

Debate : Zen und Krieg

(Der Präsident)

Als Antwort auf das Buch «Zen, Nationalismus und Krieg» von Brian Victoria und auf die Anschuldigungen, am Zweiten Weltkrieg teilgenommen und ihn unterstützt zu haben, die darin gegen das japanische Zen, einschliesslich Kodo Sawaki, vorgebracht werden, eröffnen wir hiermit eine Debatte zu diesem Thema.

Es geht nicht darum, den Standpunkt des Zen fünfzig Jahre nach diesen Ereignissen anzugreifen oder zu verteidigen – das halten wir für nicht sehr nützlich.

Der wichtige Punkt besteht darin, das Verhalten in jener Zeit zu untersuchen und zu verstehen, und vor allem, davon ausgehend unsere eigene Praxis von hier und jetzt tief zu betrachten.

Worauf müssen wir achten, damit solche Entgleisungen weder im Grossen noch im Kleinen je wieder geschehen? Was müssen wir in unserer Praxis und Unterweisung entwickeln, worauf müssen wir unsere Aufmerksamkeit lenken, damit solche Irrtümer sich nicht wieder ereignen?

Die Personen, die hier ihre Meinung äussern, tun dies in ihrem eigenen Namen.

Um nicht das Kind mit dem Bade auszuschütten

(von Roland Rech)

1. Selbst wenn Zazen die Erweckung ist, so ist diese Verwirklichung weder andauernd noch endgültig. Es ist unsere Aufgabe, unsere falschen Vorstellungen ständig zu durchleuchten, wie auch immer unsere Position und unsere Funktion in der Sangha ist.

Meister Deshimaru hat mir das durch sein lebendiges Beispiel vermittelt.

Die Schriften von Meister Kodo Sawaki zeigen oft seine Reue; es ist bedauerlich, dass B. Victoria diese Äusserungen verzerrt zitiert hat, um seinen Anklagen Nahrung zu geben. So sagt er z.B., in ‚Homeless Kodo‘, Seite 9, bezüglich seiner Aktivitäten als Soldat während des Russisch-Japanischen Krieges von 1904 – 1905: „Als Hitzkopf hatte ich nicht meinesgleichen.“

Und er fügt hinzu: „Das ist lediglich die Grossartigkeit eines Mori no Ishimatsu (ein für seine Kapriolen bekannter Spieler).“

Oder auf Seite 19: „Die Leute sprechen oft von Loyalität, aber ich frage mich, ob sie die Richtung ihrer Loyalität und ihrer Handlungen

kennen. Ich war selbst Soldat während des Russisch-Japanischen Krieges, und ich habe hart auf dem Schlachtfeld gekämpft. Aber da wir das, was wir gewonnen haben, wieder verloren, sehe ich, dass das, was wir machten, nutzlos war. Es gibt absolut keine Notwendigkeit dafür, Krieg zu führen.“

Schliesslich Seite 21: „Ob der Krieg gross oder klein ist, die Wurzel dafür ist in unserem Geist, der die Tendenz hat, hinter anderen herzubellen.“

Diese Äusserungen zeigen strenge Kritik dem kriegerischen Geist gegenüber, und sie sind zahlreich in den Werken von Kodo Sawaki. Dass sie zu anderen Äusserungen in Widerspruch stehen, zeigt uns die Notwendigkeit, äusserst wachsam zu sein.

2. Der Geist der Samurai hat manchmal auf das Zen auf Kosten des Geistes des Mitgefühls, der das Herzstück der Lehre Buddhas ist, und des Wohlwollens gegenüber allen lebenden Wesen abgefärbt. Aus diesem Grunde habe ich bereits vor sieben Jahren im Dojo der Gendronnière die Kannon-Statue wieder aufstellen lassen, damit wir alle nicht vergessen, dass das Schwert der Weisheit von Man-

jusri ohne das wohlwollende Mitgefühl von Kannon nur zu Irrtümern führen kann.

Die Enthüllungen des Buches von B. Victoria bestätigen uns, wie wichtig es ist, das Mitgefühl im Zentrum unserer Praxis und Lehre aufrecht zu erhalten.

3. Wir dürfen Zen nicht auf die Färbung reduzieren, die es über den Weg nach Japan erhalten hat.

Zazen ist die Rückkehr zur Praxis von Shakyamuni, und diese Praxis war zuerst indisch, dann chinesisch, und schliesslich japanisch.

Sie ist jetzt universell.

Wenn man sich mit dem Leben und der ursprünglichen Unterweisung Buddhas vertraut macht, kann man sich ihn mit seinem Kesa, seiner Mönchsschale oder auch die Blume zwischen den Fingern drehend vorstellen, aber **sicher nicht säbelschwingend oder bombenwerfend**. Im Zweifelsfalle frage ich mich oft: Wie hätte Buddha hier und jetzt gehandelt?

4. Die Geschichte Japans seit der Meiji-Epoche zeigt neben vielen anderen ähnlichen Geschichtsabschnitten, **dass, sobald sich eine spirituelle Praxis als Kirche institutionalisiert, sie früher oder später damit endet, sich mit der Macht zu verbinden, um ihre Interessen zu vertreten und um den Rückgriff auf Ge-**

walt zu rechtfertigen, auf das Risiko hin, ihr Ideal zu verraten.

Die beste Art, dies zu vermeiden, besteht darin, diese Institutionalisierung zu verhindern; und wenn ein Minimum von Strukturen notwendig ist, sollten wir immer denken, dass es besser ist, die Dojos oder Tempel zu verlieren als den Weg Buddhas zu verraten.

5. Die Buddhas haben die Leerheit unterwiesen, um uns zu helfen, uns von unseren Verhaftungen zu befreien.

Aber sich der Leerheit zu verhaften führt in eine Sackgasse, wie Bodhidharma betonte.

Diese Leerheit würde nur einen moralischen Nihilismus unterstützen.

Sie ist aber die gegenseitig voneinander abhängige Existenz aller Wesen, deren Bewusstsein Quelle der Solidarität, des Mitgefühls und der Achtung ist.

Die Gebote Buddhas drücken dies aus, um aufklärend auf unser Leben einzuwirken.

Das erste unter ihnen ist, nicht zu töten, sondern im Gegenteil, jedes Leben zu beschützen.

Wir sollten dies niemals vergessen.

Roland Rech

AZI DEBATE

Debate : Zen and War

Following the publication of the book *Zen at War* by Brian Victoria, and in response to its accusations that Japanese Zen authorities, including Master Kodo Sawaki, supported or participated in World War II, we are opening a debate on the subject at this site.

It is not a matter of accusations or a defense of Zen's position 50 years after the fact, neither of which would be very useful to us; it is rather a question of analyzing and understanding the behavior of the epoch, and above all of engaging in serious reflection on our own practice of here and now. To what should we pay attention so that such slips--minor or major--do not recur? What must we develop in our practice/teaching, which points must we emphasize so that such errors are not committed?

Those who express themselves here do so in their own name.

The president

The Sotoshu's "Act of Repentance" : An Opportunity for Self-Reflection? by Jacques Espinasse

In this document, published in 1992, the directors of Soto Zen examine and analyze the activities of their school and, more briefly, the political and doctrinal positions it took during what have come to be called the wars of aggression : wars against China in 1894-95 and Russia in 1904-05; the annexation of Korea in 1910; the occupation of Manchuria in 1931 and northeastern China in 1937-38; and World War II, 1939-45.

For me -- and no doubt for many of us -- it is a shock to discover that "Imperial-Way Buddhism" was tied to state politics and furnished doctrinal justification to the wars of conquest, whereas "Imperial-State Zen" brought concentration and the supposed going beyond life and death on the battlefield.

I have become aware that several researchers and historians have studied this period from the viewpoint of the Buddhist implication in these wars, and that this research continues. It would be vain to ignore it, childish to dismiss it on the grounds of the authors' subjectivity or doctrinal bias -- though both exist -- and above all regrettable to not seize this opportunity for self-reflection.

The heads of the Sotoshu did not commit this error, which led them to conduct their own research, concretized in the document called *Sanshabun*, which can be translated as "declaration of repentance" or "act of repentance."

A Word on the Historical Context

We know that Buddhism was introduced to Japan from Korea in the 6th Century, under the reigns of Emperor Kimmei and Prince Shotoku; that Dogen and transmitted Zen appeared there in the 13th Century; and that it was in fact made the state religion in the Tokugawa period (1600-1867).

In 1868 came the Meiji Restoration. The emperor was favorable to Shinto (the vernacular religion), and opposed (as was the regent Tokugawa) to Christianity and social ideas. At first, probably under the influence of his entourage, he was also opposed to Buddhism itself, and, through charters and edicts, arranged for its disappearance over time. The Buddhist clergy reacted, moved closer to those in power, and were able to redress the situation at the price of increased dependence.

The context in the beginning and in the first half of the 20th Century is therefore one of an institutional Buddhism conscious of being indebted to the Imperial system, particularly since 1872.

This climate would be accentuated during the wars by the group behavior displayed by a large part of the elite.

We are miles away from the Asoka/Shakyamuni relationship, where the king follows the Buddha.

We consider Zen as being introduced to Japan during the Kamakura Era, when the bushido -- the Way of the Warrior -- influenced those in power. Samurai came closer to Zen, notably because of the ever-present question of life and death.

