social gathering of Buddhists and Christians for the purpose of exchanging opinions.

The next turning point is the lectures on Zen-Buddhism by D.T. Suzuki, who found something common between Christianity and Zen-Buddhism. In the end, I will reach the most important figure --Father Hugo Lassalle. He was a Jesuit priest who tried to bridge the Zen-Buddhism and Catholicism through the practice of meditation. His effort bore fruit and gave impacts on people not only in Japan but also overseas.

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What do Catholicism and Zen have in common, then? I might say it is the practice of meditation and mysticism. I would like to close my paper by citing a passage from W. Johnston – “What united us was not philosophy but religious experience.”

Keywords: *Japan, Buddhists, Christians, Zen, Catholic, Interfaith Dialogue*

Introduction

Most Japanese consider themselves to be non-religious or secular. Sometimes we are at a loss unable to express any ideas when we are asked about our religious affiliation. “Ritual, but not religious” might be a useful term to describe Japanese religious characteristics. Indeed, we celebrate many religious rites throughout the year and throughout our lives some of which are closely related to Buddhism, others are related to Shinto, and others are related to Christianity. For most Japanese, religion is not a specific belief system but a pragmatic instrument for daily life; Japanese suddenly become Christians at Christmas and at weddings, they become Shintoists on New Year’s days, and then they become serious Buddhists at funerals.

Christian faith does not roots itself in the Japanese community – even when we celebrate Christmas, we imagine Santa Claus more than Jesus Christ. However, when we look back at our history, we find that some Christian missionaries took tremendous efforts to bridge the gap between Buddhism and Christianity. In this paper, I would like to trace these efforts.

Demography and Brief History of the Religions in Japan

1) Demography

First of all let us see some democratic facts about Japanese religion. Japan consists of an extensive archipelago on the far Eastern Coast of the Asian continent. Its population is over 126million. Although it is said that Japan is one of the world’s most homogeneous nations, we have other ethnic groups both in the northern part – Hokkaido, and in the southern part – Okinawa. However, in this paper, I would like to discuss the religions of the great majority of Japanese people.

According to annual reports by Japan’s Ministry of Education, Cultural, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan has had more religious adherents than its total population. Roemer discusses this phenomenon in detail and focuses on data from 2004: “Here, approximately 109 million Japanese were Shinto adherents, over 93 million were Buddhists, 9,599,000 were labeled “other”, and slightly more than

two million were Christians, for a total of 213,827,000 religious adherents (Statistics Bureau 2007:747). The population of Japan at the time, however, was only 127,776,000. These data indicate that religious adherents made up more than 1.67 times the total population in 2004.”¹

Roemer explains this gap as follows: “Perhaps a more accurate explanation is that these figures are reported by officially recognized religious institutions and not by Japanese individuals (cf. Kisala 2006). Frequently, affiliation with a Buddhist temple or Shinto shrine is based on geography or heredity rather than on one’s personal religious motivations (see Davis 1992; Traphagan 2004). Many are automatically included as members (*ujiko*) by their local Shinto shrine simply because they live within its district. Similarly, in the case of Buddhist temples, though a significant number of Japanese will state that they are affiliated with the temple where their ancestral tomb is located, most likely, the living household members did not choose this connection. Additionally, the figures reported by shrines and temples often include the same individuals or families more than once, because Japanese are free to make donations that may be recorded at a number of places of worship, regardless of their religion. Most likely, these individuals do not consider themselves affiliates of any religious institution, and they will visit different shrines and temples throughout the year on an as-needed basis (see Reader and Tanabe 1998). For these reasons we see why Shinto boasted 85% of the population and Buddhism claimed 73% in 2004”.

Table 1 shows the latest (2011) demographic data of the religious statistics officially announced by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. This also shows that the total number of religious adherents is 196 million, while the total Japanese population of 2011 is 126 million.

Table 1: *The number of religious adherents, 2011*

Shinto	100,770,882
Buddhism	84,708,309
Christianity	1,920,892
Others	9,490,446
Total	196,890,529

¹ Michael Roemer, “Religious Affiliation in Contemporary Japan: Untangling the Enigma,” *Review of Religious Research* 50 (3) (2009): 298-320.

