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The Buddhist understanding of nihilism by Keiji Nishitani in front of the scientific explanation of the religion*

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“A person who falls to the ground
gets back up by using that ground.
To try to get up without relying on that ground
would be impossible”.

(Chinul, 1158-1210)**

1. *Christianity, Religion, and Science*

The topic I want to deal with in this essay is the Buddhist understanding of nihilism by Keiji Nishitani (西谷啓治1900-1990)¹, a Japanese Buddhist philosopher of the Kyōto School. I will argue in this paper that Nishitani's philosophical thought based on Buddhist insight could shed light on the discussion on the relation between Christianity, religion, and science in our age. Before taking up the main point, I'd like to make it clear why and from what perspective this paper has an interest in Nishitani's philosophical thought.

As for Christian theology, at least since 20th century, it has been its kernel task to wrestle with questions raised both by non-Christian religions and

* This paper is a part of the research result that was gratefully supported by Nanzan University Pache Research Subsidy I-A-1 for the 2019 academic year.

** Chinul, *Encouragement to Practice: the Compact of the Samādhi and Prajñā Community, in The Korean Approach to Zen. The Collected Works of Chinul*, translated with an Introduction by Robert E. Buswell Jr., University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu 1983, 97 and 127 (fn.1). Chinul (知訥 1158-1210) is a Korean Zen master who founded Choge-Chong (曹溪宗), the leading Zen order in Korea. As Buswell noted, what Chinul said is a phrase attributed to the fourth Indian patriarch Upagupta.

¹ For the biographical record of Nishitani, see J.W. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: As Essay on the Kyōto School*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu 2001, pp. 183-187.

by the natural sciences. The reason for this is rather simple: The traditional self-understanding of Christianity as the exclusively absolute religion (or, the special revelation of God) is, on the one hand, relativized by the various religious traditions in the history of religion and ultimately deprived of the foundation for such an self-understanding. On the other hand, natural science, especially biological science since Darwinian Revolution, maintains that religious phenomena of mankind, needless to say including Christianity, can be explained thoroughly by the biological principle of natural evolution.

In this sense, we could say that, for Christianity, religion and science are working as “thought-stoppers”, if we use a term of Gregory Pence, an American scholar of bioethics. The context in which Pence used this term was a controversy over Dolly the cloned sheep designed in 1996 by the research teams of the Roslin Institute. With the word “thought-stopper”, Pence pointed out that the birth of Dolly “stopped” all the rational debate over the scientific meaning of it. «It took about a second for the questions to begin. And another for the condemnations. Actually, there were not many questions, just condemnations, because thought stops when most people hear “cloning humans”»². Due to the impact of this debate, which was made mainly because Dolly is the mammal like human beings, people rush to condemn it, forgetting even the fact that their everyday lives consist of the same technology which gave birth to Dolly.

As such, facing up to the history of religion that deprives the Christian assertion for the absoluteness of its foundation, and facing up to the science that deduces Christianity to a by-product of natural evolution, theology, as a self-understanding of the Christian faith, cannot help but to discover that the way for doing theology has become totally blocked off, as if theology has entered a dead end, *Sackgasse*.

My question is this: What does it mean that religion and science are accepted by Christian theology as “thought-stoppers”? Are religion and science working as a “sponge” that “wipes away” (Nietzsche) every possibility of being a Christian into nothingness? If those “thought-stoppers” really “stop” doing theology, what does theology think they “stop”? Do religion and science really deprive Christianity of the possibility of doing theology? What would happen if theology positively assimilated those “thought-stoppers” into the Christian faith instead of ignoring and detouring them?

² G.E. Pence, *Brave New Bioethics*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham 2002, 1.

2. “Birth of God” after “death of God”

I want to explain a little more about the evolutionary explanation of religion and the concept of God. Pascal Boyer, a representative cognitive scientist today, closed his essay on *Religious thought and behavior as by-products of brain function* as follows;

Religious believers and sceptics generally agree that religion is a dramatic phenomenon that requires a dramatic explanation, either as a spectacular revelation of truth or as a fundamental error of reasoning. Cognitive science and neuroscience suggest a less dramatic but perhaps more empirically grounded picture of religion as a probable, although by no means inevitable by-products of the normal operation of human cognition³.