Did the relationship between monk and samurai, at first authentic and person-to-person, progressively become a parody of itself at the service of the group, at the service of power ?

The question remains open.

A Word About the Teaching Viewpoint, the Doctrinal Viewpoint

Apart from internal research conducted by various schools, several people have researched Buddhism and Japanese Zen during the wars in question :

Ichigawa Hakugen, Rinzai monk : The War Responsibility of Buddhists and Buddhism During the War.

Hakamaya Noriaki, Soto academic : Critical Buddhism.

Ishikawa Rikizan : The Social Response of Buddhists to the Modernization of Japan.

Brian Victoria, Soto monk : Zen at War.

What is the "teaching" content, the doctrinal content of their research? Several authors, notably Hakamaya in *Critical Buddhism*, state the following :

"If we admit that there is an unchanging reality, an eternal and substantial essence that underlies the phenomenal world, we deny impermanence (including the famous an-atman) and the law of causality (interdependence) taught by Buddha."

It's true, such a reality would deny Buddha's teaching. But who admits that such a reality exists? According to these authors, it is Zen and Mahayana Buddhism!

In effect, Hakamaya considers that expressions such as "inherent (original) illumination," "Buddha-nature" -- expressions actually used by Zen -- imply an unchanging essence or substance, identical for everything. And so, according to Hakamaya, the following risk exists : "Everything being essentially identical, there is real risk of an acceptance of discrimination and injustice."

This is Hakamaya's explanation for the active adherence of Japanese Buddhism to the wars of conquest and to a highly conservative society. Should he have only observed -- and shared his observation of -- this active adherence, without attempting to explain it through doctrinal analysis?

Let us remember that expressions such as "Buddha-nature," "existence without noumenon," mean non-duality. These expressions have nothing to do with entity, they do not imply the existence of a fixed essence or substance, they do not contradict the law of causality, and finally they are not the negation of the an-atman, but rather its expression. Thus, identity does not discredit differences; *ku* does not discredit *shiki* ! Zen includes and goes beyond both.

Such is the teaching. How can one be mistaken on this subject? I suspect here a doctrinal bias on the part of the author. How could one consider that these expressions could serve as theoretical support, as doctrinal foundation, or as a basis for the acceptance of discrimination or injustice? In other words, the reality of a non-dualistic, non-entity, non-fixed, non-substantial life is potentially the access to inner freedom and the abandonment of egotistical goals -- and not their reinforcement, as Hakamaya suggests!

Profound Practice...Do Not Escape It !

Monk...practicing for oneself is not the Way !

Samurai...even allegiance, honor, the code are not the Way !

Only the Way -- from nothing else ! Such is our life.

The teaching of Master Deshimaru goes like this :

- Zazen itself is the Way.

- Zazen follows us automatically (zazen influences every moment of our lives). How could it be otherwise ?

Sensei liked "automatically" a lot, but it was not about naivete, nor complaisance -- we can understand it by what follows :

- However, you must take care ! Remain humble, vigilant !

In other words, even though zazen is all things, even though zazen follows us without fault, we should nevertheless remain humble in ourselves, vigilant ! Only thus is the Way ! Only then are we one with ourselves, one with this zazen that follows us !

Return to personal views, or to group views, and in an instant "it is like a chasm separating sky and earth."

By way of conclusion...

The Sotoshu's Act of Repentance appears to me today as capable of playing a determining role for people who have not yet entered into the practice and who only wish to approach Buddhism when it distances itself from power and militarism.

First, I situated this document in the historical context.

The compromising of Japanese Buddhism with those in power in this first half of the 20th Century is in line with the connection woven since its introduction in the 6th Century.

During this evolution, at each epoch, it is possible that this connection seemed natural, that it was judged beneficial or even indispensable to the survival of the school, and thus not questioned.

Then, with the benefit of hindsight, let us learn to be vigilant and let us avoid considering ourselves as more aware than our elders. Today, one must be aware not only of the wars of conquest led by Japan, but

also those generated -- in their time -- by the West.

Then I had the ambition to recall the doctrinal point of view, little-present in the school's text of repentance, and, in my opinion, badly handled by certain independent researchers - researchers who declare that Mahayana Buddhism and Zen attribute a finite and substantial character to "Buddha-nature," at the end of which they explain discrimination and injustice from this false hypothesis, fabricated by themselves.

On the subject of responsibilities, it is better to be conscious of one's weaknesses and of one's errors, aggravated by the proximity to power and group behavior, rather than to invoke a body of doctrines.

Finally, I put the accent on daily practice, starting with zazen. Not a Buddhist exercise, but the actualization of the Way. **"Zazen, the night train that carries along our life."** Don't miss it !

A word about "tathagata garbha"

This expression -- sometimes used by Zen -- is habitually translated as "seed of Buddhahood." At first glance, something with entity, wouldn't you say?

However, here, seed is not meant as an object, but as "potentiality."

In modern language, we can therefore translate it as "potential Buddhahood."

Potentiality : Master Deshimaru very much appreciated this word -- proposed by one of his disciples -- and I think that Nagarjuna would have also appreciated it !

From moment to moment, actualize this potentiality ! Naturally so...

Jacques Espinasse, Zen monk.

Translated from the French by Elaine Konopka

Don't Throw the Baby Out with the Bathwater

by Roland Rech

I am greatly distressed to learn that the Japanese Zen masters participated, before and during World War II, in emperor-worship and their government's military propaganda. Distorting Buddha's teaching as some have done is a fault that only the apology published in 1992 by the Sotoshu can help to pardon. What lessons are to be learned from these errors to avoid committing them again?

1. Even if zazen is awakening, this realization is neither permanent nor definitive. It is up to us to constantly shine a light on our illusions, whatever our position and function in the Sangha may be. This is the living example I received from Master Deshimaru. The writings of Kodo Sawaki often show his repentance; it is a shame that B. Victoria selectively quoted these remarks to fuel his accusations.

For example, in *The Zen Teaching of Homeless Kodo*, page 9, in reference to his activities as a soldier during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, Kodo Sawaki says : "*As a daredevil, I am second to none,*" adding, "*[But] that is only the greatness of Mori no Ishimatsu [a gambler famous for his bravery].*"

On page 19 : "*People often talk about loyalty, but I wonder if they know the direction of their loyalty and their actions. I myself was a soldier during the Russo-Japanese War and fought hard on the battlefield. But since we lost what we had gained, I can see that what we did was useless. There is absolutely no need to wage war.*"

And finally, on page 21 : "*No matter how big or how small a war is, the root cause is our minds, which have a tendency to make us growl at each other.*"

Such remarks show a severe criticism of the warrior spirit and are numerous in Kodo Sawaki's work. The fact that they contradict other remarks shows how necessary it is for us to be extremely vigilant.

2. The spirit of the samurai has sometimes left its mark on Zen to the detriment of the spirit of compassion and kindness towards

all living beings which is at the heart of Buddha's teaching. This is why, seven years ago, I had the statue of Kannon put back in the dojo at La Gendronnière, so that we would not forget that, without Kannon's benevolent compassion, Manjusri's sword of wisdom can only lead to error.

The revelations of B. Victoria's book confirm for us the importance of maintaining compassion as the center of our practice and our teaching.

3. We should not reduce Zen to the tone it took on during its passage through Japan. Zazen is the return to the practice of Shakyamuni, and his practice was first Indian, then Chinese and finally Japanese. It is now universal. When we become familiar with the life and original teaching of Buddha, we can represent it through our kesa, through our monk's bowl, or even by turning a flower between our fingers, but surely not by brandishing a sword or dropping bombs. When in doubt, I often ask myself, "How would Buddha react here and now?"

4. The history of Japan since the Meiji Era and many other similar histories show that when a spiritual practice becomes institutionalized as a church, sooner or later it winds up allying itself with power to protect its interest at the risk of betraying its ideal and justifying recourse to violence.

The best way to avoid this is to refuse such institutionalization, and if a minimum of structure is necessary, we should always think that it would be better to lose dojos or temples than to betray the Buddha-Way.

5. The buddhas taught about emptiness to help us free ourselves from our attachments; but attachment to emptiness leads to an impass, as Bodhidharma emphasized. Emptiness could not support moral nihilism. It is the interdependent existence of all beings whose consciousness is the source of solidarity, compassion and respect. The Buddha's precepts exist to express this and shed light on our lives. The first is not to kill, but on the contrary, to protect all life. We should never forget this.