2) Brief History

According to an article published in *Religions of the World*, Japan has had a complex religious history, where religious forces from outside Japan (notable from continental Asia) have fused with indigenous forces to produce a variegated religious structure.² Consequently, religions in Japan are comprised of a number of organized religions, including Shinto, a tradition that developed in Japan with a specific focus on the Japanese situation, and Buddhism, which came to Japan from continental Asia in the 6th century. Also, Japan has a continuing folk religious tradition centered on customs, beliefs, and practices that go back thousands of years. I will show a brief history of each religion—when it entered Japan and what effects it has on the Japanese society.

3) The indigenous prehistoric religion and Shinto

The indigenous prehistoric religion of Japan was based around the veneration of kami; god or deity. There were a lot of kami, ranging from nature deities to the spirits of clan ancestors. The relationship between people and kami was a reciprocal one, with people venerating, praying to, and making offerings to the kami, whose role was to reciprocate by providing benefits, such as good harvests and health etc., and overseeing the fortunes of the living. This indigenous tradition coalesced into Shinto. The term “Shinto” means “the way of kami—gods or deities--” and indicates a tradition centered on myths that tell that the land and the people of Japan were given life by the kami, who are considered protectors of Japan and ancestors of the Japanese imperial family. Such myths have bound Shinto, the emperor, and the nation together and have given Shinto a special status of nationalist orientation. In fact, from 1868--the beginning of the Meiji era-- to 1945--the end of World War II--, Shinto had been considered a national religion.

4) Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism

Buddhism entered Japan through China in the sixth century. At the same time, Taoism was transmitted to Japan by secular immigrants from Korea and China, not by priests. Also Confucian ethical concepts came into Japan from China. Confucianism affirmed the importance of venerating one’s elders and parents and placed great emphasis on caring for the spirits of the dead, who were worshipped as ancestors. When it entered Japan, Buddhism had absorbed many

² J. Gordon Melton and Martin Baumann eds., *Religion of the World*, Vol. 4 (ABC-CLIO, 2010), 565.

elements of Taoism and Confucianism. Buddhism also brought with it a variety of practices and rituals, ranging from the study of scriptures to meditation, pilgrimage, and mortuary rituals. These practices and rituals have influenced Japanese religion ever since. Buddhism received support from the imperial court and there was a close relationship between Buddhism and the state until the 19th century.

Japanese Buddhism developed into the variety of sects, which brought forth innovative leaders. In the early ninth century, two monks: Saicho (767-822) and Kukai (774-835), respectively, established the Tendai and Shingon sects. In the Kamakura period, between the late 12th and the 14th centuries, a number of new Buddhist leaders emerged to establish new forms of Buddhism. Eisai (1141-1215) and Dogen (1200-1253), respectively, established the Rinzai and Soto Zen sects based on meditation practices. Honen (1133-1212) founded the Pure Land sect and Shinran (1173-1262) founded the True Pure Land sect, both of which are based in faith in the Buddha Amida. Also, Nichiren (1122-1282) established the Nichiren-sect and espoused a nationalistic form of Buddhism based on the Lotus Sutra.

Although the status of Buddhism as national religion finally collapsed when the Tokugawa Shogunate was taken over from the Meiji Government, the Buddhist rituals remained in people's everyday life.

5) Christianity

In the 16th century, Japan also encountered Christianity when Jesuit missionaries came to Japan. They were briefly successful - the number of converted Christian reached 150 thousands, when Hideyoshi Toyotomi banned Christianity in the early 17th century. Between the 17th and the 19th century, Japan's political rulers took the isolation policy, banning Christianity completely. During this period that lasted for about 250 years, Japan was closed to the outside world. All Japanese people were forced to take an oath of allegiance to Buddhism and to conduct the funerals and memorial services of their ancestors at their local Buddhist temples. Accordingly Buddhism became "a de facto pillar of the state"³ and was given monopoly on the performance of death rituals.

This hostile environment for Christians turned better after the Tokugawa Shogunate was overthrown by the new Meiji Government, the top of which is the Japanese Emperor.

