According to Arnold Toynbee, the greatest event in the 20th century will be the problem of what happens when Christianity and Buddhism penetrate each other. This event could be compared with the time when the Greek-Latin Fathers re-expressed the Message of Christ through Greek philosophy that had been heretical at that time. Therefore we may say that we Japanese Christians now should re-dress the traditional forms of European Christianity through the Buddhistic treasures. It seems to be an inevitable theme.

Especially since the 2nd Vatican Council (1962-65), quite a lot of conferences concerning the dialogue and relation between Buddhism and Christianity have been held in Japan, even though the two religions had been isolated and considered as unrelated, and often even as antagonistic. In the world of Christian scholars in Japan the movement for the return to the sources of Christianity through Buddhism and the searching of new ways of re-expressing Christian thoughts in order to make them more suitable to our modern age have become more and more active.

It will be almost impossible for me to depict all activities of these Christian scholars in Japan, as my knowledge and experiences regarding them are very limited. That is why I cannot but confine to report very briefly the new theological thinking of a few Japanese Christian scholars who belong (or belonged) to the conference for “The Zen—Christian Colloquium”. This
conference is a forerunning seminar which has been held once a year by voluntary persons of both the Buddhistic and Christian Communities, usually lasting over four days.

(I) Tetsutarō Ariga (Protestant scholar of happy memory):

For a long time he had been troubled about the fact that the theological ideology of Christianity had been orientated too much to Western European thoughts. But he avoided the method of resolving this question by reading into Christianity something Japanese or oriental, and attempted to re-consider through Japanese eyes the problem of Hebraism and Hellenism which constitutes the formation of Christian thoughts. According to him, the Greek thoughts depend upon the logic of "Being", while the Hebrew thoughts are based on the logic of "Hayah" which can be regarded as the basic unity of "Being", "Becoming" and "Occurring" (he called this logic "Hayah-tology"). The Ontology has made an opening for philosophical and scientific thoughts, but the Hayah-tology can be said to be the logic of becoming, action and history, where even the so-called 'existence' is nothing else but something which has come into existence, which exists being made to exist and which creates being created. According to Greek thoughts, the Absolute Being is God, but according to Hebrew thoughts, God is the Action which makes it possible to exist and create.

However, since early times Christian theology had been formed by the Ontology. For example, the problems of 'existence' and 'essence' of God, 'theism' and 'atheism', 'transcendence' and 'immanence' etc. can all be regarded as ontological problems. This logic has penetrated so deeply into Christianity during almost 2000 years that it has formed Christianity into an ontological system.

Prof. Ariga had set a new point of view on the relation between Buddhism and Christianity by means of his proposition
of the Hayah-tology.

(II) Prof. Katsumi Takizawa (Protestant), who had been very much influenced by K. Nishida (Japanese Philosopher, 1870-1945) and who had been a disciple of K. Barth, is convinced that even Buddhists know the ultimate reality as well as Christians do. Therefore he rejects the exclusive absolutism of traditional Christianity. He considers Barth's so-called “The Name of Jesus Christ” as “The original relation between God and man”, which he called the “Urfactum” of the Immanuel (God with us), and he distinguished it from Jesus as a historical person. The Immanuel (Urfactum) and this Jesus are situated in the relation of “inseparable, unidentifiable and irreversible”. We may regard this as a Christian transformation of “the Self-Identity of the Absolute Contradiction” as K. Nishida expressed it.

Now the “Urfactum” of the Immanuel itself can never be an exclusive property of the Christian Church, but nothing else than the only source of all “the true religions”. But Jesus as a historical person is never the “Urfactum” of the Immanuel that exists eternally, but only as a “symptom” manifested within the historical world just as well as Gautama Buddha, Barth, Shinran and we ourselves. (Jesus as a historical person can only be regarded as our model-person as far as the “symptom” corresponds perfectly with the “Urfactum”.) Anyway, he remonstrates strictly against “the idolization of the human figure in Jesus” and insists that the name of Jesus Christ in Christianity, the Namu-Amidabutsu in the Pure Land Sect of Buddhism and even the Sitting-Zen in Zen-Buddhism—that all of these are not different at all in their relation to the Ultimate Reality (the Urfactum) (Zoku Bukkyō to Kirisutokyō, Buddhism and Christianity, second series, Hōzōkan, p. 215), for both Buddhism and Christianity can be regarded as two different and unique
manifestations of the same original Reality, that is the Urfactum of Immanuel as the Ultimate Relation between God and man.

(III) Seiichi Yagi (Protestant):

He, a New Testament scholar, found a new way of theological thinking through the encounter with Zen-Buddhism in the "Zen-Christian Colloquium" conferences, after he had learned from Bultman's literal criticism and demythologizing, and then accepted Takizawa's formula: "inseparable, unidentifiable and irreversible".

