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WAY OF WISDOM: A WAY OF SPIRITUALITY

Today the question of wisdom is raised in the East and the West anew. It covers, on the one hand, the question of the relationship between philosophy and religion, and philosophy and theology. It includes, on the other hand, the question of the foundation of our existence and the world. Wisdom, however, cannot be treated without treating love, enlightenment, not without compassion.

We begin with the question: What is – in comparison with the variety of religions which promise the highest insight, *gnosis*, *prajñā* or *visio beatifica* – the concern of philosophy in its “love of wisdom”? The question arises also, where religions meet. Here, however, it has to be changed into the question: How does man attain wisdom? Does he attain it through the traditions of the peoples? Or is it given to him – as a grace or a *donum*? Here again we have to ask for the relationship between wisdom and love, wisdom and compassion. Since Buddhism and Christianity – together with Islam – are among the most influential religious movements of our days, special attention should be paid to the wisdom aspect of these religions in the concert of religions.

I would like to explain the various aspects of this problem in a set of nine theses or statements. We begin with two theses on the new quest for wisdom, on the rediscovery of the love of wisdom. They are followed by two theses on wisdom in philosophy and religion, and by three theses explaining the Asian wisdom – concepts, before finally, we compare the understanding of wisdom in Buddhism and Christianity.

On Wisdom in Philosophy

Thesis 1: The loss of the sense of reality and of efficiency as seen with regard to the current Occidental philosophy, depends on the suppression of “love of the search for wisdom,” and has to be overcome in view of the encounter of cultures.

With the emergence of intercultural dialogue, philosophy cannot but reconsider and articulate its understanding of wisdom. Wisdom has been forgotten to a large extent as a theme of today's philosophy. The philosopher, at least in the Western world, has, therefore, to ask himself whether "wisdom" – "sophia" – in the name of his subject matter – "philo-sophy" – means more to him than a mere reminder of its primitive Greek origin, which, however, has lost its very meaning. The question must be discussed in intercultural encounters all the more because, in the colonization process of modern European history, Western thought was offered as normative to all peoples and cultures of the world. In the meantime Asia answered with a double attitude: a) There were attempts to express the new experience of Occidental philosophy in suitable concepts. b) There were also attempts to reflect upon the characteristics of their own cultural and religious traditions and to ask what corresponds in these traditions to the "philo-sophical" efforts in the Occident.

This double attitude can be confirmed for India as well as for Japan, which we introduce by way of examples. Regarding the Indian subcontinent, W. Halbfass has described in detail the mutual encounter of Indians and Europeans in his great work *India and Europe: Perspectives of their Intellectual Confrontation*.¹ Therein it is noticeable that the definition of wisdom obviously plays no role in India in the search for an equivalent term for "philosophy." The present Indian basic term for philosophy *daršana* is derived from *darś*=to see and refers to an orientation, "which is concerned with a genuine 'seeing,' an immediate realization of the absolute which differs considerably from the analytical, abstractional, theoretical, objectivizing mind of European philosophy."²

In Japan the actual term for "philosophy" – *tetsugaku* – goes back to Amane Nishi (1829–1897).³ Nishi used, first, *kyurigaku*=

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1. Indien und Europa. Perspektiven ihrer geistigen Begegnung. Basel/Stuttgart 1981.
 2. *Ibid.*, 296sq. (my own translation); cf. more explicitly about this and other terms *ibid.* 296–357.
 3. Cf. G.K. Piovesana, *Recent Japanese Philosophical Thought 1862–1962*. Tokyo 1963, 11–18; *Id.*, *Contemporary Japanese Philosophy*: D. Riepe (ed.), *Asian Philosophy Today*. London/New York/Paris 1981, 223–291; L. Brüll, *Zur Entwicklung der japanischen Philosophie*: Japan-Handbuch, ed. by H. Hammitzsch in collaboration with L. Brüll. Wiesbaden 1981, 1295–1318, esp. 1295–98.

science searching for *ri*, i.e. *logos*, meaning, reason, shortened to *rigaku*=science of *ri*. *Tetsugaku*, again, is an abbreviation of *kikyū tetsuchi*, which, near to the Greek etymology, implies the search and demand for "understanding" and wisdom. Shortened to *kitetsugaku*=science of searching for "understanding," it finally became *tetsugaku*=the science of "understanding." The references to the conceptual history prove that the Japanese term is an approximative concept which includes various aspects. The juxtaposition of *tetsu* and *chi* shows that at last Nishi decided in favor of *tetsu* against *chi* although, at least to my understanding, *chi* appears having but one meaning in a Sino-Japanese context, whereas *tetsu* might be open to a greater variety of methods of searching wisdom. As we see, *tetsu*, *chi*, *ri*, also *gaku*, the variety of elements making up the Japanese term for "philosophy," stand originally in a Sino-Japanese context. Here further clarifications from the Japanese and the Japanologists are desired.

Thesis 2: True search for wisdom combines philosophy with religion.

