CHAPTER TWO
THEOLOGISM AND RELIGIONISM

I

I call “Theologism” (*shingaku-shugi; Theologismus*) the theological position that claims that Christianity is the “only truth” (*Alleinwahrheit*) and attaches no “ultimate concern” to any other truth, either of philosophy or of non-Christian religions. Of course, Karl Barth is a representative of this position. On the other hand, by “religionism” (*shūkyō-shugi, Religionismus*) I mean a position, which recognizes Christianity as “one religion” among others and therefore at least cannot claim an exclusive absoluteness for Christianity, although, by way of a comparative study of religions or the general science of the history of religions, they may possibly maintain the relative absoluteness of Christianity. The thesis which Ernst Troeltsch earlier defended in his book *Die Absolutheit des Christentums und die Religionsgeschichte* (1902) is a case in point. Indeed, the absoluteness of Christianity, which he defended here, was in fact not an absoluteness that cuts off any comparison with other religions, but nothing more than a relative superiority in comparison with other religions. All studies by Troeltsch, which were written from the standpoint of “historicism” (*Historismus*) show a very wide viewpoint, are very detailed and, most of all, are

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2 To my knowledge, Mutō coined the expression “theologism” in contrast to the term “religionism” (*Religionismus*) which he found in Emil Brunner’s book *Die Mystik und das Wort. Der Gegensatz zwischen moderner Religionsauffassung und christlichem Glauben dargestellt an der Theologie Schleiermachers* (1928: 192). Religionismus seemed to have been used in the Dialectical Theology as label for the Liberal Protestant Theology based on the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*. This term must be distinguished from a recent usage of “religionism” in the sense of religious extremism. Today, the subject of Mutō’s treatise here would be discussed with terms such as “religious pluralism” and “theological monism (or exclusivism).” (Ed.)
pervaded by an acute scholarly attitude. One must admit, however, that his religionism, which is based on historicism that cannot but result in relativism, remains after all unmediated with his personal Christian faith.

Over against a relativistic religionism, as Christians we have to recognize the truth in Barthian theologism. At least, we must respect many moments of truth contained in Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. And this is necessary, above all, because this theology loyally adheres to the “Scripture principle” (*Schriftprinzip*) and bases itself strictly on an exegesis of the Bible. It is no exaggeration to say that Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* is the greatest theological work of the twentieth century. If it is true that one cannot be a Christian if one does not listen faithfully to the “word of the cross” of which Apostle Paul speaks (I Cor. 1: 18) and does not confess that “there is salvation in no one else” than in Jesus Christ (Acts 4: 12), we have to become adherents of Barthian theologism. Barth himself, for instance made the extreme statement that “religion is unbelief,”3 and Emil Brunner said, for example, that the “revelation in Christ stands outside the history of religion,”4 and that the “theology of the Word of God is the critical sublation of any religionism” (*kritische Aufhebung alles Religionismus*).5 It cannot be denied, though, that the rise of the so-called Dialectical Theology of Barth, Brunner and others, had the character of a reaction against the religionist tendencies of the liberal culture theology of the 19th century.6 One also has to pay attention to the fact that in such case, especially in Karl Barth’s, the anti-religionist theologism is determined by the standpoint of an anti-natural theology.

However this may be, I think that the antagonism (*tairitsu*)7 between theologism and religionism, as construed by the Dialectical Theology, must be sublated in one way or another. As already said, on one hand, we must steadfastly preserve the truth or truth moments in Barthian theologism as far as it is supported by the Bible but, at the same time, based on the recognition of the present-day plurality of religions we have to accept

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5 Brunner (1928: 192).
6 I.e. the theology of “liberal culture protestantism” (*liberaler Kulturprotestantismus*) in Germany. (Ed.)
7 In this article, Mutō characterizes the basic relationship between theologism and religionism by the term *tairitsu* which has the meanings of opposition, contradiction, conflict, tension, dichotomy and dilemma. Since Mutō stresses the inter-action between the opposites, the term antagonism has been used here. (Ed.)