

A PLACE FOR THE EAST-WEST ENCOUNTER

*Address by Prof. Dr. Heinrich Dumoulin S.J.
on the occasion of the Opening of the Institute for
Religion and Culture at the Nanzan University, Nagoya,
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The opening of the Institute for Religion and Culture at the Nanzan University in Nagoya is an event which not only brings joy and gratification to the professors and students of Nanzan University, but, far beyond the boundaries of the University, rouses the religious and academic worlds to hopeful expectation. As the President and the Chairman of the Board of Directors already stressed in their words of welcome today, our heartfelt gratitude goes out to all friends in Japan and abroad, particularly to the friends in Germany, who have made possible the founding of the Institute by their generous contributions.

Although I am the director of the Institute, today I rather feel like a guest, since — as you know — I belong to the Sophia University in Tokyo. In the capacity of a guest, I consider it my privilege to underline here the energetic way in which this project was realized by the Society of the Divine Word, which is creator and mainstay of the Nanzan University and which, this year, celebrated the hundredth anniversary of its founding.

According to its name, the Society of the Divine Word is connected with the LOGOS. Early Christian doctrine has it that the seeds of the Eternal Logos, i.e. of the Divine Word, are scattered over the entire world — as the kernels of truth found in all religions and doctrines of man's wisdom. The Society of the Divine Word is bounded to the Logos working all over the world. While it makes the expansion of Christ's joyful tidings its main objective, the Society has, since its beginning, also directed special attention to human science, and undertaken great and successful endeavors in the service of that science. I mention only the world famous name of Father Wilhelm Schmidt and his followers. Universities and publications have always been among the most important works of the Society of the Divine Word. The Nanzan University continues in this tradition. When the University reviewed the possibilities of its further growth, at the 25th anniversary of its founding, it was confronted with the question: in the present historical situation, which problems are in most urgent need of a solution? Actually this question was not so difficult to answer. One had only to reflect on the unique situation that Nanzan University is a Japanese University, located in the central part of Japan, and that Japanese and foreign professors are working hand in hand in

it. By these and many other circumstances, this University appears to be destined to an active participation in the task of bridge-building between the East and the West, between Asia and the Western centers of culture in America and Europe.

By an extraordinarily speedy assimilation of the technology of the West, Japan has quickly made the material values of Western civilization its own to a great extent — one could even say completely. Meanwhile, the West mainly shows appreciation for the peculiar charm of Japanese beauty. The encounter was a surprising success in external matters. But the immeasurably more difficult task of spiritual bridge-building between the two hemispheres is as yet far from being fully accomplished. It is true, we no longer believe in the famous words of the English poet, Rudyard Kipling: "East is East, West is West, and the twain will never meet." At the beginning of this century, when the depth of the ancient traditions and cultures of Asia became known little by little to the amazement of Western man, it must have looked that way. But today, in many places, the religious and cultural encounter between Asia and the Occident is in full swing. This is not the moment to go into the details of this encounter. The Nanzan University took the decisive step to make — as we confidently hope — a significant contribution to the establishment of closer and lasting spiritual ties between East and West precisely through the founding of the Institute for Religion and Culture. All indicators of success are auspicious: the scientific traditions within the Society of the Divine Word, the location and composition of Nanzan University, the daring and large-scale planning of the project.

I would like now to bring to the fore two essential traits which characterize the Institute now and should put their stamp on it in an ever increasing measure, namely scientific discipline and wide-minded tolerance.

First and foremost is the scientific orientation. On the practical level there are, nowadays, many lines of contact between Japan and the West, beginning with tourism, through technology, trade, diplomatic relations, to artistic and athletic exchanges. And there is no doubt that also spiritual contacts, such as the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture envisages, are seriously and effectively cultivated in many places. It cannot be denied, however, that, in the spiritual realm, the broader and more complicated phases still lie before us. Such, at least, is the verdict of many thoughtful observers of the situation. The Nanzan University aims at a goal-directed commitment as demanded by the present age. Such an endeavor must build upon the verified outputs of oriental research, for which we are indebted to great scholars of international fame during the last 150 years. However, at the present moment, new viewpoints, important for scientific research, are coming to light. Today there is much talk of international and interdisciplinary

research. This means that the various perspectives discovered by the different peoples must be brought together in one global unified view; and equally important, that the research methods developed by the various branches of science must be employed in a correlative and synthetic harmony.

As a modern research center the Nanzan Institute will make divergent disciplines, as psychology, sociology, pedagogy, linguistics, esthetics and history of art collaborate in the elucidation of the religious and cultural phenomena. The history of religion must be thoroughly examined in its full extent, from its origins, as known with the help of ethnology and archeology, to its present state, where it is intertwined with economic and political developments. Theology and philosophy — two disciplines which are more visibly inspired by the Logos — cast light upon the deeper interrelationships, and bestow the unitive knowledge which we call wisdom and which alone guarantees the unity and happiness of mankind.