The recent dispute about *mythos* and *logos* as well as the place attributed to philosophical thinking in Asia prior to its confrontation with the Western mode of thinking, gives new weight to the original connection of the comprehensive search of wisdom and religion also in Western thought.

In a German-Japanese colloquium on the "all-one," K. Nishitani pointed out that "all-one" refers to a problem, "which has been dealt with in religion and philosophy of the West as well as of the East since olden times," that, however, the hyphen between the two parts of the Western term "all-one" precisely expresses the problem proper to the Western understanding of the question.⁴ A German reviewer of the documentation of the symposium wrote that nothing could "have expressed the rupture or break between Eastern and Western philosophy more clearly" than the documentary volume.⁵ This volume appears very

4. Cf. K. Nishitani, *All-Einheit als eine Frage*: D. Henrich (ed.), *All-Einheit. Wege eines Gedankens in Ost und West* (= Veröffentlichungen der Internationalen Hegel-Ver-einigung 14). Stuttgart 1985, 13-21; quotation: 13.

5. Cf. H. G. Holl, *Die tödliche Form der Reflexion*: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Nr. 70 (24. 3. 1986) 11 (my own translation).

imbalanced especially because Japanese participants discuss with great naturality about their religion, concretely: Buddhist tradition, whereas members of the German group were exclusively philosophers, who, moreover, granted Christianity only a marginal role.

In view of the fact that in Asia the difference between religions, sciences of religions and philosophy rather disappears in a symbiosis, Western philosophy has to pose again the question of the relationship between philosophy and Christianity to Christian theology. For both Western philosophy and Christian theology, it must be interesting that in the exchange between Asian thought and Occidental philosophy and theology the experiential knowledge of German mysticism as well as of other forms of the history of mysticism grows ever more into an intermediary position.⁶

Where religion and philosophy meet, the question of a normative concept of religion is at stake. For the Asian context,

A. Pieris has communicated the following thesis:

The separation of religion from culture (as in Latin Christianity) and religion from philosophy (as in Hellenic Christianity) makes little sense in an Asian society. For instance in the South Asian context, culture and religion are overlapping facets of one indivisible soteriology which is at once a view of life and a path of deliverance; it is both a philosophy which is basically a religious vision, and a religion which is a philosophy of life.⁷

Let me then put things back in focus. In all, the non-biblical soteriologies of Asia, *religion* and *philosophy* are inseparably interfused. Philosophy is a religious vision; and religion is a philosophy lived. Every metacosmic soteriology is at once a *darsana* and a *pratipada* to use Indian terms; i.e. an interpenetration of a 'view' of life and a 'way' of life.

6. Cf. Zen Buddhism Today: Annual Report of the Kyoto Zen Symposium No. 2, September 1984, dedicated to the relationship of Zen and philosophy as well as of Zen and mysticism.

7. A. Pieris, *Western Models of Inculturation: How far are they applicable in non-semitic Asia?* : East Asian Pastoral Review 22, 2 (1985) 117.

In fact, the oft-repeated question whether Buddhism is a philosophy or a religion was first formulated in the West, before it reached Peking *via* Marxism. For in the Buddha's formula, the fourfold salvific *truth* incorporates the Path as one of its constituents while the Eight-fold *Path* coincides with the realization of the Truth.⁸

Wisdom in Religions

Thesis 3: The division of religions into prophetic, mystic and sapiential is untenable because every religion comprises a sapiential instant.

In the classification of religions according to their basic inspiration, a division into two groups was prevalent for a long time: "first hand" religions, grounded in immediate, direct experience, – globally speaking, called "mystical religions," and "second hand" religions, based upon indirect mediation and communication, – globally speaking, called "prophetic religions" which demand the "obedience of faith." Where the distinction of mystical and prophetic religions was concretely applied, the Near Eastern religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam were grouped under the heading "prophetic religions," and the Asian religions under the heading "mystical religions." Now, at least Buddhists react rather sceptically when Buddhism is considered a mystical religion.⁹ Greater agreement is reached where Buddhism and other religions of India and China are called sapiential.¹⁰ However, it rightly invites opposition when wisdom is onesidedly attributed to one determined cultural or religious ambient. "Speaking of wisdom has a world tradition."¹¹ Accordingly, with regard to cultural reception R.J.Z. Werblowsky posed the question: "Who considers what

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8. *Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some religio-cultural Guidelines: Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 63 (1979) 179sq.
 9. Cf. on the attitude of D. T. Suzuki H. Waldenfels, *Absolute Nothingness: Foundations for a Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*, New York/Ramsey 1980, 125sq. 129.
 10. Cf. a series of new titles of books as W. Kruckenberget al., *Wissen und Weisheit* Wien 1985; *Lexikon der östlichen Weisheitslehren*. Bern 1986 (without an article on wisdom!); J. Mehlig (ed.), *Weisheit des alten Indien*. Munich 1987.
 11. Cf. J. Möller, *Das Sein der Weisheit, die Weisheit des Seins*. Marginalien zu einer Problemgeschichte: W. Baier et al. (ed.), *Weisheit Gottes – Weisheit der Welt* 1. St. Ottilien 1987, 3–14; quotation: 3.

faith or wisdom?" For "every religion possesses its wisdom and its sages."¹² Therefore, it is certainly correct to consider with H. Küng the religions of China as an independent religious system, and yet, it is not allowed to label the three systems of the Near East, India and China as "Semitic-prophetic," "Indian-mystical," "Chinese-sapiential".¹³

Thesis 4: The term "wisdom" as expression of man's final aim surpasses man's comprehension; it can be only approached in practical and theoretical apprehension.