According to Boyer, religious views and concepts are nothing more and nothing less than the by-products of the evolution that «creates mental organization that makes people behave in particular ways»⁴. As a result, says Boyer, «supernatural concepts are just one consequence of the human capacity for decoupling representations»⁵. Christian confession says that God creates human beings, but the cognitive science insists the opposite: It is human beings that create God. Or, to say more accurately, the history of human evolution in nature produced the concept of God.

Boyer's approach to religious phenomena goes hand in hand with «the biocultural study of religion», or sociobiological studies of religion. According to F. LeRon Shults, the «biocultural study of religion» indicates the attitude supporting the claim «that supernatural agent conceptions are naturally reproduced in human thought as a result of evolved *cognitive* mechanisms that hyperactively detect agency when confronted with ambiguous phenomena and, once conceived, are culturally nurtured as a result of evolved coalitional mechanisms that hyperactively protect in-group cohesion»⁶. It is human beings that gave birth to God: «*homo deiparensis* (god-bearing hominids)»⁷. In this sense, we could agree with the opinion that «theology itself has been

³ P. Boyer, *Religious thought and behaviour as by-products of brain function*, in «Trends in Cognitive Science», 7, 3 (2003), p. 123.

⁴ P. Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*, Basic Books, New York 2001, p. 234.

⁵ *Ivi*, 131.

⁶ F. LeRon Shults, *Theology After the Birth of God: Atheist Conception in Cognition and Culture* Palgrave Macmillan, London 2014, p. 3.

⁷ *Ivi*, p. 8.

bearing atheism all along – although it has not nourished it or encouraged it to reach its full potential»⁸. In connection with Nietzsche’s declaration of “death of God”, Shults insists further;

God seems to have survived his death without much difficulty. Why do religious people find it so easy to dismiss the idea that “God is dead”? The problem was not that the madman had come too early. No, if his goal was to disrupt people’s reliance on supernatural agents to make sense of the world and act sensibly in society, as they stray “as though through an infinite nothing”, he had the wrong message. Had the madman read carefully through the last couple of decades of scientific literature in the biocultural study of religion, he would proclaim instead that gods are born – and we have borne them! As we will see, this message opens up a new way of conceiving atheism as a positive force, rather than merely as a negative reaction to (mono)theism⁹.

This paper will investigate whether and in what sense Nishitani’s thought of “the standpoint of emptiness (śūnyatā)” (jp. *kū no tachiba* 空の立場) could give Christian theology a possible way for doing theology in the face of religion and science, and even in an Asian way. As we see later, Nishitani’s Buddhist philosophy was an existential struggle with the problem of nihilism which emerged decisively by modern science. Nietzsche’s declaration of “death of God” indicates clearly that the ultimate values for ethics and religion were erased totally and radically by the mechanical worldview of modern science. In this sense, the science worked as a “sponge” that “wiped away” all the traditional religious values for mankind. Thus, as Nishitani says, «the nihility that spells the death of God emerges from deep beneath the material, mechanical world and is perceived by modern man as an abyss». But at the same time, again Nishitani states, that nihility could be a place where the modern man «experiences the ecstatic transcendence of his self-being». Nishitani further states; «Only when a man has felt such an abyss open at the ground of his existence does his subjectivity become subjectivity in the true sense of the word: only then does he awaken to himself as truly free and independent» (RN 57)¹⁰. The nihility of the nihilism that was brought by modern science

⁸ *Ivi*, p. 16.

⁹ *Ivi*, p. 3.

¹⁰ The quotation from Nishitani’s work will be written in the text with following abbreviations;

SZ: *Science and Zen* (jp. *Kagaku to zen* 科学と禪) in F. Franck (ed.), *The Buddha Eye: An Antology of the Kyoto School*, Crossroad, New York 1982, pp. 112-137.

RN: *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Bragt, University of California Press, Berkeley 1982.

could be, in turn, a creative starting point for a new understanding of religion and of human beings. In order to inquire into how Nishitani's philosophical thought was brought about, I will concentrate my argumentation on his themes of "elemental subjectivity" and natural science, before finally referring to his "the standpoint of emptiness".

