

After Ten Years . . .

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LECTORI SALUTEM!

As the Nanzan Institute passes the ten-year mark in its history, I have been prompted by the rest of our “team” to expand my usual opening greetings into a somewhat longer piece reminiscing on these pioneering years of our existence. Still, somehow it doesn’t feel right not to begin with what has become for me a sacred formula, *Lectori Salutem!*—for no other reason than that I like its classical sound and have been using it, sincerely I think, for all these years. This immediately throws the nasty question at me: Are not you, and possibly the Institute with you, already in a rut?

At my age, I do not like that kind of question, and I blame the team of the Institute a bit for imposing on me a genre of writing where it is almost unavoidable. What do they expect the tone of this document to be after all? Do they look forward to a juicy piece of self-criticism in good old communist style, or do they expect me to grow nostalgic? Is not nostalgia a feeling reserved for things that belong definitely to the past, and is not the Institute an ongoing concern, the past of which will only be determined by its future? And anyway, is ten years a time span long enough to evoke that kind of sentiment? That leads me to wonder about the age of institutes: Do ten years make them a child, a teenager, a young lady? Somehow I sense that the last alternative must fit the bill: we have already lost the innocence and completely open malleability of the child; we are already supposed to have proved ourselves in some way, and the excuse “we are still young” no longer washes as an alibi in most matters . . .

In other words, we already have a time to account for, a history: 1976–1986. In the world at large, these years mark ostensibly a time of status quo; with the exception perhaps of the transformation going on in China, a time of non-events rather than events. The threat of the oil-rich Arabic world is momentarily averted and the North keeps dominating and exploiting the South. Science and technology continue their triumphant course, and East and West keep their swords a few inches away from one another’s throats. In Japan, it has been a time of reaping the rewards of its national virtues and many years of dogged application to work, becoming the No. 1 economic competitor in the world and thereby drawing everybody’s attention to itself; a time of renewed

self-confidence and reassessment of its own traditions; a time of growing nationalism with lip service to internationalization. On the Japanese religious scene, except for some skirmishes around national policy, mutual tolerance and harmony reign supreme. Shinto puts its weight behind the national revival. Some Buddhist establishments know internal power struggles but outwardly it is “business as usual” and budding reform movements do not succeed in putting a dent in time-honored traditions. For the New Religions it was mostly a period of consolidation and striving for respectability, although quite a few of them, too, had their share of court upheavals. For our mother institution, the Nanzan University, it was a time of further expansion: the launching of the Law Faculty and the Institute for Social Ethics, not to speak of a few new buildings that changed the campus skyline. For ourselves, as individuals, we can only hope that it was a time of spiritual growth . . .

History is supposed to have its high points, its events, epoch-making or memorable. The temptation is great to concentrate in this chronicle on the memorable—the subjectively gratifying—but historiography frowns on such sentimentality and imposes a search for the objectively meaningful and future-building. But before looking for the important milestones along our road, we must remind ourselves of our point of departure.

Against all the rules, the Nanzan Institute began with a beautiful building and the pious hope that the child would eventually fill these spacious clothes. The building, which still proves its worth every day, was the fruit of the entrepreneurial spirit of a dynamo of a man, president Johannes Hirschmeier, but at the date of its solemn inauguration (November 26, 1975) it contained, besides the necessary quota of desks, chairs, and bookshelves, only the embryo of a library on religious studies. The documents of the time present an imposing array of scholars as councilors (9) and research members (8) of the Institute, but the sober fact is that, when it started its active life on April 1, 1976, the Institute counted no more than three and a half “working members”: two full-time researchers (Nagakura Hisako and Jan Van Bragt), one half-time member (Jan Swyngedouw, who for the time being still kept his “base” in Tokyo’s Oriens Institute), and one secretary. Besides the building up of a respectable library on religious subjects and the establishment of a network of contacts (with corresponding mailing list), activities envisaged from the outset were the convening of symposia, the organization of colloquia, the invitation of young Japanese scholars as research associates, and the production of a yearly publication. Permit me a word of explanation on each of them.