There are not so many difficulties in comparing faith and wisdom as in comparing mysticism and wisdom. Theologically speaking the fundamental question concerning wisdom can be posed as follows: Is wisdom the final result of human thinking, or is it – at least also – the gratuitous self-communication of the Divine Spirit?¹⁴

In the field of Asian religiosity, especially in Buddhism and Confucianism, upon closer examination, however, also in Hinduism and Taoism, the question is linked to the question about *jiriki* and *tariki*, i.e. in Buddhism to the question about the inner relationship between the meditative Zen-Buddhism and Amida-Buddhism which is rooted in radical confidence in "faithful devotion."¹⁵

The questions imply the problems of self-realization and grace, self and God, and also the problem of asceticism and mysticism in the traditional history of spirituality.¹⁶

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12. Cf. R.J.Z. Werblowsky, *Fernöstliche Weisheit und christlicher Glaube*: H. Waldenfels/T. Immoos (ed.), *Fernöstliche Weisheit und christlicher Glaube*. Mainz 1985, 260–267; quotations: 265 and 266 (my own translations).
 13. Cf. H. Küng/J. Ching, *Christentum und Chinesische Religion*, Munich 1988, 11–19, and others.
 14. Thomas v. Aquin classically treats the question in S.Th. II-II q. 45: De dono sapientiae. R. Schaeffler brought wisdom, science and piety into a triangle relationship; cf. his essay: *Spiritus sapientiae et intellectus – spiritus scientiae et pietatis*: Religionsphilosophische Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Weisheit, Wissenschaft und Frömmigkeit und ihrer Zuordnung zum Geiste: W. Baier et al. (ed.), *Weisheit Gottes I* (note 11) 15–35.
 15. K. Barth considered the latter an antipode to Christian faith; cf. *Kirchliche Dogmatik I/2*, 372–377; also C. Langer – Kaneko, *Das Reine Land. Zur Begegnung von Amida-Buddhismus und Christentum* (= Beiheft der ZRGG XXIX). Leiden 1986.
 16. Cf. my references to distinctive criteria in article, *Meditation/Mystik VII*: H. Waldenfels (ed.), *Lexikon der Religionen* (=LR). Freiburg 1988, 400–403.

In his survey – article written for *Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by M. Eliade, K. Rudolph states that as far as we can judge from the terms used and their history, wisdom was originally a practical matter, namely “insight” into certain connections existing in human life and in the world as well as modes of behavior derived from this insight and put into the service of instruction and education.¹⁷ The question is whether this minimal consent really gives full credit to the essence of wisdom as it is understood all over the world. Not only wisdom, knowledge and science, but also seeing and knowing (lat. *videre*, gr. *oída*) belong together in Occidental etymology.¹⁸

Is it not a fact that from the very beginning a *comprehensive*, knowledge was the aim of wisdom? For a long time the problem was not the comprehensive aim but the way or method leading to the attainment of a comprehensive knowledge which makes practical life meaningful.

Today again there is much talk about “gnosis,” “knowledge,” without stating exactly what this “knowledge” means.¹⁹ In order to promote the discussion between theology and philosophy I would like to add some statements of J. Möller, and ask whether other philosophers could agree with them:²⁰

Wisdom of beingness (*Sein*) (would be) a projective question concerning the horizon of beingness (*Sein*), demanding an answer. Wisdom of being as a transcending projection which surpasses the single being (*Seiendes*) (or even into the being) (*Seiendes*) leads into nothingness, called beingness (*Sein*).

17. Cf. art. Wisdom (K. Rudolph) : M. Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (=ER), New York/London 1987, XV, 393–401, esp. 393.

18.¹² On etymological derivations cf. among others G. Luck, Zur Geschichte des Begriffs “sapientia” : *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 9 (1964) 203–215; J. Kleinstück, Zur Bedeutung von Englisch “wise” und “wisdom” : *Ibid.* 217–231.

19. Cf. the relevant dictionary articles in TRE XIII, 519–550 (K. Berger/R.M.C.L. Wilson); LR 210–212 (C. Scholten); ER V, 566 – 580 (G. Quispel/I.P. Culiuanu/P. Perkins). All these greatly historical oriented articles hardly consider the actualisation of “gnostic” ideas in the context of current New Age-thinking; cf. art. New Age (M. Fuß) : LR 458sq.

