



20 October 2021

Dear friends and colleagues,

I hope this email finds you well during the ongoing pandemic.

The Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture is about to kick off a series of ZOOM lectures as part of a new project we are calling “Faith Among Faiths.” For further details, please consult the following pages.

The inaugural lecture by Prof. Catherine Cornille will be held on 5 November. If you are interested in participating, please write directly to me at the following address:

sechkim@gmail.com

and we will see that a Zoom link is forwarded to you.

We look forward to your participation and would ask you kindly to direct individuals and institutions that might find it of interest to the following website:

<https://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/en/activities/faf/>

Best regards from Nagoya!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Seung Chul Kim'.

Seung Chul Kim

Director, Nanzan Institute for Religion & Culture

What has Christianity learned from the interreligious dialogue?

A Project

Seung Chul Kim

Director

Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture

Interreligious dialogue is an act of faith between living religions through question and answer from the faiths participating in the dialogue. It is a never-ending process in which one religion tries to understand itself by encountering other faiths. Here understanding means much more than the accumulation of facts, information, knowledge, and techniques that we rely on to control our surroundings and bestow familiarity on the unfamiliar. Interreligious dialogue shares the hermeneutical insight that understanding oneself “always occurs through understanding other than the self, and includes the unity and integrity of the other.” (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall [London: Bloomsbury, 2004], 87). When we understand something, in the authentic sense of the term, this shell we call the self is cracked open to something “other.” Understanding is, therefore, “the movement of transcendence, of moving beyond the existent.” (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *ibid.*, 260). In this sense, dialogue is an indispensable act of what we call faith.

We have long been aware that we cannot return to a time before dialogue with other religions. We cannot do theology as if we were able to understand ourselves without understanding different faiths. Since the monumental efforts of Ernst Troeltsch at the beginning of the last century, we have gradually awakened from the dream of faith in an “absolute” and “pure” Christian faith existing far beyond the reach of other religions. The very idea contradicts the history of Christianity.

Looking back on the attempts for interreligious dialogue, we need to remember the Biblical adage that “each tree is recognized by its own fruit” (Luke 6: 44) as a reminder to Christians of what they can learn and earn from their effort to understand the Christian faith through encountering other living religions. It also obliges them to reexamine to what their attempts to understand their own extent faith and other faiths has been authentic. To ignore this reality and turn away from a self-critical and future-oriented standpoint can only land interreligious dialogue in a *cul-de-sac*.

In collaboration with theologians and scholars of religion, the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture has labored for more than forty years to promote dialogue among

religions and philosophies East and West. Its core team of permanent fellows, in collaboration with its post-doctoral researchers and visiting scholars, as well as with scholars from around Japan, have organized conferences, workshops, colloquia, symposia, and seminars, in addition to publishing a veritable shelf of books on the dialogue. It has now become clear to us that it is time to adjust our orientation in order better to respond to the role of dialogue in the world today. In a word, we want to advance the interreligious dialogue to its next level.

In this connection, I would like to cite two passages from former Senior Research Fellows of the Institute, both of whom dedicated themselves to the interreligious and intercultural dialogue between East and West: Jan Van Bragt and James W. Heisig.

In a 1997 address to the participants of what was to be our final formal dialogue on comparative doctrine, Van Bragt, the first acting director of the Nanzan Institute, said:

One of the characteristic of this “age of dialogue” appears to be that purely intra-religious problems—themes that are relevant for one religion only—have ceased to exist. What becomes an issue in Christianity always seems to find an echo in a number of, if not all, other religions. (Jan Van Bragt, *Interreligious Affinities: Encounters with the Kyoto School and the Religions of Japan*, ed. by James W. Heisig and Seung Chul Kim (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2014, 37.)

It was no coincidence that these words were spoken to a symposium entitled “What can Christianity learn from Buddhism?” Van Bragt made it clear that to do theology today is to view our own faith and theology through the eyes of other religions. In this sense, other religions are not simply *juxtaposed* alongside the Christian faith. They are part and parcel of the Christian faith and its quest for understanding. In addition to bringing into relief the way in which Christianity has been *already* constituted by the other faiths throughout its history, it accepts the fact that it continues to be shaped by ongoing dialogue with other religious traditions.