I have tried to focus on the wide field of research which lies ahead for the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. The four-story building, which we inaugurate today, is living proof — by its many rooms for personal and common study, arranged around an extensive library — of the earnest decision of the directors of Nanzan Gakuen to provide proper facilities for a research that is at the same time wide in scope and deeply penetrating in depth of details. Here the possibility has been created for scientific work that is conscious of its responsibility in such a communal endeavor.

I now take up the second characteristic of this Research Institute on the Nanzan campus. This building, equipped as it is with all modern means for fruitful research, should stand as wide open as possible and offer a welcome opportunity for scientific work to many sincere searchers for truth from East and West, professors and experts, advanced students and beginners. Followers of any religion as well as representatives of diversified world views are invited. A broad, open, tolerant spirit must blow through the rooms of the research center in order that in these rooms interreligious and intercultural dialogues may freely develop. For a deeper mutual understanding of East and West — the goal which the Institute has deliberately chosen — we need a spirit of true tolerance, which originates in the attitude of respect, which should be fostered by every sincere search for truth. This tolerance grows with the recognition that our possession of the truth is never perfect in every respect. We, humans, during our earthly lives, are forever seekers of truth, pilgrims of the Absolute. Therefore, mutual respect and ever-ready mutual help are expected.

I have mentioned the spirit of scientific research and the spirit of wide open tolerance as the two outstanding characteristics of the Institute. These two characteristics guarantee,

it seems to me, the success of the Institute in the pursuit of the high objectives which it set for itself. The realization of these characteristics will make the Institute a place of research, a place of communication, and a place of hope. Permit me, as the conclusion of my presentation, to say a few words on these three patterns of expectation. Since time immemorial, there have been sites of research in the East and in the West. The ancient wisdom books of the Upanishads tell us that in India wise men taught their disciples the ultimate, hidden truth within the solitude of the forest. Neti, neti (in Japanese this is called mu, mu: the Far Eastern "nothingness"): the ultimate reality is not thus and not thus, it lies beyond human words and human thought. Over the centuries, Buddha's disciples have read the sutras in spacious temple halls. And soon also schools originated near the monasteries (in this country they were called terakoya). Here teachers shared with their students the foundations of knowledge in a systematic way. Also in the West monasteries were for centuries the outstanding "places of research." But gradually the university took over the tasks of intellectual research and communication of knowledge.

In our days the universities do not any longer fully meet the need for highly concerted research. Therefore, the trend is to organize special research centers at the universities and to entrust to them research as their main task. In this way, university institutes, as "places of research," are the outcome of centuries of progress of mankind. The Institute for Religion and Culture at the Nanzan University is such a "place of research" and finds its place in the long succession of venerable research establishments.

Since the search for truth can fully bear fruit only in a community, this Institute must equally be a "place of communication," a site of mutual sharing. Communication does not exclude that kind of solitude, which our ancestors considered as a prerequisite for the pursuit of higher knowledge. But we deem it a step forward that mankind in our day came to recognize more and more its solidarity in every field. No man by himself alone can realize the ideal of complete humanity. All men are bound together in solidarity. The East has expressed this fact in the Karma doctrine; in the West — more recently — the scientist, philosopher, and theologian, Teilhard de Chardin, brought about a penetrating awareness of the interconnection of everything with everything in the universe. Thus, it is necessary, and a prerequisite for its success, that this research institute become a "place of communication", a place of mutual sharing.

We associate with the newly built Nanzan Institute also the hopeful image of "a place of the time-to-come," because this Institute is orientated towards the future and in the service of the future. Never before in history have people concerned themselves so much with the future; never before have people felt so much anxiety over the future of mankind nor have they ever yearned so nostalgically for a better future as in our day.

Moreover, people mostly agree about the ideal of the future. All men desire a happy universe of people united in peace and justice after solving the economico-political North-South conflicts and the spiritual-cultural East-West tensions.

We are concerned here with the understanding and exchange of values between the Eastern and Western hemispheres; it is of the utmost importance. Since ancient times Asia has produced high cultures, which are not inferior in value and depth to the creations of the Western spirit. This is why, in the view of great historians, the encounter between East and West, between the Far Eastern high cultures and the Christian life of the spirit (Toynbee focused it still more and said, between Buddhism and Christianity) is of prime importance. The encounter finds its center precisely at the point where religion develops itself into culture and where culture flows back into religion. The fact that nowadays encounter takes place at this point justifies hope for the future. Because we open our hearts wide for this hope, we can today celebrate the inauguration of the Institute with joyful optimism. May this Institute grow strong through the competent accomplishment of the tasks which will present themselves to it day by day — no matter how limited they may be at first —, and come to make more and more the great contribution, which we all expect from it, to the East-West encounter.