³ J. Gordon Melton and Martin Bauman eds., *Religion*, 566.

6) Modernization and Religious Pluralism

As mentioned above, Japan opened its doors after the Meiji Restoration (1868). The Tokugawa Shogunate was overthrown by the Meiji Government and Buddhism lost its privileged status; Shinto was elevated to the status of a national religion, instead, and the Japanese Emperor was to be portrayed as a sacred figure.

Sharf shows the hard situation Buddhism faced at this period as follows: “The early years of the Meiji were trying times for Japanese Buddhists. Their religion had become the subject of a devastating critique and persecution known as *haibutsu kishaku* or abolishing Buddhism and destroying [the teachings of] Shakamuni. Government ideologues succeeded for a time in censuring Buddhism as a corrupt, decadent, antisocial, parasitic, and superstitious creed, inimical to Japan’s need for scientific and technological advancement. At the same time, Buddhism was effectively rendered by its opponents as a foreign “other”, diametrically opposed to the cultural sensibility and innate spirituality of the Japanese”.⁴

As the new Meiji Government wanted to create a modern nation, the old Tokugawa system had to be destroyed. Not only Buddhism but the ethics of samurai, i.e., bushido were also attacked. Vederan Golijanin describes the situation during this period as follows: “New Government wanted to create modern Japan, which meant that old Tokugawa system must be destroyed. Apart from the shogun, the samurai and local lords were the greatest obstacle in process of modernizing, so their properties were confiscated and former warrior class was reduced to a level of common citizens. In such conditions, the bushido ethic lost the basis which it had in Tokugawa’s military regime, but the bushido consciousness continued to live in the minds of the samurai. Protestant missionaries introduced them to a new Lord they can serve – Jesus Christ. Many samurai thus converted to Christianity and redefined bushido as service to Christian God”.⁵

In fact, the similarities between Christianity and Bushido (the ethics of the samurai) attract increasing attention in Japan.⁶

As we have seen so far, Shinto became a state religion in the Meiji period. State Shinto reached its peak in the 1930s and got a political power. For example, the Bureau of Shrine was transformed into the Agency of Shinto Worship (Jingiin),

⁴ Robert H. Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” *History of Religions*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (August 1993): 1-43.

⁵ Vedran Golijiani, “Jesus in Japanese Culture. From Tokugawa Catacombs to Endo Shusaku,” *Annual Journal of St. Basil of Ostrog Orthodox Theological Faculty, University of Sarajevo* (November 2012): 35.

⁶ See Takemi Sasamori, *Bushido to Kirisuto-kyo* (Tokyo: Shincho-sya, 2013).

an extraministerial body. However, after World War II, the links between Shinto and the Japanese government were broken. According to *A History of Japanese Religion*, the situation surrounding Shinto after World War II was as follows: “Clause ten of the Potsdam Declaration, wetting out the terms for Japan’s surrender, demanded the establishment of the freedom of speech, religion, and thought. The Allied occupation authorities enforced this demand from the beginning of the occupation, in September 1945. In December they issued a directive titled “The Abolition of Governmental Sponsorship, Support, Perpetuation, Control, and Dissemination of State Shinto.” The so-called separation of the state and religion, beginning with the abolition of the State Shinto.”⁷

In May 1947, the new Constitution of Japan, which guarantees religious freedom as a basic human right, took effect and the State Shinto’s eighty-year dictatorship in religious matters finally came to an end.