Roland Rech

Reply by Brian Daizen Victoria

May I begin by expressing my appreciation to the Association Zen Internationale for having posted "Debate: Zen and War" on its website. As the author of *Zen at War*, I have long hoped one or more Zen groups in the West would seek to continue the discussion I began in that book. AZI's willingness to face what Aitken Roshi has so aptly expressed as the "dark side of our heritage" reveals your association's openness to facing some unpleasant truths about our tradition, even when it involves Zen masters that many of us have long revered. While I am in agreement with much of what Roland Rech said in his critique of my book (especially points 2 thru 5), I must nevertheless express disagreement with many of his comments in his first point. That is to say, I believe Roland is still refusing to recognize the full extent and significance of Kodo Sawaki's complicity in Japanese militarism. I say this because Roland claims: "The writings of Kodo Sawaki often show his repentance; it is a shame that B. Victoria selectively quoted these remarks to fuel his accusations." The truth is in fact quite the opposite. That is to say, as far as my book is concerned, space limitations forced me to select only a few of Sawaki's many remarks in which he repeatedly expressed his wholehearted support for Japanese militarism and the totalitarian ideology it represented. I thought these quotes would be sufficient to show the character of Sawaki's wartime thought, but apparently for Roland they are too selective. Thus, I must ask Roland to tell me just how many quotes it would take to convince him that Sawaki was indeed a fervent militarist during the war years (if not long before)? For example, in May 1944 Sawaki went so far as to claim that Zen Master Dogen himself had anticipated the Japanese military spirit. Sawaki wrote:

In the chapter entitled "Life and Death" of the *Shobogenzo* (A Treasury of the True Dharma), Zen Master Dogen said, "*It is possible to free oneself from life and death by simply forgetting body and mind; casting oneself into the abode of a Buddha; acting as a Buddha would act; and living as a Buddha would live. In*

so doing there is no reason to exert oneself either physically or mentally."

Expressed in different words, this means that the orders of our superiors are to be obeyed, regardless of content. It is in doing this that we immediately become a faithful retainer of the Emperor and a perfect soldier.

[Quotation in "*Shoji o Akirameru Kata*" (*The Method of Clarifying Life and Death*) in the May 1944 issue of the *Buddhist magazine, Daihorin*, p. 6.]

If Roland is still not convinced, I can provide him with any number of similar quotes (and articles) though I would request that he arrange for these materials to be translated himself.

What I find so TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE with quotes like the above is the manner in which Sawaki turns the Buddha Dharma as expressed by Zen Master Dogen into an instrument of support for a totalitarian ideology that taught "*orders are to be obeyed, regardless of content*" in order to "*become a faithful retainer of the Emperor and a perfect soldier.*"

I would ask Roland just what he thinks of a man who urged blind obedience to one's superiors in the name of the Buddha Dharma, especially blind obedience to superiors who ordered the killing of millions of their fellow Asians, committing atrocity after atrocity in the process? Please share your thoughts with us, Roland. In November 1997 I attended the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion held in San Francisco, California. One of Sawaki's disciples was also there, a Soto Zen priest by the name of Gudo Wafu Nishijima (a translator of the *Shobogenzo*). Nishijima presented a paper entitled "Japanese Buddhism and the Meiji Restoration." During the question and answer period that followed, Nishijima startled his audience when he said, "*During W.W. II Zen Master Sawaki always told us, 'Be the best soldier you can be. This is the Buddha Dharma!'*"

I would ask Roland, is this the teaching of an authentically enlightened master?

The historical record reveals that beginning in 1939 Sawaki, already sixty years old by then, served the Japanese war effort in a variety of positions, including one as a commission

member promoting the practice of the martial arts among Japanese school children in order to prepare them for military service. In addition, in 1941 and 1942 he went to give war-promoting "Dharma talks" to Japanese military and civilians occupying the Chinese province of Manchuria. For these and other wartime contributions, the Japanese government awarded him a civilian decoration on November 3, 1943. Yes, Roland is right, I was indeed "selective" in my quotes and comments. I should have included all of the above and more until there could be absolutely no question of exactly what Sawaki stood for and advocated during the war years! Moving on, Roland invokes a few quotes from Sawaki as contained in "The Zen Teaching of Homeless Kodo" in an attempt to prove that Sawaki "often showed his repentance" and "showed a severe criticism of the warrior spirit." The fact is that the quotes he invoked show nothing of the kind. In fact, it is Roland himself who is guilty of "selective quotation." I say this because what appears to be a form of self-criticism for Sawaki's "daredevil spirit" as expressed in the first quote Rech mentions, is exactly that. Read in context, it is clear that Sawaki was subsequently critical of his youthful reckless bravado during the Russo-Japanese war. Or expressed somewhat differently, Sawaki was critical of his 'macho attitude.' No army wants its soldiers to act foolheartedly on the battlefield. Cold, hard, unfeeling (except for hatred of the enemy), efficient, and always obedient killers are what generals seek. As Sawaki himself said about his own military service during the Russo-Japanese war, "I chased our enemies into a hole where I was able to pick them off very efficiently." All militaries welcome men like Sawaki and his subordinates who "gorged ourselves on killing people." (*Zen at War*, p. 32)

Needless to say, this all has ABSOLUTELY NOTHING to do with Buddhist "repentance." Further, in the second quote Roland uses, Sawaki claims that as far as Japan's wars are concerned, "since we lost what we gained, I can see that what we did was useless." And just what does this really mean? Logically speaking, it should also mean: "if we hadn't lost what we gained,

what we did was useful." In actual fact, Japan didn't immediately lose what it gained from the Russo-Japanese War (i.e. the right to economically exploit both Korea and Manchuria). These and other colonial possessions were only lost after Japan was defeated in W.W. II. Thus, if Sawaki eventually came to the conclusion that "there is absolutely no need to wage war" it was only in the postwar era when Japan's cities had been reduced to ashes. Is this what it takes to turn a Buddhist priest against war? And further, as I am sure Roland is aware, Buddhist repentance requires that each individual Buddhist confess his or her own transgressions. Where do we read that Sawaki ever repented his own fervent and unquestioning endorsement of, and collaboration with, Japanese militarism? Finally, let us remember that Sawaki served for more than six years as a non-commissioned officer and squad leader in the Japanese Imperial Army, i.e. from 1900 to 1906. During this entire time he was also a Soto Zen priest, having entered the priesthood in 1895 at the age of 16. Thus, as I note in my book, Sawaki was an ordained Buddhist priest as he "gorged [him]self on killing people." Is there any record whatsoever that he ever expressed remorse for having personally killed hundreds of men? Does the fact that Sawaki killed in the name of the state and the emperor exempt him from his earlier pledge as a priest to follow the Buddhist precepts, including the precept forbidding the taking of life? If I have seem somewhat harsh in the things I have written here, I ask Roland and my other readers' understanding. The historical reality is that far, far, far too many sentient beings have died because of the murderous ideology espoused by Sawaki and his like. I can only hope that Roland will agree with me when I say that if the Buddha Dharma is to be built on a solid foundation in the West, it must be built on a foundation of truth, not wishful thinking, let alone uncritical reverence for a man who for at least forty five years of his life (i.e. 1900-1945) placed the Buddha Dharma in the service of Japanese imperial conquest. In the friendship of the Dharma, Brian Daizen Victoria P.S. May I inform German language readers that the German edition of my book is now available from Theus Verlag of Berlin under the title, "Zen, Nationalismus, und Krieg." I have added two

new chapters to the German edition that detail both the 2,000+ year historical background of 'holy war' in Buddhism (and Zen), as well as some of the reforms necessary in Zen practice and doctrine for "the unity of Zen and the sword" to be broken,

once and for all. I look forward to hearing German readers' reactions, especially to my proposals for Zen 'reform.'

Brian Daizen Victoria

**Reply
by Roland Rech**

Dear Brian

I thank you for your answer of 30/4/99. This time I would need more information to be convinced that master Kodo Sawaki was a strong supporter of Japanese militarism and its totalitarian ideology. Could you send me more texts, even in Japanese,

about this problem? An answer from AZI will come when we have more deeply studied the matter in order to learn all possible lessons from it.

Thank you for your help.

Yours in the Dharma

Roland Rech

Is the Moon Dirty? by Luc Boussard

Our lives are complicated. There are times of war when fires fall from the sky, and there are times when we have afternoon naps with the kotatsu [heater]. Sometimes we have to work all night and sometimes we relax and drink sake. Buddha-dharma is the Buddha's teaching about how to manage these various situations. (Kodo Sawaki) ¹

People often say, "Reality, reality," but it is just a dream. It is reality in the dream. People think revolutions and wars are astounding, but they are just struggles in a dream. At the point of death, you might easily understand, and say, "Oh! That was just a dream." (Kodo Sawaki) ²

It seems that American Zen is going through a crisis -- one which could be described as both an internal crisis, because it has erupted within the community; and a growth crisis, insofar as it comes after a long period of increasing strength and doesn't seem likely to lead to a fundamental questioning of the presence of Zen in the United States. The observation of this crisis was inspired by, among other things, my reading of the book by Brian Victoria entitled *Zen at War*³, whose cover depicts Buddhist monks in kolomos, shouldering rifles, parading past an officer standing at attention. Brian Victoria, university professor (Asian languages and literatures at the University of Auckland) and author of a book on Dogen (Zen Master Dogen), but also a Soto Zen monk and disciple of Yokoi Kakudo (author of an English translation of the *Shobogenzo*), firmly denounces the attitude of Japanese Buddhist sects, especially the Zen sects, towards the openly repressive, imperialist and militaristic policy adopted by the Japanese state from the end of the 19th century until its defeat in 1945. Victoria analyzes the strictly historical factors of this evolution of Buddhism in Japan -- from the feudalization of temples by warlords to the enslavement of the clergy by the state in an effort to regain the ground lost to Shintoism at the beginning of the Meiji era, as well as the traditional links between Zen and the martial arts. But he doesn't stop there: He examines the

basic tenets of Buddhist teaching for evidence of characteristics conducive to the abdication of a religious and compassionate vocation in favor of nationalism, war-mongering and emperor-worship.