Understandably enough, the (biannual) symposia or interreligious dialogue sessions, together with their preparation and the editing of their reports in view of their publication in book form (in Japanese), have played a large role in the life of the Institute. As a matter of fact, the first symposium (February 6–8, 1976) was the “birth cry” of the Institute, antedating even the arrival of its staff by nearly two months. We owe its organization—which became the model for all the later ones—to Nagasaka Gen’ichirō, professor of

philosophy of science at Nanzan University, and Kadowaki Kakichi, professor of philosophy at Tokyo's Sophia University. In our very first *Bulletin*, the nature of these symposia was described as follows: "On the whole, the Nanzan Symposium can be considered an effort at a dialogue *in depth*. Therefore, sufficient time was allotted (two full days); the number of participants was strictly limited (10 persons only) as also the number of religions represented (only Buddhism, . . . mainstream Protestantism, and Catholicism); . . . a fundamental religious problem was chosen [in that case, "Religious Experience and Language"] that would permit us to plumb deeply the structure of a religion and the similarities and differences between different religious systems."

Our colloquia are intended to give the local community of scholars and those interested in the world of religious thought a chance to hear Japanese or foreign religious personalities or recognized authorities in religious studies expound their ideas in person, and to offer a forum for discussion. The party invited is asked to talk for about forty minutes and the remainder of the two hours is given over to discussion. In general we have held four to six colloquia a year.

Our sponsorship of research associates is a kind of bet on the future. Young Japanese scholars working in the field of religious studies, for the most part immediately after completing their doctoral studies, are provided a modest scholarship and a chance to continue their studies with us, participating for one or two years in all of the activities of the Institute. Our hope is that this will help them acquire a taste for comparative study and interreligious dialogue, and a willingness to collaborate with the Institute at some future date.

The annual publication—a minimum, of course, for any self-respecting institute—is a story all its own. The arrival at decision as to its nature, simple enough as it may seem at first glance, was probably the single most soul-searching struggle we faced at the beginning, and proved critical for the future course the Institute would take. But I shall come back to that later.

And so our ship set sail, riding rather high in the water with a minimum of ballast. Of its journey since then we now must open the log. This journey, I am happy to report, was mainly marked by the people boarding the ship for a time, now and then, or for good. One such "boarding," which led to a long trek together in meaningful cooperation, was that of the "Gankai group." Faithful readers of our *Bulletins* may be familiar with the name, since it pops up regularly there. The group is made up of Jōdo Shinshū people (mostly Higashi but with a sprinkling of Nishi representatives) from the Kansai area, loosely structured around a scholarly and deeply religious leader, Takahara Kakushō, and the redaction of a monthly magazine, *Gankai* (The Ocean of Amida's Vow). Hoping to find stimuli for renewing their religious ideals and adapting them to the times, they explored several other Buddhist sects and then, one day, came to Nanzan in order to learn from Christianity. I shall never forget the moment I was introduced to them, on a wintry day at the beginning of 1977, in the president's office. Since then we journey together: we have been meeting at least ten

times a year for discussions on a point of doctrine or the common reading of the *Amida Sūtra*—always in a frank and friendly give and take, and no one certain who is learning the most from whom.

The next year, 1978, will be remembered as the year that insured the Institute's future with the consolidation of its permanent team. On April 1, Jan Swyngedouw moved to Nagoya to become a full-time research fellow (without, however, giving up his membership at the Oriens Institute or his many other connections), and September 1 of the same year witnessed a coming aboard that could more aptly be described as a "landing:" James Heisig, a specialist in philosophy and psychology of religion, settled down with us after long and intricate peregrinations all over the globe.

Possibly reassured by this consolidation of the crew, the Nanzan University then decided to incorporate our fledgling institute as an independent entity alongside the four departments already in existence (April 1, 1979). This amounted to an academic stamp of approval for a work which had started out as a more or less private endeavor of the founding fathers of the University, the Society of the Divine Word. Of more direct existential importance for us, however, was another event that had taken place on January 25 of that year: the completion of a residence-cum-guesthouse for the use of the Institute. The negotiations for constructing a "home" for us on a plot of land adjacent to the campus represents yet another—in retrospect, almost unbelievable—gesture on the part of the authorities of the Nanzan School Corporation. If the role the Paulus Heim has played since would have been impossible to foresee, even now it is hard to overestimate. Not only has it helped knit the core membership of the Institute closer together, but has made it possible—through the welcoming of visiting scholars as temporary residents, the stream of which has never dried up since our first guests, Professor and Mrs. Fritz Buri from Basel, stayed with us February 5–8, 1979—to blossom from the merely scholarly into the all-round human.