That brought the age of religious diversity to Japan. Many new religions emerged, and in the field of Christianity, denominations left the Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan, which was established in 1941, in a quest for religious freedom. “The denominations that broke away in 1946 were the Kirisutokyo Kyodai Dan (Japan Brethren in Christ), Kassui Kirisuto Kyodan (Christian Church of the Living Water), Nihon Kirisuto Kaikakuha Kyokai (Reformed Church in Japan), Nihon Seikokai (Anglican Episcopal Church of Japan), Kyuseigun (Salvation Army), and Toyo Senkyokai Kiyome Kyokai (Kiyome Church of the Oriental Missionary Society). They were followed in 1947 by the Nihon Fukuin Kirisuto Kyodan (Japan Evangelical Christian Church), Nihon Horinesu Kyodan (Japan Holiness Church), Fukuin Dendo Kyodan (Evengetical Mission Church), Nihon Baptesuto Remmei (Japan Baptist Convention), Kirisuto Yukai (Religious Society of Friends), and Nihon Fukuin Ruteru Kyokai (Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church), and the trend continued in 1948 and 1949”⁸. Between 1946 and 1952, the Protestant membership in Japan swelled. However, after 1952, when the occupation by the allied forces ended, Christian fervor waned and large numbers of the young who had thronged the churches lost their interest. Compared with the large number of Christians in Korea, the number of Japanese Christians stayed low, but Christianity had a deep and far-reaching influence on the religion, ethics, education, and culture of Japan.

⁷ Kazuo Kasahara ed., *A History of Japanese Religion* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 2001), 542.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 522.

Dialogues between Christians and Buddhists

1) The Anti-Christian Campaigns in the Early Meiji Era

As mentioned above, the Meiji Government gave Shinto the status of national religion and then Buddhism took its place. In 1889, the Meiji Constitution was promulgated and it symbolized “the end of an epoch of rapid Westernization and Christian expansion”.⁹ Although the Constitution guaranteed the long-cherished freedom of religious belief, “the Christian churches entered a period of hardship, persecution, and retarded growth”.¹⁰ Also, the Buddhist renewal movement was closely related to the anti-Western and anti-Christian reaction. According to Thelle, “the frequency and aggressiveness of Buddhist campaigns increased drastically after 1889”¹¹.

Thelle surveyed the anti-Western Campaign as a concrete manifestation of the conflict. Let me summarize the background of the campaign after him.¹²

First, Thelle indicates that, in most cases, the Anti-Christian activity was directly related to obvious signs of Christian expansion. In order to counteract this, Buddhists sometimes held anti-Christian meetings and even took drastic actions to disturb Christian meetings. Second, he mentions that there was some feeling of Buddhist doctrinal superiority and they were eager to defeat Christian theology. Third, Buddhists’ attack on Christianity proved their nationalistic reaction. After 1889, there was a wave of nationalism, which supported this tendency.

In short, in the Early Meiji Era, Buddhist persecution of Christianity was a nationwide phenomenon and the situation was far from the dialogues between Christians and Buddhists.

2) The Buddhist-Christian Conference (1896)

1896 is a remarkable year for the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism. The first Buddhist-Christian conference was held in Tokyo on September 26, 1896. That was a social gathering of Buddhists and Christians for the purpose of exchanging opinions. The discussions were prompted by a questionnaire concerning the future of religion in Japan, published by Nihon Shukyo in May, 1896, and it was Soen Shaku who proposed the discussions between the two parties. This was the concrete starting point of the Buddhist-Christian Conference. Soen Shaku is the person who published the first English

⁹ Notto R. Thelle, *Buddhism and Christianity* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 95.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 136.

¹² Ibid., 136-146.

book about Zen.¹³ Sharf mentions that “Soen Roshi came to play a pivotal role in the export of Zen to the West, not only through his own efforts — his participation at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions, his subsequent lecture tour of America and Europe, and the English publication of his lectures - but also through the efforts of some of his students, notably D. T. Suzuki (1870-1966), and Nyogen Senzaki (1876-1958)”.¹⁴

Now the dialogues began. This conference can be considered a model of interfaith relationships.

3) D. T. Suzuki’s understanding of Christianity

D. T. Suzuki, a disciple of Soen Shaku, is a big figure in Zen-Buddhism. He was born in 1870 and was diligent enough to master English. First he helped his master Soen with his English. He then read a lot about Christianity and found something common between Christianity and Zen-Buddhism. He was impressed by the German theologian, Meister Eckhart’s sermon and was “convinced that Christian experiences are not after all different from those of the Buddhist¹⁵”. He thought that Eckhart’s idea of God’s self-love is connected with the idea of universal enlightenment of Zen-Buddhism. As D. T. Suzuki gave lectures in the United States, his idea of Zen-Buddhism attracted the beat generation in 1950’s.