20. The following quotations are taken from the essay mentioned in note 11 (my own translation); page numbers in brackets in the text.

calling for an answer; for without an answer we do not reach wisdom, but only silence, which, however, is a mode of speech, too. (10)

Wisdom is openness, closing-up (*Verschliessung*) and closedness (*Verschlossenheit*); openness because wisdom does not close up itself and tends to communicate itself to anybody; *closing-up* because, as transcendence, it remains closed to those who only search for being (*Seiendes*) and its external side (i.e. the external side of oneself and of being). In such a way wisdom is constantly concealed: The world takes its own course. Wisdom as *closedness*, – not because there are only few who follow the path of wisdom in solitude, but because in order to be faithful to itself, wisdom has to screen itself from being (*Seiendes*) which is penetrated by it. The difference between the wisdom of beingness (*Sein*) and being (*Seiendes*) has to be posed necessarily, and at the same time remains incomprehensible. In the tension of openness and closedness, wisdom manifests the double beginning of thinking which cannot deny its negativity and does not hide the difference. (11sq.)

Wisdom is characterized as looking at life and facing death. If redemption (in a philosophical understanding of wisdom) is meaningful at all, then this is the case only through the experience of a turn of thinking which reaches into the nothingness of the super-human, expecting the power of conversion from there. (14)

Wisdom in Asian Religions

Thesis 5: The "realization" of wisdom is the central category of salvation for the gnostic-sapiential forms of Buddhism, especially the meditative Mahāyāna schools.

One of the guiding texts of Mahāyāna-Buddhism carries the name *Prajñāpāramitā*, "perfect wisdom" or "perfection of wisdom." *Prajñā* – from Sanskrit *jñā* = to know signifies the highest, no longer expressible mode of intuitive, comprehensive knowledge by which the knowing subject and the known object are one.²¹ Thus *prajñā* is only another

21. Cf. the art. *Prajna* : ER XI, 477–481 (T. Skorupski); LR 508sq. (H. Waldenfels).

term for being awakened or illuminated in enlightenment. In this sense *prajñā* refers to the basic experience of the Buddha and to the path leading to the Buddha experience. The standard code of religious training comprised a trilogy of morality (Skt. *śīla*), meditation (Skt. *samādhi*) and wisdom (Skt. *prajñā*). Here, however, we should note that what is described as the third or the final stage, is already effective in the passage through the preceding two stages.

Here we cannot describe the history of the understanding of *prajñā* in the various schools of Buddhism. It is, however, important to realize that *prajñā*, on the one side, is to be understood as eminently practical and that in this sense Buddha refutes any form of a mere theoretical speculation as far as it prevents from self-realization and hinders the therapy of a wounded existence and a troubled world. On the other hand, that does not mean that in the attainment of salvation man is not led to the perfection of all his faculties and, consequently, human thinking, too, in its utmost ability is driven to the boundary of the unthinkable.²² This is treated in Nāgārjuna and the philosophical schools following him, especially in Zen-Buddhism and its philosophical reflections until our present time.²³

Prajñā, thus, is formulated predominantly in the line of an all comprising, wholistic *knowledge*. It is, according to T.R.V. Murti, "non-dual knowledge,"²⁴ i.e. the existential realization of reality as it is in every one's body undivided from all reality. *Prajñā* is wisdom of life which elevates knowledge beyond the realm of a cumulatively collected theoretical knowledge to the level where human effort turns again into a perceptive or receptive encounter with reality presented gratuitously as grace. Here knowledge becomes again a knowledge which, from a different perspective, can be called religious.

Because it is inherent to language to tend also to duality and dissension, in the process of history, wherever *prajñā* became an object of speech, it was expressed in the paradoxical terms of knowledge

22. Cf. for more details H. Waldenfels. *An der Grenze des Denkbaren*. Munich 1988.

23. On the philosophical schools of Buddhism cf. the review articles: *Buddhist Philosophy* (Y. Takeuchi/J.P. Keenan): ER II, 540-547; *Buddhistische Philosophie* (H. Waldenfels): LR 96sq.

24. Cf. T.R.V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (London: 1970), p. 214 and others.

and non-knowledge, perception and non-perception, thinking and non-thinking, mind and non-mind, etc.²⁵ The attitude of radical detachment – in Sanskrit *śūnyatā*, mostly translated as “emptiness” or “absolute nothingness,”²⁶ terms which in Western understanding not seldom lead to misunderstandings – can be described in the words of a Chinese text quoted by H. Dumoulin:

“Hence the sage is like an empty hollow. He cherishes no knowledge. He dwells in the world of change and utility, yet holds himself to the realm of non-activity (*wu-wei*). He rests within the walls of the nameable, yet lives in the open country of that which transcends speech. He is silent and alone, void and open, where his state of being cannot be clothed in language. Nothing more can be said of him.”²⁷

Thesis 6: In the genuine Chinese forms of religiosity, Taoism and Confucianism, wisdom is realized in opposite ways through “non-action” or “right action” respectively.