My first reaction after reading this work is an ambivalent one, even if I am on the whole grateful to Victoria for having published it. To begin with, I was floored by the enormity of the facts revealed to me. The elite of the Buddhist clergy, especially the Zen clergy, was devoted, body and soul, to the propagation of the totalitarian and war-mongering ideology adopted by the Japanese state during the period in question, with a conviction and zeal that made it, next to the army, the spearhead of this policy. The Buddhist sects threw themselves into the wars of conquest initiated by Japan (against China in 1894, against Russia in 1904, the annexing of Korea in 1910, territorial expansion under cover of World War I, invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and of China in 1937, World War II). As in so many holy wars, the clergy justified and encouraged the worst atrocities committed by the army and the authorities, while the missionaries actively participated in indoctrination, infiltration and surveillance operations. If the slightest doubt remains on this subject, the apology published in 1993 by the heads of the Soto branch of Zen should put it to rest. Some examples of the admissions to be found there :

The Soto school as a whole felt no remorse, nor, indeed, any sense of guilt for having embraced the ideas and having collaborated with the governmental authorities since the beginning of the Meiji Era in their pursuit of national policies which led to wars of aggression...⁴

We cannot help but conclude that the [Soto] order itself and its missionaries were overwhelmingly and actively in favor of the policies of the government of the time.⁵

Missionary activities in Korea prior to the war abetted the national policies of colonization, supported policies of Imperialization and aided propaganda operations.⁶

Members of the [Soto] School were directly under the control of the Japanese army and

played an important role in military activities in...placation operations...[7](#)

The Soto school, which did not behave any worse than the others, deserves some credit for at least admitting to these criminal errors and expressing its shame and determination to not repeat them. The same cannot be said of all Buddhist schools.

I must admit that I am bitterly disappointed, having harbored, as many people do, the conventional notion that Buddhism always held itself apart from political power and never compromised itself in a war. The pill is that much more bitter to swallow given that my disgust for the historical misdeeds of the Catholic Church played a large part in my rejection of that religion. But once past this disillusionment, there's really nothing to make a fuss about. Given that Japan wanted to reproduce all the approaches that made for success in the West, it's not surprising that it experimented with the alliance of the Army and the Church. We may be disappointed to learn that Buddhism did not resist corruption any better than Christianity did, but after all, the pressures were formidable and the era was what it was. Not to mention that the degeneration of and betrayal by the institutions, clerical and other, Japanese or not, is not at all surprising. And Master Taisen Deshimaru, of whom I was a disciple, did not instill me with a great respect for the Japanese Zen clergy. But Brian Victoria's book raises other questions that seem to me much more serious.

First of all, after a lengthy exposition of the misdeeds committed by Japanese Buddhist leaders, and an analysis of the historical and cultural factors which contributed to this departure, Victoria exposes the justifications for these crimes found by Buddhist scholars and priests in Zen doctrine. And here the picture is positively distressing. Zazen itself and the foundations of the practice -- *mushotoku* (non-profit), *muga* (non-ego), *hishiryo* (beyond thinking), *shin jin datsu raku* (throwing down body and mind), *wago* (harmony with oneself, others and the cosmic order), *daishu ichinyo* (following others when in the temple) -- are

used to justify emperor-worship and war, war presented as an act of compassion performed by the only supporters of true Mahayana (the Japanese) to bring the troublemakers back to the straight and narrow. In other words, the deepest, most intimate, most treasured Zen values were put at the service of the lust for conquest. Here, in no particular order, are several edifying quotes :

...Russia is not only the enemy of our country, it is also the enemy of the Buddha.... If theirs is the army of God, then ours is the army of the Buddha. (Sôen)⁸

[There is] no bodhisattva practice superior to the compassionate taking of life. (Nantembô)⁹

It is really not [the soldier] but the sword itself that does the killing.... It is as though the sword performs automatically its function of justice, which is the function of mercy.... (D.T. Suzuki)¹⁰

[If one would but] annihilate the ego...[then an] absolute and mysterious power and radiance will fill one's body and mind,...[together with] an unlimited gratitude to the imperial military.... (Yamada Reirin)¹¹

If you see the enemy you must kill him... Isn't the purpose of the zazen we have done in the past to be of assistance in an emergency like this? (Harada Daiun)¹²

...when the ego as been thoroughly discarded, that which springs forth is identical with the spirit of Japan. (Seisetsu)¹³

In addition to the distress I feel upon reading this, several observations come to mind.

First a sort of revolt that I would like to see Victoria share. No, Zen has nothing to do with this; on Vulture Peak, when he recognized Mahakasyapa as his heir, Buddha did not brandish a sword but turned a flower between his fingers.

Even though he claims to not have renounced his priest status, Victoria seems to lack the conviction to defend Zen. He sometimes seems very close to submitting to the arguments of those who think that the Buddhist teaching, by its very nature, lends itself a bit too easily to the misappropriation undertaken by the Nippon clergy, army and state.

His criticism of the monasteries is dubious, as is his support of the "twelve historical characteristics " of Hakugen¹⁴, which "produced in

Japanese Buddhism a receptiveness to authoritarianism." It must be said plainly : These arguments do not hold water. It's like saying the Gospels contain the seeds of the Inquisition and the massacre of the American Indians.

Harmony with the cosmic order is not harmony with the established order.

When we go beyond ourselves, through zazen, it is not marching in step to cries of "long live this" or "down with that" which we find, any more than *muga* and *hishiryō* lead us to kill without remorse. In a word, Victoria is a victim of the famous confusion between the finger and the moon : believing he has found a stain on the finger that points to the moon (the finger being the Japanese masters), Victoria cries : "The moon is dirty!" In fact, he lends his personal notions of politics and morality an importance that does not seem sufficiently counterbalanced by the wisdom of zazen.

I also find that, in his insistence on the connection between Zen and the sword, Victoria displays a very poor understanding of the martial arts. Like many well-intentioned people, he hates war and the mere idea of violence. This is undoubtedly why he seems a bit too eager to reduce the martial arts to a method of killing without emotion. Personally I think the fusion of Zen and the martial has more to do with the study of death, and therefore of detachment, equanimity, and freedom, rather than with the art of taking life. Victoria dwells at length on a certain perversion of Zen and the martial arts, but he shows little eagerness to rebalance this portrait. Nevertheless, the martial arts go well beyond the act of killing.

Here we reach a level of reflection that seems beyond Victoria, perhaps because he is blinded by his attachment to pacifism and the prevailing ideas about justice and right. It sometimes happens that circumstances put men in situations that are not of their choosing. War is one of them. While it is unacceptable that the clergy use Zen to promote nationalistic and militaristic interests, might it not be possible that a master has the right, and even the duty, to

use war, when war exists, to continue to teach the Way? I think it safe to say that Kodo Sawaki did nothing to encourage the unleashing of hostilities; should he cease being a man of the Way and a guide for others simply because there is a war on?

Once again, I am neither surprised nor bothered by the fact that Zen and Buddhist institutions compromised themselves in their relationship to Japanese totalitarianism. But Victoria's book levels very serious accusations at the most prestigious masters, the transmitters of the Dharma, and notably those who brought Zen to the West.

I must be frank. Seeing the American Zen establishment suffer in its puritanism and its good conscience by discovering that the lineage from which much of it comes (Shaku Sōen, Harada Daiun Sōgaku, Yasutani Hakuun) seriously compromised itself for an atrocious cause does not exactly displease me.¹⁵ This same establishment ostracized Master Deshimaru because he criticized the mixture of Soto and Rinzai made fashionable in the United States by precisely the people who *Zen at War* accuses of colluding with facism.¹⁶

But Victoria also attacks Kodo Sawaki (Deshimaru's master), reproaching him for being in the war, for boasting that he fought fiercely, and for being a propagator of militarism. It is an image of Kodo which jives neither with what I know of him nor with the teaching that Master Deshimaru gave us and which he received from him. This teaching, which confronts us with the urgency of resolving here and now the problem of life and death, without any other consideration, can in no way preach servility towards authorities. The quotes from Kodo Sawaki published in *Zen at War* are brief and out of context, and lend themselves to diverse interpretations; sometimes they are even taken from Kodo's enemies, who claim to cite him without the reader knowing exactly what comes from them and what comes from him.¹⁷ It would therefore be interesting to have access to the sources that Victoria cites.

As for me, I reread the excerpts of Kodo Sawaki's Notebooks translated and commented on by Master Deshimaru. Kodo says the fol-

lowing : "*Since prehistoric times, man has perpetuated this action [war]. This does not diminish the truth that killing is the worst of crimes, especially in Buddhism.*" And Master Deshimaru adds that his father wanted him to join the army, but Kodo advised against it. "*When I met Kodo Sawaki,*" he says, "*I made my choice : Being a monk is better than becoming a general. Even a beggar-monk. My mind was made up. Kodo Sawaki was a determining influence.*"

Kodo went to war : Nobody asked him his opinion, and rather than see him as a trigger-happy defender of fascism, I prefer to tell myself that he was no doubt somewhat swept away by his own ardor and the mania of the era, but that above all he put into practice a tenet that was dear to him, the knowledge that all places (even the bottom of a trench) and all times (even the fury of battle) are a good time and place to practice the Way. If such is the case, the merits of this teaching go well beyond our personal ideas of morality and politics.