Next, I want to cite James Heisig, the second director of the Nanzan Institute. In a critical look at theological approaches dialogue, he pointed out a kind of “misplaced immediacy”:

“Christian theology came to be so overwhelmed by derivative debates over the nature of doctrinal truth claims in a religiously plural world that the immediacy of contact had been displaced by talk about contact. In time, it became clear to Buddhist participants that the Christians preferred to talk to themselves.” (James W. Heisig, “The Misplaced Immediacy of Christian-Buddhist Dialogue” in Catherine Cornille & Stephanie Corigliano eds., *Interreligious Dialogue and Cultural Change* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012, 97).

His point is that, instead of trying to change the self-understanding of our faith by learning from other faiths, we have been engaged in securing control over other religions by subjecting them to the framework of our own theology. With Heisig, I believe we have to acknowledge the presence of a solipsistic self-assertiveness that turns dialogue into a virtual ventriloquism.

I believe those two statements by Van Bragt and Heisig on interreligious dialogue can point the way to the next stage of the dialogue, beyond typical Christian paradigms, be they exclusivist, inclusivist, or pluralist. What is essential is to find what we have gained from the dialogue. This includes the following questions;

- What are the fundamental presuppositions underlying Christian participation in the dialogue with other faiths?
- What awakenings did Christianity experience from the interreligious dialogue in understanding God as Ultimate Reality, the role of Christ, the nature of faith, what it means to be human, the place of the Church, and so forth?
- Are we prepared to acknowledge that the interreligious dialogue has shown us how the Christian faith is always and ever constituted through dialogue with other religions?
- What would the consequences be for the Christian faith to accept the fact of religious pluralism as a demand for dialogue with other religions.

With questions like these in mind, we are preparing to launch a series of on-line conferences on the theme, *What has Christianity learned from the interreligious dialogue?* We are inviting theologians and scholars of religion from around the world who have made important contributions to interreligious and intercultural dialogue. It is my hope that in sharing our experiences, we may light the way on the road that lies ahead.



Faith among Faiths

Lectures on the life of religion in a multireligious environment

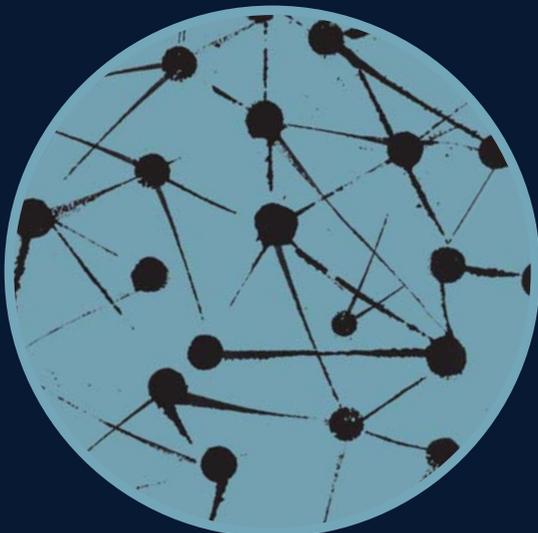
1. **Catherine Cornille**, "Re-con-figuring the Uniqueness or Particularity of Christianity through Interreligious Dialogue"
— 5 November, 10:00 PM Japan time (8:00 AM Boston time)
2. **Pan-chiu Lai**, "What Christianity Might have Learned about 'Salvation' from the Dialogue with Chinese Religions"
— 10 December, 9:00 PM Japan time (8:00 PM Hong Kong time)
3. **Reinhold Bernhardt**, "The Second Coming of Jesus Christ in Christianity and Islam"
— 14 January (2022) 9:00 PM Japan time (1:00 PM European time)
4. **Peter Phan**, "What the Catholic Church has Learned from the Interreligious Dialogue"
— 14 April (2022) 9:00 PM Japan time (8:00 AM Washington, D.C. time)

Forthcoming lectures

Sung Hae Kim on "Humanity's Pilgrimage toward the Light: The Mystics of World Religions as Torchbearers"

Manuel Gilberto Hurtado Duran, "What has Christianity Learned from the Dialogue with the Indigenous Peoples of South America?"

Roger Mushi, "The Legacy of the Hidden Christians in Japan"



Unless otherwise indicated, all lectures will be held exclusively online. For further details and Zoom links, consult the Nanzan Institute's web page.

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<https://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/en/activities/faf/>