Sharf says that it is no doubt that D. T. Suzuki is the single most important figure in the spread of Zen in the west¹⁶. I will quote him below:

“Suzuki was born in Kanazawa (Ishikawa Prefecture) in 1870, and first became interested in Zen in high school through the influence of his mathematics teacher Hojo Tokiyuki (1858-1929), a lay disciple of Kosen Roshi. Around the same time (i.e., 1887) Suzuki met Nishida Kitaro—a student at the same school—and the two would become lifelong friends. In 1889 Suzuki was forced to leave school due to financial difficulties, and after a stint as a primary school English teacher he entered Waseda University in 1891. Soon thereafter Suzuki transferred to Tokyo

¹³ According to the explanation by BBC, Zen Buddhism is a mixture of Indian Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism. It began in China, spread to Korea and Japan, and became very popular in the West from the mid 20th century. The essence of Zen is attempting to understand the meaning of life directly, without being misled by logical thought or language. Zen techniques are compatible with other faiths and are often used, for example, by Christians seeking a mystical understanding of their faith (“BBC-Religions-Buddhism: Zen Buddhism”, accessed October 4, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/subdivisionz/zen_1.shtml).

¹⁴ Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” 7.

¹⁵ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Misticism: Christian and Budddhist* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), 6-7.

¹⁶ Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” 12.

Imperial University, and at the same time began to commute to Engakuji to study first with Kosen Roshi, and following Kosen's death, with Shaku Soen. Suzuki reports that Soen Roshi started him on the mu koan, which he "passed" with a kensho experience at rohatsu sesshin (a week of intensive Zen practice commemorating Buddha's enlightenment) in 1896.

Suzuki's life changed dramatically when, in 1897, he moved to LaSalle, Illinois, to study with Paul Carus, the editor of *The Open Court* journal. He was to spend a total of eleven years in La Salle, earning his keep as a translator and proofreader at the Open Court Publishing Company. In addition, Suzuki took time off in 1905 in order to serve as Soen Roshi's translator and assistant during the latter's tour of America."¹⁷

4) Father Hugo Lassalle, S.J.

Hugo Lassalle was born in 1898 in Germany. He joined the Society of Jesus in 1919 and came to Japan as a missionary in 1929. He was fascinated with the country's Zen practices and he got Japanese citizenship in 1948. His Japanese name is Makibi Enomiya. Here is the obituary of Hugo Lassalle published in Otto Syre S.J.'s "Calendar of the Society of Jesus".¹⁸ If you read this you might understand what he did during his life:

"July 7th 1990 – Hugo M. Enomiya Lassalle
† in Munster

Father Lasalle was born as the son of a Huguenot family on November 11th 1898 in Externbrock, district Hoexter at the Weser. In 1919, after World War I he entered the Society of Jesus. In 1929 he went to Japan to take over a professorship for German language at Sophia University in Tokyo. His Japanese name was Makibi Enomiya.

In 1931, Together with students he created the 'Jochi Settlement', a social work settlement in the slums of Tokyo. From 1935 to 1949 he was Mission Superior of the Jesuit Mission in Japan. In a difficult time he was responsible for the Sophia University in Tokyo and for the Apostolic Vicariate of Hiroshima.

On August 6th 1945 he survived the atomic bomb release at close range.

After World War II it is because of his initiative that Jesuits from many countries came to Japan to help the work of the German Jesuits. An expression of his courage and commitment was the building of the World Peace Church in Hiroshima. This was Father Lassalle's idea and work.

¹⁷ Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁸ "July 7th 1990 – Hugo M. Enomiya Lassalle," accessed July 16, 2013, www.conspiration.de/syre/english/jul/e0707.html.

Aside from those activities he became more and more engaged. He became engrossed in the spirituality of Zen Buddhism and even became a qualified Zen Master. It is his merit that the Zen meditation was introduced into the Christian spirituality. After the Second Vatican Council he became by uncounted meditation courses in the German speaking countries for many people an instructor of the inner life. His experiences found expression in many books and publications.