In the aforementioned text, in its own way, the Buddhist *prajñā* meets with the Chinese *tao*. Presumably in the preoccupation with the Sino-Japanese Buddhism the genuine Chinese influence has been overlooked for too long a time. *Tao*, the central notion from which all Chinese religiosity is understood, literally means street, way, – way which the Chinese has to go; way how China is to be “saved;” way which gives back order to the Chinese world.²⁸ Only where the Chinese understanding of *tao* is transferred into the realm of generality and humanity, *tao* becomes the inner core of all things which are named “way” wherever it signifies the fundamental performance of human life.

25. Cf. recent literature from a philosophical point of view, among others: S. Hisamatsu, *The Characteristics of Oriental Nothingness: Philosophical studies of Japan II* (Tokyo: 1960) 65–97; T. Izutsu, *Philosophie des Zen-Buddhismus* (= rowohlt's deutsche enzyklopädie 388). Reinbek 1979; K. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1982; Y. Oshima, *Zen – anders denken? Zugleich ein Versuch über Zen und Heidegger*. Heidelberg 1985.

26. Cf. for more details my book mentioned in note 9.

27. Cf. H. Dumoulin, *History of Zen Buddhism* (New York: 1963), p. 59.

28. Cf. art. Tao (J. Ching) : LR 635.

The religion which today includes *tao* in its name, i.e. Taoism, knows, it is true, a founder, Lao-tzu, the "old teacher," a contemporary of Confucius, but what really remained effective, is the book ascribed to him, the collection of *Tao-te-ching*, the book about "the Way and its Power." It deals with the nameless, which in default of a better term, is called the *tao*, whose power consists in *wu-wei*, in non-action, i.e. in "simple," natural action. Taoistically *wu-wei*, is the quintessence of wisdom. In *Tao-te-ching* 19 we read:

"If we renounce wisdom and throw away knowledge, people will gain hundredfold.

If we renounce morality and throw away duty, people will return to filial piety and love.

If we renounce skill and throw away gains, there will be no thieves and robbers anymore."²⁹

The text which at first sight seems to reject wisdom, actually rejects only a certain form of wisdom and reflects a conscious opposition to the teaching of Confucianism which in *Li Gi* is positively summarized in the triad of "wisdom and sacredness" – "morality and humanity" – "skill and courage":

"Wisdom, humanity, courage: these three are always the effective spiritual powers on earth. To exercise them, only *one* thing is necessary (i.e. the resolution to reach the determination)... The master said: Love of learning leads to *wisdom*, forceful action leads to *humanity*, the ability to be ashamed leads to *courage*. Whoever knows these three things, knows how he has to cultivate his personality; he knows how he can put human beings into order. Whoever knows how he can put human beings into order, knows how he can put the world, the state, the house into order."³⁰

The close connection of wisdom (chin. *chih*) and humanity (chin. *jen*) is repeatedly mentioned in the *Discourses* of Confucius:

29. Quoted from Laotse, *Tao te king*, transl. by R. Wilhelm (= Diederichs Gelbe Reihe 19). Düsseldorf/Köln 1978, 59 (my own translation). Cf. also *Tao-te-ching* 3.

30. Quoted from: *Li Gi. Das Buch der Riten, Sitten und Gebräuche*, ed. by R. Wilhelm (=Diederichs Gelbe Reihe 31). Düsseldorf/Köln 1981, 35 (my own translation).

"Fan Tshi asked what wisdom is. The master said: To be dedicated to the duties towards human beings, to honor demons and gods and at the same time to keep aloof from them – that might be called wisdom." (VI. 20)³¹

or:

"Fan Tshi asked for (the essence of) morality. The master said: Love of human beings. He asked for (the essence of) wisdom. The master said: Knowledge of human nature." (XII. 22)

In Taoism wisdom like *tao* is the inexpressible which wherever it is expressed in words, loses its essence. In Confucianism wisdom is the powerful which appears in the virtues of human beings. It stands the test wherever people live together. Accordingly, especially in Confucianism the sage becomes the illustration of wisdom and its power, – the wise man

"possessing a Way which penetrates everywhere, a brilliance which radiates everywhere" who "is in union with Heaven and Earth in his virtue, with the sun and moon in his brilliance, with the four seasons in his regularity, and with ghosts and spirits in his regularity, and with ghosts and spirits in his (gift) of divining fortunes and misfortunes."³²

Thesis 7: The sage is the saint.

In the history of religions the term "saint," it is true, nowadays is used in a rather inflationary way and therefore should be replaced by the term "mediator of salvation," i.e. the "illuminating embodiment of accomplished salvation" i.e. a person "who in the communication of salvation plays a decisive or at least helpful mediatory role."³³ However, in regard to the ideals of China the thesis should be stated as it stands. As in Judaism the just is the representative of the divine order, in Confucianism, starting with the wise kings of prehistoric times, the sage is a person who understands the order of heaven and shapes his life accordingly. With good reasons both the leading

31. This and the following quotation from Kungfutse, *Gespräche – Lun Yü*, transl. and ed. by R. Wilhelm (=Diederichs Gelbe Reihe 22). Düsseldorf/Köln 1985 (my own translation).