I would like to conclude with two observations. To begin with, it seems to me that we should, above all, not avoid this debate. If Zen was led astray, and even if the masters of whom we are the descendants participated in this deviation, we should say so clearly and condemn the errors they committed. When something smells bad, it's better to open the windows wide rather than to plug-up all the issues or turn our backs as if nothing were wrong. In this sense, Brian Victoria has done useful work.

That being clear, let's say it once and for all : Zen is not fascist! (Not anymore than it is related to any other ideology). It is not martial! (Nor vegetarian, nor politically correct.) It is not made to uphold the established order, or to manufacture cannon fodder and model employees! I would even go so far as to say that Zen is not Japanese, and that perhaps the supporters of "Imperial- Way Buddhism"¹⁸, who associated it with *yamato damashii* (the Spirit of Japan), dealt a fatal blow to its Nippon version. It is interesting to note that the first missionaries who left Japan to propagate Buddhism after the defeat in WWII con-

sisted of some of the most ardent defenders of this mystical-nationalistic mix.

This demystification itself seems to me full of lessons. If we thought that Zen, as a movement, was immune to the failings that beset all human undertakings, it is because we were mistaking our desires for reality. In fact, the Dharma is unattainable. There's no way we can associate it with a worldly school of thought. And if there is a lesson to be learned from the errors of our Japanese predecessors, it seems to me that it is this : let's not mix our ideas, our categories, good or bad, with the practice.

There is no certainty or merit in which we can trust, outside of here and now. Enlightenment is created in every moment; it is neither attached to a fixed model nor dependent upon a "Zen master" or "patriarch" certificate. That's why, though sincere devotion to a master is one aspect of the practice, we must not forget the other, that of spontaneity, of intimate experience, alone on a zafu, the gaze turned inward. The person who transmits the Dharma is not a saint. The transmission follows its own, sometimes winding paths. It is important for the disciple to take stock, and to not let himself be swayed. It is in his own heart that he will find the true flavor of the practice.

Luc Boussard, November 1998

NOTES

1 Quoted in Uchiyama, *The Zen Teaching of "Homeless" Kodo*, pp. 68-69.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

3 Brian Victoria, *Zen at War*, Weatherhill, New York/Tokyo, 1997.

4 Quoted in the Autumn 1997 issue of *Zen Quarterly* (Vol. 9, No. 3, p. 8).

5 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

6 Quoted in the Winter 1998 issue of *Zen Quarterly* (Vol. 9, No. 4, p. 6).

7 Quoted in the Spring 1998 issue of *Zen Quarterly* (Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 6).

8 Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, pp. 29-30. Shaku Soen (1859-1919) was a Rinzai master and the master of D.T. Suzuki.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 37. Nantembo (1839-1925) was a celebrated Rinzai master, who counted generals and war heroes among his disciples.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 132. Yamada Reirin (1889-1979), a Soto master, was post-war president of Komazawa University and abbot of Eiheiji. It was in this capacity that he officially gave the shiho to Taisen Deshimaru.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 138. Harada Daiun Sogaku (1877-1961), a Soto master, was the master of Yasutani Hakuun (1885-1973), pioneer of American Zen and master of Yamada Koun, Maezumi Taizan and Philip Kapleau.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 181. Seki Seisetsu (1877-1945), "totally illuminated" Rinzai master.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 171-174. Ichikawa Hakugen, Rinzai monk and scholar, tried to identify the specifically Buddhist roots of militarism.

15 This nuance is significant. Apparently there are wars that are "atrocious" and others that are not. See the introduction to *American Buddhism*, edited by Duncan Ryuken and Christopher S. Quenn, which quotes Richard Hayes on the willingness of American Buddhists to support the 1991 Gulf War "on Buddhist principles that warfare is sometimes necessary and unavoidable." What a relief to know that the American clergy, unlike the Japanese, would not get mixed up in any war but a "good" one.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 135 and further.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 175-176.

18 Movement begun in the 1930s which gathered all Buddhist schools under submission to the State and subjugated the Law of Buddha to the Law of the Emperor.

Open Reply to Luc Boussard from Brian Daizen Victoria

As in my earlier reply to Ronald Rech, I would like to thank Luc Boussard for having taken the time and effort to respond to the material presented in my 1997 book, *Zen at War*.

I am in complete agreement with Luc when he states: "*If Zen was led astray, and even if the masters of whom we are the descendants participated in this deviation, we should say so clearly and condemn the errors they committed.*" Yes, by all means let us do so!

I am in further agreement with Luc when he states: "*I would even go so far as to say that Zen is not Japanese, and that perhaps the supporters of 'Imperial-Way Buddhism,' who associated it with Yamato damashii (Spirit of Japan), dealt a fatal blow to its Nippon version.*"

Here I am reminded of a book published in 1986 by Japanese attorney and lay Zen leader Makoto Endo. His book was entitled "Ima no Otera ni Bukkyo wa nai" (There is No Buddhism in Today's Temples) and, as the title suggests, Endo believes that institutional Buddhism in Japan, regardless of sect, has so thoroughly compromised the essential message of the Buddha Dharma over the centuries, especially in the modern era, that it can no longer be considered Buddhist. Sadly, after more than fifteen years of residence in Japan, I must agree with him.

Notwithstanding the above, I find that I and Luc have substantial differences of opinion on a number of issues. Before addressing these, however, let me first correct some factual errors that appeared in the opening lines of Luc's critique of my book.

For the record let me state the following:

I received Dharma transmission from Soto Zen Master Asada Daisen, abbot of Jokuin temple in Saitama prefecture (not Yokoi Kakudo as Luc states).

Furthermore, it was Yokoi Yuho and I who translated a portion of Zen Master Dogen's "Shobogenzo," (not Yokoi Kakudo as Luc states). Our book was entitled, "Zen Master

Dogen: An Introduction with Selected Writings (Weatherhill, Tokyo, 1976).

This said, during the four years (1967-71) I pursued graduate studies at Soto Zen-affiliated Komazawa University in Tokyo, I did enjoy a close relationship with Yokoi Kakudo, a Soto Zen master who was also an associate professor at Komazawa until his untimely death of cancer in 1975. With this background in mind, let me move on to a discussion of those points of disagreement that I have with Luc's earlier webposting:

1. Let me begin by asking Luc to clarify what he really thinks of Zen Buddhist support for Japanese militarism inasmuch as he provides readers of his essay, "Zen and War; Is the Moon Dirty?", with two very different reactions. That is to say, early in his essay he states:

"I must admit that I am bitterly disappointed, having harbored, as many people do, the conventional notion that Buddhism always held itself apart from political power and never compromised itself in war."

Having written this, Luc later goes on to say,

"Once again, I am neither surprised nor bothered by the fact that Zen and Buddhist institutions compromised themselves in their relationship to Japanese totalitarianism."

These contradictory comments lead me to ask, "*Which one represents the 'real' Luc Boussard?*" Not surprisingly, I personally hope that the first comment reflects Luc's true feelings. I say this because past experience tells me that people who are "bitterly disappointed" are open to questioning and probing even long accepted 'truths' while those who are "neither surprised nor bothered" reflect a mind that has excluded further exploration of historical reality from serious consideration.

2. Luc mentions that "*Master Taisen Deshimaru, of whom I was a disciple, did not instill me with great respect for the Japanese Zen clergy.*" This is a comment I hope Luc would be willing to elaborate on further. It suggests that Japanese Zen leaders' fervent embrace of militarism was not an isolated event or aberration. Rather, it may in fact be only one symptom of a deeper and broader malaise in the Japanese Zen Buddhist clergy, if not the Japanese Buddhist clergy as a whole. Would Deshimaru

have agreed with Makoto Endo mentioned above that "*there is no Buddhism in today's [Japanese] temples*"?

In addition, if Master Deshimaru was critical of the Japanese Zen clergy, was this, at least in part, because he, too, found their wartime role unacceptable from a Buddhist point of view? Did he ever discuss this question with his European disciples, especially in connection with the Buddhist precept forbidding the taking of life?

On the other hand, if Master Deshimaru failed to discuss this issue with his disciples, what does that tell us about him? Since Deshimaru participated in Japan's war effort, albeit in a civilian capacity, is it possible that he was unaware of what Japanese Zen leaders were saying, especially the militaristic comments of his own master, Kodo Sawaki? If Deshimaru chose not to discuss (or criticize) Sawaki's fervently pro-war comments, is this a sign that he, like so many postwar Japanese Zen leaders, either tried to hide or forget that such comments were ever made?

3. About midway through his comments, Luc writes: "*In addition to the distress I feel upon reading this, several observations come to mind. First a sort of revolt that I would like to see Victoria share.*"

Does Luc really imagine that as a Zen Buddhist priest myself I am not DEEPLY REVOLTED by what wartime Japanese Zen masters did, said, and wrote? In his review of my book (that appears on its back cover), Professor John Dower of M.I.T. wrote:

Brian Victoria's great sensitivity to the perversion and betrayal of Buddhism's teachings about compassion and nonviolence makes his indictment of the role played by Imperial Way Buddhists in promoting ultranationalism and aggression all the more striking -- and all the more saddening."

Given that even a lay scholar could see the stance I took in this book, I can only wonder why Luc was unable to see the same thing?