For his role as mediator between the eastern and the western thinking Father Lassalle got much acknowledgment. Hiroshima, the city where he lived and worked for so many years, conferred on him the freedom of the town. The theological faculty of the University Mainz granted him the honorary doctor on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday.

During a meditation journey through Germany he fell and broke his thighbone. He needed care and therefore he came to Munster for the last months of his life into the order-own home for the elderly.

When pneumonia supervened he died in the St Francis Hospital Munster on July 7th 1990.

Several Japanese were present when he died. Those present sang in a low voice the song which he closed all his Zen courses with, namely 'Great God we praise you'. During the second strophe he imperceptibly passed away into God's eternity."

Lassalle read a lot of D. T. Suzuki's writings and learned about Zen Buddhism¹⁹. He experienced Zen for the first time in 1943, at the Eimeiji Temple in Tsuwano, Yamaguchi. He describes his experience as follows: "To say something about the contents of meditation is certainly the most difficult thing. It is characteristic that not a single word is said beforehand about the subject of the following meditation. At the sound of the gong, everybody goes to the meditation room. With faces turned towards the completely barren walls, all squat down in their assigned places, in the position described above. The spinal column has to be perfectly erect, and the hands folded in front in a prescribed way at all times. Not a single word is whispered, not even the slightest noise of a movement breaks the absolute silence. One sits there in this posture for one or two hours [...] What does the mind occupy itself with during all this time? Perhaps one could say that the mind should be free from all thought in the ordinary sense of the word, in order to become ready to receive the "enlightenment". This enlightenment is a new kind of knowledge, intuitive insight into the essence of being."²⁰

Since then he frequently visited the Eimeiji Temple. In 1945, unfortunately he was severely injured following the atomic bomb attack but he miraculously

¹⁹ Hugo Lassalle, S.J., "The Catholic Church and Zen Buddhism in Hiroshima," *The Irish Monthly*, Vol. 83, No.972 (1954).

²⁰ Ibid.

survived. In August 1948, the Association for the Promotion of Religious Thought was at last founded. There were six Catholic priests and twelve Zen bonzes present at the association. Lassalle says that “it was perhaps the first time in the history of the mission that such an association had been founded”²¹. In his memoir he writes that from 1948 to 1950, mainly during spring and autumn, lectures were held in different districts. Also Zen monks cooperated with him at the construction of the World Peace Church in Hiroshima in 1954. In 1956 he started a Zen-Buddhist practice in Obama, Fukui, and in 1961 he built a Zen Training Monastery in Hiroshima. He returned to Sophia University, Tokyo in 1962, and built a Zen Training Monastery in Tokyo in 1969.

He also gave many meditation-lectures in Germany and Western countries. He wrote a book, *Zen Meditation for Christians* so that he could answer the many questions and requests from his students. In his book, he explains about Catholic meditation and Zen meditation and shows that in Catholic meditation, which is usually understood as discursive meditation, there are some aspects of objectless meditation, which is characteristic of Zen meditation. I will quote him below:

“The term “Christian meditation” usually reminds us of a kind of mental prayer which reflects on some religious truth, some passage in the Bible or event from the life of Christ. The meditator ponders the object of reflection and derives a moral from it, developing it into a dialogue with God, Christ or the saints; that is, into a prayer in the true sense of the word. This kind of meditation has been and still is the kind that is most often practiced. In the following we shall consistently refer to it as “discursive meditation,” and shall distinguish it from “object-less meditation” in its proper sense.

On the other hand, when we hear of meditation in the context of the Eastern religions, say Hinduism or Buddhism, we usually think of something different. The practice of *zazen*, for example, has some external similarity to discursive meditation in the Christian realm, but Zen Buddhism does not even employ the word “meditation” much less “discursive.” The phrase “Zen meditation” which one occasionally finds in modern Japanese texts is a recent one of foreign origin”.²²

He makes it clear that the dividing line between “discursive meditation” and “object-less meditation” is not always clearly visible by making reference to Thomas Aquinas’ explanation between ratiocination and intellection — the former refers to “discursive meditation”, while the latter to “object-less meditation”. He says: “By way of difference between reason and intelligence we can now distinguish discursive from object-less meditation. In the former it is primarily the

²¹ Ibid.