3. *Nihilism as the moment of "elemental subjectivity"*

Nishitani's Buddhist philosophy reached its zenith, as generally admitted, with his notion of "the standpoint of emptiness", which was born through his encounter with nihilism. Especially two of his works, *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism* (jp. *Nihirizumu* ニヒリズム) in 1949 and *Religion and Nothingness* (jp. *Shūkyō to wa nani ka* 宗教とは何か) in 1961 reflect his existential struggle with the problem of nihilism and its integration into the Buddhist concept of *śūnyatā*. Thus, in Nishitani's thought, the Buddhist concept of emptiness, nihilism, and modern science make an organic unity which can not be separated from each other.

As was already suggested by the fact that for Nishitani the problem of nihilism was related to the concept of *śūnyatā*, the central idea of Mahayana Buddhism, the characteristic of Nishitani's approach to nihilism is that it led him to inquire into the true subjectivity of the self, as he said that «nihilism teaches us to return to our forgotten selves and to reflect on the tradition of oriental culture» (ON 179). As he made clear in the preface to *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, his inquiry into nihilism comes from his concern for the problem of subjectivity.

Nishitani explains that he approached nihilism from the perspective of Asian "spiritual culture". He said that his book, *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, has three themes of Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, and Buddhist emptiness, and explained further that those three themes are related to each other. Even though he said that «the final theme, of Buddhist "emptiness", came to capture my interest more gradually», we can imagine without difficulty that his approach to the nihilism of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche was carried out by bringing the Buddhist tradition into perspective¹¹.

PP: *The Starting Point of my Philosophy* (jp. *Watashi no tetsugakuteki shubatzuten*, 私の哲学的出発点), in «FAS Society Journal», Spring 1986, pp. 24-29.

ON: *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, trans. Graham Parkes with Setzuko Aihara, State University of New York Press, Albany (NY) 1990.

¹¹ Cfr. K. Nishitani, "*nihirizumu, shukyo, kagaku*" (ニヒリズム・宗教・科学 *Nihilism*,

Actually in an interview with Yoshiaki Ejiri and Jeff Shore in 1985¹², Nishitani said that he himself was surprised to find that, already in his graduation thesis, he used many Zen terms. Remembering that the Zen *koan* has a deep relation with the realization of the True Self, we may say that he accepted nihilism as the starting point of his philosophy as a way to realize the True Self. Thus, in nihilism, the doubt as a «doubt about the self's existence itself» (PP 28) is gradually deepen into “great doubt” (jp. *daigi* 大疑) in which the religion itself is called into question, because the religion, which is generally expected to diminish that doubt, becomes an object of doubt, as Nishitani mentioned; «nihilism includes in its essence a doubt which possesses an irrepressible defiance of ethics an religion. ... Thus one doubts any attempt to find meaning in human life, especially through ethics or religion».

As said, the fact that nihilism was accepted by Nishitani as a “great doubt” means that he understood the problem of nihilism from the perspective of grasping his own self that Buddhism usually calls the True Self. We can already find a trace of Nishitani's concern for subjectivity in his first book *Philosophy of Elemental Subjectivity* (jp. *kongenteki shutaisei no tezugaku* 根源的主体性の哲学 1949). As indicated by the title of the first chapter of this book, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra and Meister Eckhart*, written in 1938, he saw the similarity between the nihilistic thought of Nietzsche and the mysticism of Meister Eckhart in the fact that both of them found the genuine subjectivity of the self in its detachment from something exterior to the self. That is, Nishitani understands the essence of religion as a way for the realization of the *elemental subjectivity*. Nishitani said, «if all the attachment to the object is broken, the fixed image of the self is also broken. Then, from the reverse direction, the relation between the self and the ground of life begin to appear»¹³. Eckhart's “*Ohne Warum*” and Nietzsche's “God is dead” means, according to Nishitani, such a radical detachment from the object. Eckhart and Nietzsche had in common their thought that the real ground for human beings and of the ultimate reality, that is God, is just an abyss, which in turn lets human beings realize its radical subjectivity;

“God is dead” could be understood in this sense. That shows us the abyss of life where we cannot any more say that we live in front of God, we live with the love of God, we ourselves are dead and instead live in God, we live in union with God etc.

Religion, and Science) nishitani keiji chosakushū (西谷啓治著作集 *Collected Works of Keiji Nishitani*), vol. 21, Shōbunsha, Tokyo 1990, pp. 5-14.