Was it because, for whatever reason, he didn't wish to recognize my indictment of "*the perversion and betrayal of Buddhism's*

teachings"? This said, I do wish to inform both Luc and other readers that the English edition was originally supposed to contain two additional chapters in which I specifically addressed Luc's concerns in this regard.

The first of these chapters was entitled, "Was It Buddhism?" and consists of my attempt to place "Imperial Way Zen/Buddhism" within its historical context not only in premodern Japan but also in China and even India.

The last chapter is entitled, "*From Zen Toward Buddhism*" and contains what I believe are those "reforms" of Zen required for the alleged "*unity of Zen and the sword*" to be brought to an end (as I believe it must be if Zen's Buddhist 'heritage' is to be restored).

I was in fact deeply disappointed that the last two chapters were left out simply because, as my editor at Weatherhill explained to me, "We had not budgeted for such a long book."

The good news, however, is that the just published German language edition of my book, entitled "Zen, Nationalismus und Krieg" (Theseus Books, Berlin, 1999), contains these last two chapters in their entirety. I heartily recommend that those readers, hopefully including Luc, who read German take a look at these two new chapters. Whoever does so will quickly realize that I certainly believe that Zen, as an authentic Buddhist tradition, OUGHT NOT to have had anything to do with either militarism or totalitarianism. I cannot but hope that Luc would agree with me on this.

4. For some reason, Luc appears to believe that because I included a lengthy quote describing Hakugen's "*twelve historical characteristics*" that this signifies my "support" for them. In this regard, I cannot but wonder if Luc actually read my book carefully. I say this because on p. 174 I clearly state: "*Each one of the twelve characteristics identified by Hakugen is, certainly, open to debate.*" I must ask Luc to tell me where he got the idea that I personally support any or all of Hakugen's twelve characteristics?

This said, it is true that I went on to say on the same page that "*[Hakugen's] critique strongly suggests that the issue of Buddhism's collaboration with Japanese militarism is one with*

very deep roots in Buddhist history and doctrine, by no means limited to Japan alone."

In writing the above, it was my intent, as noted above, to present my own analysis of the "*very deep roots in Buddhist history and doctrine*" in my last two chapters. Alas, I was unable to do this in the English edition. Fortunately, these chapters are now available in the German edition. I would very much like to hear Luc's reactions to what I have said in these new chapters and can only express the hope that both he and other readers will read this material. I would, of course, very much like to see a French language version of the enlarged edition of my book as well. Perhaps Luc or another member of the AZI would be kind enough to serve as the translator?

5. I cannot help but be both fascinated and appalled by Luc's comment that I am "*a victim of the famous confusion between the finger and the moon.*" Need I remind Luc that it is the militarist Japanese Zen masters I quote in my book who claim that they and they alone have transmitted the unsullied and authentic Dharma of Buddha Shakyamuni.

If one takes seriously the claim that Zen is a tradition which is dependent on the transmission of the Buddha Dharma from enlightened master to enlightened disciple, what happens to that transmission when the master's mind is that of a militarist and totalitarian?

I would ask Luc if he believes that Dharma transmission exists outside of, or independent from, transmission from 'enlightened mind to enlightened mind'? Or perhaps Luc believes that fervently militarist Zen masters are quite capable of transmitting the 'moon' of the Buddha Dharma even while they were at least indirectly responsible for the deaths of millions of sentient beings?

6. As if the above were not sufficient, Luc states that I have "*lent [my] personal notions of politics and morality an importance that does not seem sufficiently counterbalanced by the wisdom of zazen.*" The clear implication here of course is that Luc believes I am to be

faulted for having not done sufficient zazen to really know what zen is all about.

While this may or may not be true, I wonder if Luc would say the same thing about his grandfather in the Dharma, Kodo Sawaki?

The one criticism of Sawaki that I have never heard is that he didn't meditate enough! And yet, in spite of his many, many years of zazen, Sawaki wrote in 1942: "*Whether one kills or does not kill the precept forbidding killing [is preserved]. It is the precept forbidding killing that wields the sword. It is this precept that throws the bomb.*"

Does Luc really believe that inasmuch as I clearly oppose Sawaki (and other similar Zen masters') murderous interpretation of the Buddha Dharma that I am the one guilty of "*lend[ing] his personal notions of politics and morality*" unsupported by "*the wisdom of zazen*"?

7. Next, Luc tells me that I "*display a very poor understanding of the martial arts.*"

Why? Because of my "*insistence on the connection between Zen and the sword.*" Of everything Luc has written this has to be the most obviously false.

That is to say, nowhere in the book do I personally insist on the connection between Zen and the sword. Instead I quote over and over again from those allegedly enlightened wartime Zen masters who THEMSELVES claim, like Zen Master Omori Sogen so often did even in postwar Japan, that "*Zen and the sword are one.*"

I am afraid that in this respect, if not in others, Luc's comments display that age old predisposition to "*blame the messenger for the message*"!

In point of fact I studied the martial art of Aikido in Tokyo for many years directly under the guidance of the founder of this tradition, Morihei Uyeshiba (O-sensei). Although I was awarded a first-degree black belt, I am far from being an accomplished practitioner of this art. This, however, does not alter the historical fact that throughout Japan's modern history up to 1945 the martial arts (and martial arts masters) were consistently incorporated, with deadly effect, into the service of Japanese imperialism and militarism, both at home and abroad.

And, of course, historically speaking both the martial arts and Zen have long been closely associated with Japan's samurai ruling class who had the legal right to use their swordsmanship skills to decapitate any lowly peasant who failed to show them the proper respect.

The fact that "*the martial arts go well beyond the act of killing*" may, at least in principle, be true. Nevertheless, this fact clearly escaped the attention of those hundreds of thousands of Japanese soldiers who used their martial arts skills, as their martial arts instructors (and Zen masters) had instructed them, to kill millions of their fellow Asians without mercy or hesitation.

The irony of Luc's remarks are, as I mentioned in my earlier response to Ronald Rech, that it was Kodo Sawaki himself who served as a government-appointed commissioner for the promotion of the martial arts from December 1939 through the end of the war. Does Luc really imagine that Sawaki served on this wartime commission solely to promote the martial arts as a 'spiritual discipline'?

More concretely, had Luc been about to be decapitated by an expert Japanese ken-doist, i.e. swordsman, at the 1937 "Rape of Nanking" I wonder just how much solace he would have derived from the fact that "*the martial arts go well beyond the act of killing*." Perhaps Luc should have appended the following comment to the preceding sentence so that it would now read: "*the martial arts go well beyond the act of killing, at least for those who are left alive*."

8. Luc also accuses me of being "*blinded by [my] attachment to pacifism and the prevailing ideas about justice and right*."

Now just where I even mentioned "divine right" in my book is beyond me. I cannot help but wonder if Luc hasn't got his books mixed-up somewhere along the way, or perhaps it is Christianity and Buddhism that he got mixed up?

In any event, I do have to plead "*guilty as charged*" in this instance. That is to say, I do indeed believe that the precept that ALL Buddhist priests take (including even Luc?)

that forbids the taking of life means exactly what it says. Luc may choose to label that as "pacifism," but I believe that the title "one aspect of the Buddha Dharma" is much more fitting, let alone accurate. If in looking at the life and actions of Buddha Shakyamuni, Luc can demonstrate that the former was NOT "*blinded by his attachment to pacifism*"

I invite him to demonstrate this to us all. Or perhaps Luc knows someone "better" than Buddha Shakyamuni for Zen adherents to model their lives on?

9. While, as Luc asserts, it may be true that Kodo Sawaki "*did nothing to encourage the unleashing of hostilities*," there is no equally no evidence to suggest that he tried to stop hostilities from breaking out.

On the contrary, he personally killed tens if not hundreds or more human beings in the Russo-Japanese war to the point that his superiors recommended him for a military decoration.

Furthermore, as I have already noted in my earlier reply to Ronald Rech, Sawaki so strongly supported Japan's war effort that even as a civilian he was decorated by the Japanese government on November 3, 1943.

Is actually killing, and legitimizing the killing of, one's fellow man what Luc regards as "*being a man of the Way and a guide for others*"? If Luc regards these actions as representing the Buddha Dharma, I am afraid we believe in two different religions. Does Luc honestly believe this is how Buddha Shakyamuni either acted or encouraged others to act?

10. Luc tells us that he is "*not exactly displeas[ed]*" to learn that the Harada Sogaku - Yasutani Hakuun line "*seriously compromised itself for an atrocious cause*." If Luc believes that the Kodo Sawaki lineage did any less, then historical honesty compels me to inform him that HE IS LIVING IN A DREAM WORLD!

Having now studied this issue for more than twenty years, I have yet to encounter as much as a single, solitary acknowledged Zen master who did not, to some degree or other, collaborate with, if not fervently support, Japanese militarism.

Anyone understanding the nature and history of totalitarianism will quickly realize that by its very nature there is absolutely no room for either "neutrality" or "indifference" toward the duties it imposes on its citizenry, be they civilian or military, layman or cleric, man or woman, child or adult. While there may have been some degree of difference in the fervency with which these various Zen masters supported Japanese militarism, but does Luc think that this made the slightest difference to the millions of victims of that militarism?