32. Quoted from J. Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity* (Tokyo: 1977), p. 80.

33. Cf. art. Heilsgestalten I (H. Waldenfels): LR 274sq.; also art. Heilsgestalten IV. Chinesische Religionen (R. Malek): LR 276sq.

personalities of China are "teacher," "master": Lao-tzu=the old teacher, K'ung Futzü=Teacher K'ung. What made them important and respectable persons, was their teaching which was a doctrine of life. It is interesting to note that Confucius in his *Discourses* calls himself a "striving person":

"The master said: What originality and morality is concerned: how could I dare (to pretend to possess it); only that I unwearily strive for it and untiredly teach: this maybe could be said. Gung Si Hua said: "Quite true; that we disciples cannot learn." VII.33; cf. XIV.30)

Confucius does not place himself simply in a line with the sages. As it is indicated in *Lun Yü*, the ability and willingness to learn is precisely what distinguishes the teacher from his disciple. When K. Jaspers counts Confucius together with Socrates, Buddha and Jesus among the authoritative personalities,³⁴ the mode how the "Teacher" K'ung teaches the learning, is one of the fundamental qualities which make him an authority. That it is less but self-evident to teach how to learn, proves the history of Confucianism which until today can be considered the history of losing the original inspiration. The loss of the perspective of heaven which deprived Confucianism of its religious quality, was another consequence; it led to a development in which the human relations were not sufficiently rooted anymore in the fundamental relationship between heaven and earth. To the Chinese the wisdom of man refers to the position of man between heaven and earth. Whereas Taoism leads man with its overemphasis on the heavenly order finally into an attitude hostile to civilization and history, at least to a tendency of escaping from world and society,³⁵ in Confucianism man is fully engaged in the realization of humanity. In the five basic relationships between sovereign and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, friend and friend man essentially becomes - as he is called in Japanese: *nin-gen*=a "being in between," i.e. a being which - according to Confucianism - cultivates its relations without - according to Taoism - violating the order of *tao*. Thus, however, wisdom and sanctity, wisdom and holiness are penetrating each other so that in Chinese the concepts become exchangeable. Different from the Chinese teachers, the Buddha is not only a teacher but a saving-

34. Cf. K. Jaspers, *Die großen Philosophen I* (Munich: 1957), p. 154-185.

35. Cf. W. Bauer, *China und die Hoffnung auf Glück* (Munich: 1971), p. 61.

liberating personality. Whether in later times his experience is interpreted – rather *gnosticly* – as knowledge, i.e. wisdom or – rather *agapeicly* – as radical selflessness, i.e. mercy, it does not matter regarding the fact that his experience of a break-through into the essence of true humanity liberates man in his totality and in all his relationships. It is precisely the tension between *prajñā* – wisdom – and *karuṇā* – compassion – that gives the Buddhist understanding of wisdom its proper touch. The enlightened one does not remain alone. The openness for all creatures, feeling compassion for them turns out to be the otherside of wisdom gained in enlightenment.

In Zen Buddhism we meet again with the destruction of affirming statements. In the introductory chapter of the Koan collection *Bi-yān-lu* we read:

“Wu Di of Liang asked the Great Master Bodhidharma: What is the highest meaning of the holy truth? Bodhidharma said: Open vastness – nothing holy. The Emperor insisted: Who is opposite to us? Bodhidharma replied: I do not know.”³⁶

As true thinking reveals itself in non-thinking, the truly holy manifests its true face in the non-holy. In the understanding of Christian theology, the holy as such is not realized by one’s own power but by the power of the Holy Spirit of God, here we come across the positive demand for a conversion of thought – gr. *metanoia*. Here again we are confronted with the problem of the relationship between wisdom and holiness, philosophy and religion.

Wisdom and Compassion in Buddhism and Christianity

Thesis 8: Wisdom and compassion express the ultimate reality in Buddhism and Christianity.

The last part of thesis 7 demonstrates that with regard to Buddhism the relationship of wisdom and compassion is still more fundamental than the tension between philosophical and religious treatment of wisdom dealt with in theses 1–4. This impression gets intensified where Buddhism and Christianity meet in the sign of wisdom

36. Bi-Yān-Lu. Meister Yüan-wu’s Niederschrift von der smaragdnen Felswand, transl. by W. Gundert. Vol. I, Munich 1964, 37 (my own translation); cf. also H. Waldenfels, Grenz (note 22) 83–87.

and love, wisdom and compassion. 1) *Prajñā and karuṇā*: In his book *Zen and Western Thought* M. Abe has repeatedly formulated the thesis that *prajñā* and *karuṇā*, wisdom and compassion arise at once from the fundamental experience of *nirvāna* or *sūnyatā*, i.e. emptiness:

“True Nirvana is, according to Mahāyāna Buddhism, the real source of both *prajñā* (wisdom) and *karuṇā* (compassion). It is the source of *prajñā* because it is entirely free from the discriminating mind and thus is able to see everything in its uniqueness and distinctiveness without any sense of attachment. It is the source of *karuṇā* because it is unselfishly concerned with the salvation of all others in *samsāra* through one's own returning to *samsāra*.³⁷

Undoubtedly this thesis complies not only with the Mahāyāna texts but also with the basic inspiration of the Buddha. Nevertheless, the suspicion cannot be suppressed that in the encounter of Buddhism and Christianity it has become more clear-cut. Anyway, in the meditative forms of Buddhism the priority of the wisdom aspect as opposed to the aspect of compassion can hardly be overlooked.