²² H. M. Enomiya Lassalle, *Zen Meditation for Christians*, trans. John C. Maraldo (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1974), 23-24.

discursive or logical thinking proper to reason which is active, along with sensible representation. Moreover, reason by its very nature always grasps in terms of subject and object. This, of course, also influences discursive meditation, which is accordingly characterized as representational, that is, directed to an object. For this reason a certain amount of preparation is required with respect to the object of reflection, as everyone who has learned to meditate discursively knows.

On the other hand, object-less meditation in the proper sense of the word makes use of intelligence. From the preceding we may conclude that intellection by its nature does not operate within a division of subject and object. There is essentially no tension between subject and object in intuitive knowledge; rather unitary being itself, which never occurs as an object, imparts itself to intelligence. Accordingly, meditation performed by means of intellection is non-representational or supra-objective. It grasps the truth at a single glance. But we cannot understand how this happens as long as we try to use reason. For reason divides where intelligence unifies.”²³

Then he concludes: “Zazen in its advanced state is a kind of meditation performed through the intelligence, and supra-logical and supra-objective.”²⁴

His practice of Zen had a big influence on the other Catholic fathers and sisters. Let us see some cases below.

5) After Hugo Lassalle

• Sister Elaine MacInnes

Sister Elaine MacInnes, born in 1918 or 1919, is a Roman Catholic nun. She came to Japan as a foreign missionary in 1961 and was introduced to Zen meditation. She was one of the few teachers to be accredited by the Sanbo Kyodan in Kamakura, Japan, one of the foremost centers for the study of Zen. In her book *Light Sitting in Light*, she wrote about her life and the relationship between Zen and Christianity. She met Father Lassalle and He influenced her a lot. She expresses her gratitude to him in her book.²⁵ After she spent 15 years in Japan, she transferred to the Philippines in 1976 and opened a Zen Center for the Catholic Church in Manila. In 1980 she and Hugo Lassalle were accredited Roshi, i.e., grand masters of Zen Buddhism, by their master Yamada Roshi. In 1992, she was invited to become director of the Prison Phoenix Trust in Oxford, England. After her retirement in 1999, she moved back to her native Canada and lives there now.

²³ Ibid., 28.

²⁴ Ibid., 30.

• *Father Robert E. Kennedy, S. J.*

Robert E. Kennedy, S.J., born in 1933, is an American Catholic priest and a Zen master. He became involved in Zen through his work in Japan during the late 1950's and early 1960's. At that time, there were many Jesuits who were engaged in interfaith work with Zen Buddhists.²⁶ He was installed as a teacher of Zen in 1991. He was the chairperson of the theology department of Saint Peter's College in Jersey City, N.J. He teaches theology and the Japanese language there. In addition to his work at the college, he was a practicing psychotherapist in New York City, and a representative at the United Nations of the Institute for Spiritual Consciousness in Politics. He belongs to Morning Star Zendo in Jersey City, New Jersey now and attends many regional sittings when his schedule allows.²⁷

• *Father William Johnston, S.J.*

Father William Johnston, S.J., born in Belfast in 1925, entered the Society of Jesuits in 1943. He was ordained a priest on March 24, 1957 and spent many years of his life in Japan; during this period, he was actively involved in inter-religious dialogues, especially with the Buddhists. He is the author of well known books on mysticism, including *Silent Music*, *The Still Point*, and *The Inner Eye of Love*.²⁸ His work bore fruit into "Christian Zen"²⁹. He passed away in Tokyo in 2010.

Instead of conclusions

Hugo Lassalle's effort bore fruit and gave impacts on people not only in Japan but all over the world. As shown above, Sister Elaine MacInnes, Father Robert E. Kennedy, S.J., and Father William Johnston, S.J. studied Zen in Japan. There have been so many followers of Zen in Europe that the Lassalle-Institut was founded for the promotion of ethically-based culture of values in Edliback,

²⁵ Elaine MacInnes *Light Sitting in Light: A Christian's Experience in Zen*, trans. Somo Horisawa (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2009).