¹² An Interview with Keiji Nishitani, in «FAS Society Journal», 4 (1985).

¹³ K. Nishitani, *kongenteki shutaisei no tezugaku*, p. 19.

Nietzsche said once “If you look into the abyss long for a while, the abyss also look into you”. That means what I said just before¹⁴.

4. *Science and Nihilism*

Jan Van Bragt, the translator of *Religion and Nothingness*, defines in the translator’s introduction the characteristic of Nishitani’s Buddhist philosophy in the way that it has a «constant preoccupation with nihilism, and its alliance with scientism, that is undermining the very foundations of Western civilization, leaving man with no place to stand as man». Bragt made here clear that Nishitani’s approach to nihilism was accompanied by his profound insight into the essence of the modern natural science.

In *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, we find Nishitani’s elaborate studies of nihilism. In term of the theme of this paper, we pay attention to Nishitani’s evaluation of Nietzsche’s “experimental knowledge” (*cognitio experimentalis*) (ON 31), that is, existentialization of science. For Nishitani, science is not merely a knowledge system of the natural world. It rather determines and reflects the way of being for human beings. Therefore the question about science must be raised and answered “existentially”, that is, the questioner himself must be the object of the question. It is the questioner himself that became a problem in the face of science, because as Nishitani quotes Heidegger’s phrase on “God is dead”, science extinguishes the possibility of metaphysics: «For Heidegger, Nietzsche’s statement that “God is dead” means that ... Metaphysics, which is for Nietzsche western philosophy understood as Platonism, is over».

What is more important is that for Nietzsche science as a modern world-view was deepened into the “scientific conscience”, in which Nietzsche’s «radical and fearless pursuit of the scientific spirit» is apparently expressed as «one of the essential driving forces of Nietzsche’s nihilism» (ON 84). The fact that for Nietzsche the “scientific conscience” is the cause of nihilism, means that nihilism as «the very mode of existence in which one relates to and overcomes oneself» is equivalent to science that tries «to strive scientifically for full understanding of all phenomena of the world – including the world within» (ON 85). As such, the radical nihilism of Nietzsche was possible «only because he had first opened up in his own person the scientific-existential standpoint» (ON 90). Therefore, in the nihilistic self, history and

¹⁴ *Ivi*, pp. 11-12.

nature converged into one, the self's own existence. To put it differently, every determination through historical and natural law is denied as an heteronomic determinism which is forced to the self, and at the same time every determinative power is converged into the self. The self become destiny itself, as Nietzsche's concept of *amor fati* suggests.

5. From nihilism to the standpoint of emptiness¹⁵

Especially in Mahayana Buddhism, *śūnyatā* is a concept arising from the fundamenal Buddhist awakening of the “dependent origination” (= *pratītyasamutpāda*) that everything exists in a mutual relationship with other things. If everything stands in a “circunincesseional” relation to other things, then nothing has it's own substance that is eternal and unchangeable. That is the reason why everything is empty, that is, lacks a self-nature (*svabhāva* 自性). And just because nothing has its own self-nature, everything can exist in mutual dependance. Nāgārjuna (c. 150 - c. 250), who is said to have compiled the theoretical explanation of Mahayana Buddhism, puts it this way: «We state that whatever is dependently arising, that is emptiness. That is dependent upon convention. That itself is the middle path» (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24:18)¹⁶.

Let's go back to Nishitani's “stanapoint of emptiness”. As mentioned before, the nihility of nihilism is radical in the sense that it cannot be eliminated by anything outside of that nihility, e.g God, because the radicalness of nihilism is to be found in the fact that such a “God is dead”. If so, nihilism could be overcome only from inside, through nihilism itself. That means, nihility could be overcome only by the abyss of that nihility. In other words, the nihility could be overcome in the field in which nihility is nihility. And it means that the nihility should be existentially assimilated by the one who finds himself to exist in the midst of that nihility. That is at the same time the field where the self is a True Self.

In this field, Nietzsche's proclamation on the death of God and the scientific explanation that there is no such thing like the beginning and the end of nature turns into the religious awakening that the nihility from the death

¹⁵ For the following part of this paper, I amended my earlier essay *An Asian Christian Theology in Dialogue with the Buddhist Philosophy of Keiji Nishitani*, in *L'esperienza religiosa tra Oriente e Occidente*, Edizioni Cantagalli, Siena 2019, pp. 19-30.