This becomes very clear where K. Nishitani fundamentally reflects upon the relationship between Buddhist wisdom and reason, i.e. rationality from a Zen-Buddhist context.³⁸ Abe remarks in view of D.T. Suzuki:

“In the view of Suzuki, a Zen person is apt to seem to make too much of *prajñā*, the great wisdom, rather neglecting *karuṇā*, the great compassion.”³⁹

This impression exists even if it can be at once refuted as unjustified in the case of D.T. Suzuki. It can be corrected in view of K. Nishitani too, if we pay attention to the last chapter of his great work of philosophy of religion.⁴⁰ It ends with charity and compassion. There it is written:

37. M. Abe, *Zen and Western Thought* (Honolulu: 1985), p. 178, similarly *ibid.* XXI sq. 21. 126. 162. 221 sq. etc.

38. Cf. K. Nishitani, *Hannya to risei* (Wisdom and reason) : Bukkyo no hikakushisoron-tekikenkyu (Comparative investigation of Buddhist ideas) (Tokyo: 1979), p. 237-299.

39. M. Abe, *Zen* (note 37) 79.

40. Cf. K. Nishitani, *Religion* (note 25) p. 280-285; the following page numbers in the text refer to this book.

"In Buddhism, however, the religious compassion extending to all living things is not merely a feeling of philanthropy or 'universal brotherhood.' It issues from the very essence of the standpoint of Buddhism as a religion." (281)

The decisive example of a universal selfless devotion towards all creatures, however, is not a Buddhist person but Francis of Assisi. K. Nishitani even goes so far that he draws a parallel between the change from Hīnayāna – to Mahāyāna – Buddhism and between Greek *eros* and Christian *agape*, because after all in Buddhism as well as in Christianity true love is based upon radical selflessness (cf. 282).

(2) *Agape and sophia*: In contrast to Buddhism, however, Christianity emphasizes the sequence "love – wisdom." In the New Testament we find sentences like "God is *agape*" (1 John 4, 8, 16) or "God was the *logos*" (John 1, 1) or "God is light" (1 John 1, 5), but nowhere there is a phrase like "God is *sophia*," although the New Testament speaks about God's wisdom. Here, again, we cannot even give a survey about the meaning of wisdom in the Old Testament scriptures and its effect upon the New Testament theology and christology.⁴¹ And although a change of attitude evidently is about to occur, W. Kasper is still right in maintaining that

"The topic of wisdom does not belong to the favourite themes of present discussions." (320)

Consequently, – in spite of many studies on the subject available – the question of wisdom has to be posed again in Christianity. W. Kasper tries to prepare a new place for it in the context of modern Occidental atheism or absence of God and asks:

"How is the presence of God as it is attested in Holy scripture and mediated by Jesus Christ, experienced in the world of today, above all, how can it be thought of?" (319)

41. Such surveys are found among others in ThWNT VII, 465–528 (U. Wilckens/G. Fohrer, art. *sophia*, *sophos*, *sophitso*); ThAT I, 557–567 (M. Sabe, art. *hkm*); ER XV, 401–412 (J.L. Crenshaw/A.R. Brown, art. *Wisdom Literature*). On the christology of wisdom cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus. Die Geschichte von einem Lebenden*. Freiburg/Basel/Wien 1975, 380–383; on the new formulation of the question W. Kasper, *Gottes Gegenwart in Jesus Christus. Vorüberlegungen zu einer weisheitlichen Christologie*: W. Baier et al. (ed.), *Weisheit Gottes I* (note 11), 311–328 (the following page numbers in brackets in the text refer to this article).

In connection with the sapiential traditions of the Old Testament which – not without contact with non-Jewish sapiential traditions – search for God's presence in creation or in the world and are carried on in the gospels, in Christianity the question, above all, refers to the relationship between the theology of creation and of redemption. However, a new approach cannot be started anymore in the horizon of modern Occidental thought alone; today the topic of wisdom as the wisdom of God has to be treated in the horizon of a post-Christian modern period⁴² which is characterized by cultural polycentrism and religious pluralism. So far European theology has not been sufficiently adjusted to the new period of time which, with regard to Christianity and European culture, leads to the loss of the claim to be normative for all the world. In the crossing point of philosophical and religious thought and action as well as of the salvific promises of the religions, the category of wisdom could play a central role.