²⁶ "The Gifts of Zen Buddhism," accessed October 5, 2013, <http://www.americamagazine.org/issue/384/article/gifts-zen-buddhism>.

²⁷ "Morning Star Zendo", accessed October 5, 2013, <http://kennedyzen.tripod.com/details.htm#links>.

²⁸ "Fr. William Johnston SJ", accessed October 5, 2013, http://pweb.sophia.ac.jp/jesuit45/Fr_William_Johnston_SJ.html.

²⁹ William Johnston, *Christian Zen* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), William Johnston, *The Still Point: Reflections on Zen and Christian Mysticism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1995).

Switzerland in 1995. It is one of the Europe's most distinguished institutions in the field of Zen.³⁰

What do Catholicism and Zen have in common, then? I might say it is the practice of meditation and mysticism. As I have given some remarks about meditation in the previous chapter, let me consider what mysticism is. According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, "mysticism" is defined as follows:

1. the experience of mystical union or direct communion with ultimate reality reported by mystics;
2. the belief that direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through subjective experience (as intuition or insight);
3. a vague speculation, a belief without sound basis;
4. a theory postulating the possibility of direct and intuitive acquisition of ineffable knowledge or power."³¹

In Christian history, Meister Eckhart (circa1260 – circa1328) was a famous mystic. According to the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, "Meister Eckhart (in English, Master Eckhart) was a theologian, a writer, and the greatest German mystic of the Middle Ages. His writings focused on the relationship of the individual soul to God"³². The big figure of Zen Buddhism, D. T. Suzuki was impressed by Eckhart's idea as mentioned before. Ignatius de Loyola (circa 1492 – 1556), Spanish Catholic priest, was another mystic. He was one of the founders of the Society of Jesus. It makes sense that there are many Jesuits, including Lassalle and Kennedy, who are interested in Zen Buddhism.

Zen Buddhism is also related to mysticism. We have already seen that Zen Buddhism is a mixture of Indian Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, "The Taoism of the Chinese philosopher Lao-Tze is a system of metaphysics and ethics in which mysticism is a fundamental element"³³.

Apparently Zen Buddhism and Catholicism have some elements of mysticism in common. Lassalle concludes that there are some similarities between Zen and Christian mysticism³⁴. Let me quote some of his explanations below: "The parallels between Zen and Meister Eckhart are perhaps even more striking...It is not surprising that in Eckhart we find sayings and pointers which could have been written by a Zen master. He says, for example, that an aspirant must "leave God for the sake of the Godhead" – which means: to come to the essence of God, his true ultimate nature, the aspirant must leave the three persons who derive from the

³⁰ "Lassalle – Institut", accessed July 17, 2013, www.lassalle-institut.org/.

³¹ "Misticism", accessed October 9, 2013, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/misticism>.

³² "Johannes Eckhart", accessed October 9, 2013, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/eckhart>.

³³ "Taoism", accessed July 10, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14446b.htm>.

³⁴ Lassalle, *Zen Meditation for Christians*.

essence. As we have seen, Zen doesn't ever, not even temporarily, conceive of the absolute as a person. Similarly the Zen master Rinzai (d.867) writes: "kill the Buddha, kill God, kill your ancestors". This means not that the disciple must eliminate Buddhism in order to attain enlightenment, but that he must free himself of all concepts to grasp the absolute.

We find another parallel in Eckhart's teaching on the complete spiritual renunciation of the will as well as of the intellect. In his sermon "Blessed are the poor", he says "As long as a person keeps his own will, and thinks it is his will to fulfill the all-loving will of God, he has not the poverty of which we are talking, for this person has a will with which he wants to satisfy the will of God, and that is not right. For if one wants to be truly poor, he must be as free from his creature will as when he had not yet been born." A principle of Zen runs parallel: "Through perfect denial to perfect affirmation."³⁵

In conclusion, I would like to refer to a passage from W. Johnston: "What united us was not philosophy but religious experience."³⁶ I have found the Zen-Catholic Dialogue a great model of inter-faith dialogue and it proved to have possibility to be a passage toward religious universalism.

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³⁵ Ibid., 81-82.

³⁶ William Johnston, *Christian Zen* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997).

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