¹⁶ D.J. Kalupahana, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi 1999, p. 339.

of God and from the purposeless nature is the place where the self becomes the True Self. In this field, the nihility turns into the creative field, as Shōtō Hase, a Japanese philosopher of *Jōdō Shinshū* (= the Pure Land Buddhism), says; «That Nishitani had to arrive at the idea of emptiness was due to the involved character of the nihility of nihilism. A nihility that dissolves and renders null and void all paths to the transcendent demands a special means of transcendence. Emptiness possesses a unique way of transcendence that makes the overcoming of that nihility of nihilism possible»¹⁷.

What is then the genuine relation between religion and science in the field of śūnyatā? In other words, what does it mean that the traditional conventional dichotomy between religion and science, i.e., the absolute and the relative, the spiritual and the material, or the personal and impersonal is over in the field of śūnyatā? Nishitani maintains that such a dichotomy is no longer meaningful after the declaration of the death of God by Nietzsche. It is Nietzsche's nihilistic thought that religion should abandon such a dichotomical way of thinking. This is just the reason why Nishitani «would like to approach the problem of the relationship between science and philosophy from a new angle» (RN 79). It is because, for Nishitani, the religiosity that goes through nihilism goes hand in hand with the subjectification of the nihility, that is, the subjectification of the scientific spirit. In an traditional Christian world view, the world as Created by God was thought to be under God's providence in which human beings as the Crown of the Creation were and are living in a personal relationship with God. Modern science, however, says that the world is totally indifferent to human interests. As a result, says Nishitani, the world which is indifferent to human interests «has cut across the personal relationship between God and man» (RN 90).

What does it mean then to consider «the relationship between science and philosophy from a new angle»? First of all, the “new angle” could be found in the fact that Nishitani deals with the problem of religion and science from his concern for «the question of modern man's awareness of his own subjectivity» (RN 53). And this concern for the subjectivity of human being is, as mentioned above, related to his inquiry into the problem of nihilism, represented by Nietzsche's declaration of the death of God. Nihilism makes clear that religions so far «have tended to put the emphasis exclusively on the aspect of life», that is, «the personal relationship between God and man». But, as Nishitani said, the world of death “has cut cross” indifferent to the

¹⁷ Shōtō Hase, *Nihilism, Science, and Emptiness in Nishitani*, in «Buddhist-Christian Studies», 19 (1999), p. 144.

world of life. In this sense, religion and science, like life and death, being and nonbeing, and spirit and matter, build up one and the same reality in the way that they are the “double exposure” of the same reality, as Keiji Nishitani aptly points out;

This kind of double exposure is true vision of reality. Reality itself requires it. In it, spirit, personality, life, and matter all come together and lose their separateness. They appear like the various tomographic plates of a single subject. Each plate belongs to reality, but the basic reality is the superimposition of all the plates into a single whole that admits to being represented layer by layer. It is not as if only one of the representations were true, so that all the others can be reduced to it. Reality eludes all such attempts at reduction (RN 52).

It is stimulating enough to find Keiji Nishitani citing phrases from the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel according to *Matthew* 5, 43-48, as something like a *koan* for us to approach the problem of how to consider the “circunincesseional integration” between religion and science: «He [=God] causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous».

From the passage above, Nishitani believes to be able to perceive two kinds of “indifferences” that represent the fundamental structure of reality: the indifference of nature, and the indifference of the love of God. The indifference of nature, which refers to the consistency of the movement of nature, «reduces everything to the level of a highest abstract common denominator, be it matter or some particular physical element». In contrast to that, the love of God «embraces all things in their most concrete Form – for example, good men and evil men – and accepts the differences for what they are». According to Nishitani, the question of how to understand the relation between religion and science is equivalent to the problem of the relation between these two “indifferences” (RN 58). And according to Nishitani, two “indifferences” meet each other at the standpoint of emptiness.

