CHAPTER SEVEN

NOTHINGNESS-IN-LOVE
THE PHILOSOPHY OF TANABE HAJIME AND CHRISTIANITY

I

At the end of March 1945, Professor Tanabe retired from Kyoto University after having reached the age of sixty. A few months earlier, in the framework of public lectures of the Kyoto Philosophical Society in autumn 1944, he had delivered the lecture with the title “The Way of Metanoetics” (Zange-dō) which can be said to be the culmination of his long years of lecturing at Kyoto University. In 1946, right after the end of the war, the book Philosophy as Metanoetics (Zange-dō toshite no tetsugaku) was published by Iwanami Shoten. Of course, this publication was connected with the lecture at the Kyoto Philosophical Society mentioned above, and it cannot be denied that the change of heart the book called for was repentance (zange)—in the deepest, original sense of the word—of the Japanese state and people. It must be emphasized, however, that the spirit of Tanabe’s call for “repentance” was totally different from that of the politicians who, in a sudden change of attitude after the defeat in the war and in an effort to deceive themselves as well as others, brandished the slogan “General repentance of 100 million people” (ichi oku sō-zange).

After Philosophy as Metanoetics, Tanabe published several books in rapid succession, among them Existence, Love, and Practice (Jitsuzon to ai to jissen, Chikuma Shobō 1947) and The Dialectics of Christianity (Kirisuto-kyō

1 The original title is Mu soku ai—Tanabe tetsugaku to kirisuto-kyō. This article is based on a lecture delivered in 1985 at a symposium in memory of Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime at Kyoto University (Cf. Shingaku-teki—shūkyō-tetsugaku-teki ronshū Vol. II: 170). It was published 1986 in Mutō’s book Shingaku-teki—shūkyō-tetsugaku-teki ronshū (Collected essays on theology and philosophy of religion) Vol. II. Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 143–165. The present translation by Jan van Bragt is the first publication of this article in English.
2 The literal translation is “philosophy as way of repentance.” The expression “way (or path) of repentance” indicates a practical approach over against an abstract philosophical discourse, which also plays a role in the present article. (Ed.)
3 This is Japan’s most prestigious publishing house. (Tr.)
no benshō,⁴ Chikuma Shōbō 1948). While in Philosophy as Metanoetics he had developed his own philosophico-religious thought in the footsteps of Shinran’s Kyōgyōshinshō (Teaching, Practice, Entrusting, and Realization),⁵ in the later two books Tanabe for the first time seriously negotiated (sesshō) with, and confronted (taiketsu),⁶ Christian thought and faith. A point, which he makes in the preface of The Dialectics of Christianity, is especially worthy to note. The gist is the following: Earlier, for about forty years, he was strongly interested in Christianity, but since the end of the war his interest had intensified and his eyes had been opened to the Gospel of Christ for the first time. Thereby he revised his understanding of Christianity.

At this point, permit me to insert a personal note. I entered the Department of Philosophy in the Faculty of Letters at Kyoto University in 1938, graduated in 1941, and stayed on one more year in the post-graduate division, specializing in what was then called “Pure Philosophy.” During this time Tanabe Hajime was my main professor, so that I may call myself his—albeit unworthy—disciple. Mainly under the influence of my family, I had become a Christian in my youth, and it is no exaggeration to say that Christian thought and faith became the central interest of my life from that time on. That I nevertheless opted for “Pure Philosophy” rather than for “Religious Studies” (where it would have been possible to study Christian thought and its history) was partly due to the high respect I felt for Professor Tanabe. One more reason may have been my desire to study Christian thought and faith in a philosophical perspective (at the least, without losing sight of that perspective), rather than from a narrow theological point of view.

The impact of Tanabe’s lectures was extremely strong. The subtlety of his reasoning and the “dramatic” development of his thought took hold of our minds and left a deep impression. In general, the constellation of Kyoto University during my period of studies there (1938–1942) was a happy one for me, especially since it was the period wherein the religio-ethical interest of Tanabe Hajime came to the fore most clearly and in its

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⁴ The term benshō can also be rendered as “apologetics.” Ozaki (1990: 4) translates the title as “Demonstratio of Christianity.” As the contents of Tanabe’s book and Mutō’s subsequent treatise indicate, this title signifies the self-critical, dialectical process which, in his view, Christianity should undergo towards the “second reformation,” i.e. to “return from Paul to Jesus.” (Ed.)

⁵ For an English translation, see Shinran (1997: 1–292).

⁶ Taiketsu can be rendered also with Auseinandersetzung. (Ed.)