The Myōtei Dialogues is the only extant defence of Christianity written not by a Jesuit missionary but a Japanese convert. A good part of the manuscript was discovered in 1917 but the Buddhist section only came to light in 1972. Presented in the vernacular as a discussion between two women living in seclusion, this work has four distinct sections: a detailed exposition of the doctrinal positions held by the main Buddhist schools/sects, a sympathetic treatment of Confucianism, a vicious attack on Shinto, and an encomium of (Catholic) Christianity. The author, Fukansai Habian, converted in 1583 but recanted his faith in 1609 and went on to produce the much better-known anti-Christian tract ‘Deus Destroyed’ in 1620.

Until recently, Professor Bowring was the Keidanren Professor of Japanese Studies at Cambridge, head of the East Asian Studies Department and Master of Selwyn College. He studied Japanese at Cambridge from 1965–68, when the number of students interested in the subject was very small. He then left to work in airline management for two years, but returned to work on Mori Ogai, obtaining his PhD in 1973. After three years in Japan, he obtained his first teaching post at Monash University in Melbourne (1976–78), moved to Columbia University (1978–79) and then to Princeton University (1979–84). He returned to Cambridge in 1984. Since that time he has worked to build a strong group of scholars and teachers in Japanese studies. His interests have shifted over the years from Meiji all the way back to Heian. He is now retired from his University post, which will enable him to concentrate on his research.

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