Thesis 9: From a Christian point of view, the cross of Jesus Christ as "God's might and God's wisdom" (1 Cor. 1, 24) is the crossing of all human wisdom.

In spite of all the attention paid to the various sapiential doctrines, which originated from Jewish and extra-Jewish sources and influenced the early Christian Church and theology,⁴³ for the history of the imitation of Christ, the Pauline phrases at the beginning of his first letter to the Corinthians became the guideline:⁴⁴

As God in his wisdom ordained, the world failed to find him by its wisdom, and he chose to save those who have faith

42. Cf. regarding this definition H. Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie* (Paderborn: 1985), p. 449sq.

43. Here we have to ask for the ways of human discovery of wisdom, for the hypostatization of wisdom as indicated in Prov. 1–9 and Wisd. 6sq., for the relation of God and wisdom, wisdom and *logos*, wisdom and spirit, also for the conveyance of wisdom to Mary and the woman in general as exercised in Christian mariology. Reflections in the fields of trinitarian theology, christology and pneumatology as well as of mariology and theological anthropology would become parts of a discourse.

44. In this regard cf. H. Schlier, *Kerygma und Sophia. Zur neutestamentlichen Grundlegung des Dogmas*: Ders., *Die Zeit der Kirche*. Freiburg et al. 1966, 206–232; U. Wilckens, *Kreuz und Weisheit: Kerygma und Dogma 3* (1957) 77–108; H. Merklein, *Die Weisheit Gottes und die Weisheit der Welt* (1 Kor 1, 21): G. W. Hunold/W. Korff (ed.), *Die Welt für morgen. Ethische Herausforderungen im Anspruch der Zukunft*. Munich 1986, 391–403.

by the folly of the Gospel. Jews call for miracles, Greeks look for wisdom; but we proclaim Christ – yes, Christ nailed to the cross; and though this is a stumbling-block to Jews and folly to Greeks alike, he is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Divine folly is wiser than the wisdom of man, and divine weakness stronger than man's strength. (1 Cor. 1, 21–25)

Translating "Jews" and "Greeks" from the contemporary pattern of Pauline thinking into our present context, according to St. Paul the cross of Jesus crucified is nothing but the break-through and fulfilment of all religious and philosophical quest and discovery of wisdom. The paradox that folly is declared wisdom, weakness strength, death life, downfall victory, cannot be solved by any power of human discernment. On the contrary, in relation to God human criteriology is invalidated and, in its place, man is called into crisis and decision. In this sense F. Nietzsche rightly called Christian faith with its formula "God on the cross" an *absurdissimum* and a "continuous suicide of reason."⁴⁵

And yet, in its criticism of worldly wisdom, the wisdom of the cross must be "expressible and comprehensible as God's greater and more comprehensive wisdom."⁴⁶ This, of course, cannot be done by a more refined process of human reasoning but only in such a way that man himself is introduced into "the mystery of the hidden wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 2, 7).

Theologically speaking, here two fundamental movements meet:

- the *theo-logical* line on which God becomes *logos*, human word and language, and
- the *myst-agogical* line on which inversely man is so strongly drawn into the attitude of self-denial that – *kenotically* – he encounters the self-denial of God which has found its inexchangeable real symbol in Jesus Christ crucified (cf. Phil. 2).⁴⁷

What St. Paul in Phil 2, 7sq. describes as self-denial, self-abasement and obedience unto the death on the cross, can be summarized with the words of 1 Cor. 1, 30:

45. Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 46 : Werke (ed. K. Schlechta) II. Munich 1966, 610.

46. W. Kasper, *Gottes Gegenwart* (note 41) 325.

47. Cf. for more details on the three central key-words H. Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentalthologie* (note 42).

“God made him – Jesus Christ – our wisdom ; he is our righteousness ; in him we are consecrated and free.”

Where, by mistake, *agape* is not taken for *eros*, terms like redemption self-denial, devotion, compassion, selflessness etc. indicate what is understood by charity and love. Where, however, words like these become expressions of God's own nature the ordinary image of God as it is spread among Christians and non-Christians, becomes shaken. Thus the discourse about “the wisdom of the cross” puts *light* upon God himself so that our ordinary conceptions of God become questionable. At the same time it puts *light* upon us and our world by which the crossing of human wisdom provokes us to the attitude of compassion for all creatures which are in need of redemption. Politically, compassion is to be understood as dedication to justice among all peoples and all who live on the dark side of the world, as commitment to peace and liberation, as engagement for an attitude towards nature and its resources which is ecologically justified. In view of the cross, the wisdom of God urges one to actions of love by which man gives himself away and at the same time the relation of lord and servant is reversed. Precisely for all religions, the commitment to wisdom which is revealed in divine *kenosis*, however, is a challenge to compete with each other in the spirit of love and compassion for the establishment of peace in the world. Indeed, today the competition in realizing true love is not strong enough in Christianity and all other religions throughout the world.