11. Luc states that the militarist image I present of Kodo Sawaki doesn't *"jive . . . with what I know of him nor with the teaching that Master Deshimaru gave us and which he received from him."*

Having been deceived myself for many years, I can genuinely empathize with what Luc says here. But that doesn't make Sawaki's militarist attitude any less true, it only proves in this instance how little Luc knows about the "real" Sawaki, or at least one important dimension of his life.

And why was Luc kept in the dark? Was it because Master Deshimaru was well aware that his European disciples, who had either directly or indirectly experienced Nazi totalitarianism, would not follow a path that had so utterly compromised itself with an Oriental brand of the same totalitarianism?

Is this apparent lack of candor on Deshimaru's part what we should expect from an authentic Zen master? Does it not also raise the question of what else Deshimaru might not have told his disciples either about Sawaki himself or about his own wartime role within Japanese militarism?

I suspect the whole story has yet to be told in this regard.

12. Luc refers to the fact that some of my quotes come from people he identifies as *"Kodo's enemies."*

May I ask who these enemies are? Am I one of them? By this does Luc mean that anyone who presents the documented truth about Kodo automatically becomes an "enemy"?

Have we reached the point in the Sangha in the West that we are going to have our own "mini-holy wars" between our 'Dharma friends' and our 'Dharma enemies'? I pray not!

13. Luc states that *"it would be . . . interesting to have access to the sources that Victoria cites."*

In this regard may I inform both Luc and interested readers that, fortunately, the Tokyo headquarters of the commercial Buddhist magazine, Daihorin, has a complete set of their wartime issues.

If Luc has the slightest doubt about Kodo Sawaki's fervent, unconditional, and frequently expressed support for Japanese militarism (inevitably contextualized as an authentic expression of the Buddha Dharma), he need only spend a few hours reviewing the numerous wartime articles Sawaki wrote for this magazine. Once having done so, I can only hope that Luc or others will openly and honestly share what they find with all those interested in this issue.

14. And finally, I would point to what I find to be the most problematic if not dangerous statement Luc makes. Luc states:

"[Kodo Sawaki] put into practice a tenet that was dear to him, the knowledge that all places (even the bottom of a trench) and all times (even in the fury of battle) are a good time and place to practice the Way. If such is the case, the merits of this teaching go well beyond our personal ideas of morality and politics."

For those who would identify themselves as Buddhist this is truly a chilling statement! The reality of modern warfare is that soldiers spend little time at "the bottom of a trench." Instead soldiers advance or retreat across battlefields on which, literally scared 'shitless,' they do their utmost to kill every enemy in sight whether this requires shooting the enemy in the head, bayoneting him through the breast, blowing up his body with a grenade, turning him into burnt flesh with a flamethrower, or crushing him beneath the treads of a tank.

That is to say, they kill, kill, and kill again all without the least hesitation or remorse. Does Luc mean to tell us that each and every one

of these aforementioned acts represents "*a good time and place to practice the Way*"?

Had, for example, the crew of the B-29 that indiscriminately dropped the atomic bomb on both the civilian and military population of Hiroshima been Luc's Zen disciples, would he have told them: "*the merits of this teaching go well beyond our personal ideas of morality and politics.*"

Further, if Luc maintains that "all places" and "all times" are a good time and place to practice the Way, then I must assume that Luc believes that the Nazi guards at concentration camps like Auschwitz could have "practiced the Way" even as they herded camp inmates into the 'shower rooms' to be gassed!

This said, I do believe that Buddhists faithful to the Buddha Dharma might well have become victims of the Holocaust, but NEVER a victimizer!

The historical truth is that from his youth up through 1945 Kodo Sawaki was consistently and fervently on the side of the victimizers. As a young man Sawaki "efficiently" killed whoever he was ordered to kill and later, in his fifties and sixties, en-

couraged others to do the same, always in the name of the Buddha Dharma. In this context the reader will recall the new quote by Sawaki that I included in my previous response to Ronald Rech. I refer here to Sawaki's 1944 statement: "*The orders of our superiors are to be obeyed, regardless of content. It is in doing this that we immediately become a faithful retainer of the Emperor and a perfect soldier.*"

As unpalatable as quotations like the above may be to both Luc and other members of the AZI, they nevertheless embody the historical truth about not only Sawaki, but ALL of Japan's wartime Zen masters.

The sooner this fact is openly and honestly recognized, the sooner the reform and renewal of Zen can begin, the ultimate goal of which is the creation of a Sangha in the West (if not in the 'East' itself!) faithful to the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni.

In closing let me express the hope and prayer that Luc and his Dharma brothers and sisters in the AZI have the necessary courage, compassion, and wisdom to undertake this effort.

In the friendship of the Buddha Dharma,
Brian Daizen Victoria

The True and the False Sawaki by Luc Boussard

*Today, I cannot believe it was me who shouted "Fire! Charge!" during the Russo-Japanese War. Of course, I became a monk, and fifty-seven years have passed since a bullet went through my neck, but still it remains that I fought during the war. Nevertheless, it would be ridiculous to isolate this episode of my life and say that this image completely represents me.*¹

*Sawaki eats to do zazen and, to strengthen zazen, he shaved his head and wears the kesa. That's all. He does zazen and teaches others to do it. He possesses only what is indispensable, simple things. All the rest is only idle gossip, even if you speak about him for years, for a century.*²

The debate raised by Brian Victoria's book *Zen at War* has continued to develop. After responses by Roland Rech and myself were published on the Internet, several members of the AZI wrote letters breaking their ties with the Association, and finally Brian Victoria himself took up the debate, addressing Roland and myself in turn. Even though nothing new appears in Victoria's remarks, it seems important to me to take the floor once again.

Before anything else, I would like to apologize to Victoria for the errors I committed concerning his background as a Zen monk, and I thank him for correcting them.

In his letter, Victoria raises many points about my text, but I do not think he grasps what is essential. It may therefore be useful for me to go back over it, especially since six months of maturation have only reinforced my convictions. I expressed my shock at the discovery of the compromises the Zen and Buddhist authorities made with the totalitarianism of the Japanese state; I thanked Victoria for having raised the issue, and I insisted that this issue not be swept under the carpet with the ideal of devotion and going beyond oneself that belongs to the samurai. He was also outspoken. We are not obliged to find this pleasant, but let us remember what Master Deshimaru said : "*Don't imitate my bad points.*"

As for wanting at all costs to make Kodo out to be a sword-wielder, a fanatic, a killer -- come on !

Certainly he went to war, and without restraint; certainly he held opinions that seem unacceptable to us; but the image Victoria gives him is totally unjust.

I do not have access to the sources, since I do not read Japanese.

But I have consulted several people who have carefully looked at the writings cited by Victoria and who are very familiar with Kodo on the page, and they are unanimous : the "incriminating" texts are not speeches of propaganda, the tone is not one of a warrior's furor.

Kodo Sawaki means something completely different when, for example, he speaks about the kai (precepts), and when he comes to "Do not kill," he employs in effect the formula for which Victoria reproaches him ("It's the law..."). This phrase is certainly ambiguous, but it is not a call to murder; it is nothing more than the words of someone seeking to reassure people in a state of war, who may be leaving for the front. Victoria would no doubt have liked Kodo to have said, "Throw your uniform and your sword into the bushes and go embrace the enemy"; but is this really serious?

In short, those who are upset by the idea that Kodo may have been a bloodthirsty fascist can be reassured. It is false : he was a man of his time, profoundly conservative, a product of poverty and hardship, and in a country at war. Here is what I was told about Kodo Sawaki by a Japanese monk I consulted (who took Kodo's classes at Komazawa) : "No matter what his position was, we were happy to respect his practice and his daily life. And we know that all the Japanese were mistaken, not just him."

And there is one thing that Victoria seems to have forgotten, except when he reproaches Sawaki for it : Kodo was a Zen master, one of those whose teaching "explodes the brains of those animals who hear it."³ Must we believe that Victoria is like the scholars of whom Kodo remarked, "They are under a spell, they may hear well, but their brains do not ex-

plode."⁴ All Victoria sees is that Kodo is not on the same ideological side as he is -- big deal ! -- and that he does not correspond to the image he has of Buddhism. Yet what Kodo teaches is a "180-degree turn" as Master Deshimaru used to say, a dive into oneself and into reality so deep that there is no longer any Buddhism, nor Zen. Not once does Victoria make reference to Kodo's teaching (except to make us believe that Kodo preached militarism), and I sense that, more than the irritation the man inspires in him, it is his teaching that he hates. In truth, Victoria does not seem to have great sympathy for the practice of mushin (no-mind) or muga (no-ego), in other words everything that directly or indirectly touches on the rejection of body and mind (which risks throwing us into the arms of the fascists). Tell me if I'm wrong, Brian...

In his response to me, Brian Victoria recalls that I reproach him for his lack of rootedness in the practice, in the sense that the opinions he expresses are totally foreign to the deep wisdom that comes from zazen, and he says of this reproach, "maybe it's true and maybe it's not." As far as I am concerned, the question is settled. Whether he's talking about Zen or the martial arts, Victoria does not express himself from the inside but from the outside. His point of view is not one of a practitioner of the Way, but of an intellectual and an ideologist showing solidarity for the winning camp -- those who decide the historical truth and designate the good guys and the bad guys. The trial he puts Kodo Sawaki (and Deshimaru ⁵) through is a bad trial, it attacks the masters of the transmission in the name of a worldly ideology, or at best a vague religiosity.