«Double exposure» has its Buddhist name of «life-*sive*-death», «nothingness-*sive*-being», or the absolute non-duality of life and death. The Buddhist standpoint of emptiness, says Nishitani, represents a way of thinking and living to find the nihility in the midst of life, and vice versa. At the standpoint of emptiness, we will realize that religion and science – life and death, God and man, or existence and nihility – meet each other «in a kind of 180° turn». It is even different from the standpoint of nihilism, which, «as a opposite direction of the Platonic and Christian sense» still conceives the nihility as «something of the far side» of life.

The reality as the “double exposure” of the indifference of nature and the indifference of God’s love brings about the decentering of the self, which occurs in the *topos* of śūnyatā. Religion and science represent the “double exposure” in the way that the indifferent love of God deprives the indifference of nature of its base, and vice versa, as much as the impersonality of God robs the believer of the ego-centered understanding of God.

If religion and science could be understood as the “double exposure” of one and the same reality, they are thought to negate the fixed basis of each other; religion negates the nihilism that was brought about by the “impersonal” indifference of nature; science negates the objectified basis of religion, such as God as the absolute “personal” being. In other words, the dichotomy of being and non-being, “personal” and “impersonal” are overcome at the place of the “double exposure”. In fact, the concept of the “double exposure” of Nishitani is a variant interpretation of the Buddhist understanding of reality that is expressed in the following way: Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form.

Nishitani says the same thing in a rather dramatic expression;

If the place where the omnipresent God resides be called heaven, then heaven would also have to reach beneath the bottomless pit of hell: heaven would be an abyss for hell. This is the sense in which emptiness is an abyss for the abyss of nihility (RN 98).

At the standpoint of emptiness, the dichotomy between «the field of nihil-ity» as the field of «an infinite dispersion» and «the fields of sensation and reason», which are set up «as the negation of such an orientation toward infinite dispersion», could be overcome. By this reasoning, everything that exists «is gathered together and united». The absolute One of traditional philosophy represents such a field, and the world is represented as «a single center, a center that makes the world what it is». But as Nishitani maintains, such an opinion «leads to the positing of a One seen as mere non-differentiation». Therefore, in order that multiplicity and differentiation in the real world could become really meaningful, «the system of being must be seen as something that opens up *nihility* at its ground, and not merely as a system of *being*». At the field of emptiness, everything exists in its own «home-ground» and exists at the same time in the «circumcensectional» relation with others; everything exists in itself, and reflects and is reflected in every other being.

It comes about only on the field of śūnyatā, where the being of all other things, while remaining to the very end the being that it is, is emptied out. Moreover, this

means that the autonomy of this one thing is only constituted through a subordination *to* all other things. Its autonomy comes about only on a standpoint from which it makes all other things to be what they are, and in so doing is emptied of its own being (RN 148).

As a provisional conclusion of this paper, I will read the following Zen *mondō* which, in my opinion, could provide us with a stand-point for understanding the meaning of “the standpoint of emptiness”, and its implication for the interreligious dialogue and the dialogue between religion and science;

A monk asked Jōshū, “All the *dharmas* are reduced to oneness, but what is oneness reduced to?” Jōshū said, “When I was in Seishū I made a hempen shirt. It weighed seven pounds” (僧問趙州 萬法歸一 一歸何處。州云 我在青州 作一領布衫 重七斤。)¹⁸.

Abstract

The topic discussed in this essay is the Buddhist understanding of nihilism by Keiji Nishitani (西谷啓治 1900-1990), a Japanese Buddhist philosopher of the Kyōto School. The thesis advanced in this paper is that Nishitani's philosophical thought based on Buddhist insight could shed light on the discussion on the relation between Christianity, religion, and science in our age.

Keywords: nihilism; Nishitani; buddhism; christianity; interreligious dialogue.

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¹⁸ *Two Zen Classics. Mumonkan & Hekiganroku*, translated with commentaries by Katsuki Sekida, edited and introduced by A.V. Grimstone, Weatherhill, 1977, p. 271. (case 45) *Mondō* (問答) means literally “question and answer”, and is used in Zen Buddhism to provoke a great question and also to test the awakening status of the practicing monk. For the meaning of Nishitani's philosophical thought for the interreligious dialogue, see Seung Chul Kim, *An Asian Christian Theology in Dialogue with the Buddhist Philosophy of Keiji Nishitani*, in *L'esperienza religiosa tra Oriente e Occidente*, cit.