According to him, the personal beings are just like poles of a magnet, which can be distinguished from each other but cannot be separated (distinguishable, but inseparable). He interprets Takizawa's "Urfactum" of the Immanuel (God with us) as the Transcendent Who integrates the personal beings and sees the relation of the "inseparable, unidentifiable and irreversible" between the Transcendent and the personal beings. (He called this relation the mutual immanence, but not "Soku", because at that time he had thought "Soku" as the mere logic of reversibility.) ("Bukkyō to Kirisutokyo no Setten"—The contactpoint between Buddhism and Christianity, Hōzōkan, Kyōto, 1975, p. 168 sqq.)

Anyway, the best analogy of integration is perhaps music. Each sound has its own individuality but it manifests itself only in relation to the other sounds which have gone or are coming. Any change of a sound affects the whole. In this sense, the part contains the whole. In other words, we find there the relation of "the part soku the whole". In this parable, each sound of music corresponds to a person, a piece of music to human community, and the human heart which integrates the sounds to the Transcendent.

Now, the conceptuality of integration shows or suggests the conclusion that both Christianity and Buddhism stand on the
same ground (ibid. p.12, p. 418), as both religions can be regarded as established only if there is a realization and participation of the action of the Transcendent Who integrates the personal beings (ibid. p.12). He thinks, however, that “Jesus as a historical person corresponds with Gautama-Buddha just like any other historical person would do” (ibid. p.19). But at the same time he declares that “My symbol of the integration is still Jesus Himself” (ibid., p.66).

(IV) Masaaki Honda (Catholic):

He seeks a new way of re-expressing the Christian basical concepts through the Buddhistic logic of “Soku” (pratītya-samutpāda).

He got to know this logic of “Soku” under the guidance of an elderly Buddhist philosopher, Dr. Nobuji Nakayama. But his encounter with Dr. Nakayama was in itself no other than the encounter of the Christian elements with the Buddhist elements within the innermost depths of his heart. This encounter was an encounter of East with West, forming two circles sharing the same focal points.

Now, the peculiarity of Christianity, according to him, still lies in the historical facts of the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ in which the Love of God was revealed, but he thinks that the spiritual world of the Gospel is nothing else than the Christian world of “soku”, that is “the self-identity of the absolute contradiction (Kōan)”’. On the other hand, if we cannot deny a priori that there dwells the Absoluteness of Divine Truth or Grace even in Buddhism, whether it may be the Path of Sages or Pure Land Path, we cannot help but affirm the possibility of such different revelations as Cosmic and Conscious Revelations. Thus he proposed the Topological Christian Theology (a sort of Christian transformation of Nishida Philosophy), expecting to re-discover more deeply the Christian tradi-
tion through the light of those three kinds of revelations.

Anyway, he tries to reconsider the Divine Revelation dividing it into three kinds, namely, the "(1) Historical Revelation, (2) Conscious Revelation and (3) Cosmic Revelation". If we put too much emphasis only on the fact of the Historical Revelation, we might often be captivated by the "idea" of transcendence without immanence and make our Church imperialistic by confusing our faith with our own intellectual ideas. It will increase the dualistic thoughts in all fields. On the other hand, if we attach ourselves only to the Conscious and Cosmic Revelation, we might be in danger of putting too much importance on the immanence without transcendence, which could end up in pantheistic monism. Therefore it is most important for us to re-assure the balance of the three forms of Revelation.

(V) Ichirō Okumura:

Having been fascinated by the religious metaphysical vision of Dōgen, he had devoted himself to the sitting-Zen in his youth. He was very eager to bring about a "demythologisation" of the Bible and the strong resistance against the "Incarnation" of Christ unknowingly in his very struggle against Him; however, he at last all of a sudden experienced a dramatic conversion to Christianity at the age of 26. He became a Catholic, and finally even a Carmelite priest.

First, his old religion became alienated to him, but now this former religion means a challenge to him. According to him, this challenge arises from the unstructured thinking characteristic of Oriental mentality which is in opposition to the well-structured thinking of the West on the one hand, and on the other it comes from the criticism and the doubts of other religions in regard to the exclusive absolutism of Christianity. The former is a problem of religion and culture; the latter is basically a theological problem, mainly a problem of revelation. About
these two problems, he insists that the Inculturation of Christianity is inevitable, but he feels firm resistance to such a thought as “all religions in fact can be reduced to one”. According to him, it is this firm faith in Christ alone, which means the essence of Christianity, that is the focal point in the encounter with other religions. He doesn’t try to relativate “Jesus as a historical person” by distinguishing him from the “Urfactum” of the Immanuel as Prof. Takizawa and Prof. Yagi did, and he believes that the deep human mystery that cannot be reached through any other religion, including Zen-Buddhism, can be found in Christ alone.

I have outlined very briefly the theoretical thinking only of some Protestant and Catholic scholars. But among the Catholic Fathers we can find those pioneers as Enomiya-Lasalle, S. Oshida, Williams Jonstones, K. Kadowaki, T. Oka, who are all devoting themselves to the sitting-Zen. We also have to recall the names of M. Doi, M. Kasai (Protestants) and Dumoulin (Catholic Father) who have all promoted the interreligious dialogue.

Among the active members of Buddhists who belong to the Conference, I would like to mention only those names as M. Abe, R. Akizuki, R. Harada, K. Nara, S. Bandō, E. Nishimura, K. Suzuki, G. Hōzumi, and many others.