Faced with the problem he has raised, the only true reaction is to return to the root, to reflect upon the dt. I also said that the straying of the Zen clergy (and not Zen itself, since I do not confuse the teaching with the institutions purported to represent it) was not surprising to me and that Master Deshimaru did not have much respect for the Japanese Zen circle. After which I admitted a certain perplexity as to the lack

of conviction on Victoria's part to re-establish the truth : not the truth about the facts (even though there are things to say about his interpretation of them), but of Buddhist teaching -- in a word, his lack of conviction to defend the Dharma. I went so far as to say that he seemed to me a bit too eager to recognize that Zen (or Buddhist) teaching, at least in its Japanese version, contains in its very essence the digressions of which the establishment was guilty -- which gave rise to the subtitle of my text, "Is the Moon Dirty?" Basically, I felt in Victoria's book a determination that had less to do with the desire to establish the truth than it did with emphasizing personal conceptions about justice and rights (and not "divine right" as was mistranslated in the English version), indeed about Buddhism itself.

Just as in dealing with my text Victoria is blinded by the details and loses sight of the whole, so in attacking Kodo Sawaki he weaves from whole cloth a character that has nothing to do with the "real" Kodo. Sawaki was certainly no altar boy, nor a liberal, and not even a humanist. He was most likely a reactionary, attached to order and hierarchy, and no doubt a man of "old Japan," i.e. meaning of our practice. This debate will serve a purpose if it helps us clarify the teaching and question ourselves about what is at the core of Zen (and even of Buddhism, if necessary, although personally that does not interest me much), because it is true that beyond the polemic, Victoria's book raises questions. And here are some of them :

What is compassion?

What does it mean to be ordained?

What is the place of morality in our practice?

What is the part that is purely Japanese in the Zen which was transmitted to us, and can we cut it away and return to a pre-Japanese Zen?

What is the true nature of the ties that Zen keeps with the Bushido, and should we also make a clean slate of their contribution?

Once again, we must thank Brian Victoria for his work as a historian, and for having brought this debate to light. It is good to know that Zen is not spared from committing

errors and that it has sometimes gone seriously astray. But we must also stop ranting about Kodo Sawaki. The man goes far beyond the small dimension that Victoria wants to give him. There are sides of him that belong only to him, to his history, to his culture, and that we are not obliged to adopt. But let us not forget that he was a transmitter of the Dharma. It would be serious if he had mixed his personal ideas with his teaching, had taken advantage of his influence as master to propagandize; not reading Kodo Sawaki with the same eye as Victoria, I don't believe we have much to reproach Kodo for on this note.

At any rate I am firmly convinced that the teaching should be held firmly apart from all that resembles politics or ideology, and if Kodo did not respect this principle, I think he was wrong. What is sure, in any case, is that Brian Victoria commits precisely this error in confusing Zen and the promotion of democracy and international morality. Dogen is not Bill Clinton and Zen is not the prevailing wisdom.

There is another point for which to thank Victoria. The book and the debate it raises have served as pretext for a certain number of zazen practitioners to run away. After many years of practice, they suddenly realized that we were brainwashing them and that they were setting out on a underhanded undertaking of indoctrination, behavior modification and propaganda. That's very good for them and very good for us. People of such fragile faith that they shake at the slightest thunderclap are right to take off. In staying, they would be wasting their time and ours.

One last point. I was a disciple of Master Deshimaru. What pushed me to follow him, even if there were sides to his personality that I did not necessarily appreciate, was the impression of freedom that emanated from him. That is why I cannot condone the insinuation that he was a manipulator, or a man with a secret agenda. I never saw him use anybody; he always turned everyone back to face their own freedom, their "great dimension" as he used to say, and the urgency to realize their human potential. That man was the descendant of Kodo Sawaki, he taught nothing other than what Kodo Sawaki taught him, and what I hope we will continue to teach.

Luc Boussard, May 1999, translated from the French by Elaine Konopka

NOTES

1 Kodo Sawaki, Le Chant de l'Eveil (The Song of Awakening), translated from the Japanese into French by Janine Coursin, Albin Michel, 1999

2 Ibid., Kodo Sawaki speaking about himself.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Victoria reproaches Deshimaru for having served the interests of military Japan as a civilian by working for a business which contributed to the war effort, and implies that he was part of a vast plot destined to hide from Westerners the war crimes committed by Japanese Buddhism.

The Precept "Do Not Kill" : Commentary by Kodo Sawaki

Much has been written about Brian Victoria's book *Zen at War*, especially on this site. Kodo Sawaki in particular has been the object of Victoria's finger-pointing. We the disciples in the Sawaki/Deshimaru lineage ([Association Zen Internationale](#)) do not wish to re-start the debate, but rather to put it to rest by making accessible one of the principal "pieces of evidence" on this subject, an article written by Sawaki in 1942 for the Japanese Buddhist magazine *Daihorin*. In excerpting this article in his book *Zen at War*, Victoria shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the Buddhist position on killing as described by Sawaki.

On pages 35-36 of *Zen at War*, Victoria translates Kodo Sawaki as follows :

Superior officers are my existence, as are my subordinates. The same can be said of both Japan and the world. Given this, it is

just to punish those who disturb the public order[...] It is the precept forbidding killing that wields the sword. It is this precept that throws the bomb [...] (*see the final lines of the translation below for comparison*)

From this excerpt, Victoria concludes that Kodo believed that "killing and bomb-throwing are done independently of the individual's will," and therefore there can be "no individual choice or responsibility in the matter." Victoria is only able to reach this conclusion because he has taken Sawaki out of context and presented his words to support his own conclusions.

Here is the translation of an excerpt of Sawaki's article. A reading of the whole text re-establishes its meaning. Let the reader judge for him or herself....

Rei Ryu

Ph. Coupey

Kôdô Sawaki's Commentary on the Zenkaihongi Wo Kataru

(On the True Meaning of the Zen Precepts)
written in 1774 by BANJIN DÔTAN
(in *Daihôrin*, January 1942, pp. 98-112)

[It is said in the Lotus Sutra:] "The three worlds are my own existence and all living beings who live there are, in truth, my own children." When the distinction between oneself and others comes to an end, the precept "do not kill" manifests itself. That is to say that the extinction of the differentiation between self and other causes this precept to appear. In fact, it is the principle of the reality of things which, through its manifestation, actualizes "do not kill." The sky and the earth have the same roots, all things are one body. The other does not exist apart from me, and I do not exist apart from the other. Therefore there is nothing left to kill. By consequence, within the light of the Buddha's precept, the other is light and I am also the light of the Buddha's precept. Lights of Buddha's precept do not kill each other.

Deep darkness makes us kill each other. Killing each other means killing something which cannot be killed. "There is no form, no odor that is not of the Middle Way. Mountains, rivers, grasses and trees, everything is Buddha." Reconsidered from this perspective, all things, without exception, are Buddha. Everything is the door to this reality of the Middle Way. In the teaching of the reality of the Middle Way, even the word "kill" no longer has any meaning. The Sutra of Supreme Extinction calls this reality "permanent and omnipresent Buddha-Nature." There is only Buddha-Nature. At the heart of the omnipresent and permanent Buddha-Nature, the word "kill" comes to an end.

We absolutely cannot understand "do not kill" if we have not studied in depth the Buddhist concept of non-self. In putting our small self first, we feel hate for others and the desire to kill. This is why it is said in the Lotus Sutra that if we penetrate the reality of phenomena, and if we realize that what is before us is Buddha, it becomes impossible to kill. It is also said that to penetrate reality is to transcend samsara.

Sojo (Seng Tchao, born in 374), disciple of Kumarajiva (born in 350), said, "The four elements are fundamentally empty, the five aggregates originally have no existence. A neck stretched towards the edge of a sword is cut like the spring wind." This is the principle of final vacuity by the power of prajna. Since the precept "do not kill" is not something one can lean on, a deep understanding of this principle of vacuity is necessary. It is only when a person has transcended samsara that sky and earth have the same root and he attains the domain where all things are one body. Thus, if this person goes to war, he loves his enemy as his friend, there is no more conflict between his profit and others' profit. We do not kill an enemy thoughtlessly; this is inadmissible. Nor do we give ourselves over to looting or other violence.

He who makes war puts himself in the place of the other country. He protects its inhabitants as much as possible. From a military point of view, while protecting the population he should also win the war. Moreover, treating prisoners well is an advantage, even from a military point of view. The final victory comes naturally.

Sacrificing one's own life, light as a feather; having pity for another's life, so like one's own. When the boundary between self and other disappears, the precept "do not kill" becomes manifest. Thus if we follow the words of the Lotus Sutra, "The three worlds are my own existence and all living beings who live there are, in truth, my own children," the result is that all beings, my friends as well as my enemies, are my own children. My superior is my own existence, my inferior is my own existence, Japan is my own existence, the whole world is my own existence and in this world which is my existence, reestablishing the order which has been disturbed is what we call a just war. In this case, whether we kill or not, the precept "do not kill" is not broken. It is the precept that wields the sword. It is the precept that drops the bombs. It is the reason for which the precept "do not kill" should be studied deeply.

Bodhidharma translated this precept as "the wonderful mystery of our own nature."

For more information, please write us or contact us by email

Bron: <http://www.zen-azi.org>

(deze info is inmiddels verwijderd van de site)