That same year another beautiful thing happened: our Institute, together with several other institutes in Japan, Catholic and Buddhist, sponsored and organized what came to be known as the "East-West Spiritual Exchange" program. Thirty-nine Japanese religionists, men and women representing all the major schools of Japanese Buddhism and even including two Shinto Priests, travelled to Europe in order to take up residence, in small groups and for about three weeks (September 3–23), in Benedictine and Trappist Catholic monasteries, there to share as fully as possible in the life of the monks and nuns. This project, born out of a rather daring idea, lived up to its name, and we are proud that our Institute, which focuses on the doctrinal side of the interreligious dialogue, managed to be the main instigator of such an event on the more practical and spiritual level of the dialogue. We were also involved in the return visit, which brought seventeen Catholic monks and nuns to Japan in October of 1983 to share in the life of Zen *dōjō*.

In retrospect and in comparison, the year 1980 seems rather uneventful. I say "in retrospect" because it did not feel that way at the time. As the year drew to a close, a package arrived from Paulist Press in New York with the first copies of the Hans Waldenfels's *Absolute Nothingness*, the opening volume of our Nanzan Studies in Religion and Culture. Our English-language monograph series was born. The idea behind initiating the series was to make available to Western readers thinking on religion and culture from the countries of the East (especially Japan). Theoretically, this would seem an obvious and necessary precondition for a fruitful dialogue, but it took Jim Heisig's special talents and familiarity with the American academic world to be realized.

The next two years then can be seen as the period wherein our originally high-riding ship kept burying its gunwales deeper and deeper in the water by taking on new cargo at an alarming pace. It all began with our next "lading," which we still reckon was an extraordinary stroke of good fortune: we were entrusted with a full-grown academic journal. From the time of the inception of the Institute, there had been regular pressure put on us by our protectors in the University to inaugurate the publication of a journal, with the idea, of course, that this would lend us quick respectability. We stalled and resisted for two reasons. On the one hand, we felt that we were not ready, especially in the early years, to shoulder such a burden. On the other, we felt that we would be duplicating the work of publications already in existence with which we ought to be collaborating rather than competing. Chief among them was the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, which was being published by the International Institute for the Study of Religions in Tokyo and subsidized in large part by funding from the Federation of New Religions. But by mid 1980 word came that the funding would be discontinued and the danger was great that this valuable bridge for Japanese religious scholarship towards the wider world would disappear overnight. That it was then offered to us was mostly due to the fact that Jan Swyngedouw had a long record of collaboration with it and had recently acted as its editor for a year during the absence of its regular editor, David Reid. We were only too happy to accept this proposal on condition that Nanzan would permit us to hire a full-time copy editor to aid with this and other of the Institute's publications. The authorities agreed and a formal contract was signed on January 20, 1981 with Michael Kelsey, a specialist in Japanese literature and Buddhist folklore. The next logical step—at least it was logical to us, though only in hindsight to many others—was the appearance in our midst of the Trojan horse of the technological age: the computer. Since that time (January 1982), necessity and the presence among us of a computer fiend-wizard account for an eerie pullulation of these machines in the Institute.

The next milestone in the life of the Institute, which would again augment our load considerably, was the organization of the Manila Conference of Christian Organizations for Interreligious Encounter in Eastern Asia (March 4–7, 1982). The aim of this conference was to explore the possibilities of a greater coordination of efforts in the interfaith dialogue in this (not too well

defined) part of the world. Among the resolutions arrived at by the representatives from 16 institutes in 8 countries of Southeast Asia were (1) that this kind of meeting should take place on a more or less regular basis, and (2) that a newsletter for mutual information should be started. Since our Institute turned out to be the strongest organization in its line in the region, it was entrusted with both of these tasks—which since then have fallen to Jim Heisig. The “newsletter” soon developed into a respectable semiannual bulletin entitled *Inter-Religio*. Later meetings were held at the Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Center in Hongkong (September 13–17, 1983) and at the Nanzan Institute (September 6–9, 1985). This latest meeting was followed by a trip to mainland China where participants were able to meet with key figures in the world of religion and religious scholarship.

That same year we were asked to take on the secretariat of the newly founded Japan Chapter of the East-West Religions Project (also known as the Academic Association for East-West Religious Exchange) based in Hawaii, and the co-editorship, with Professor Takeuchi Yoshinori, a faithful colleague and constant guiding light of the Institute, of the Buddhist volumes of the Encyclopedia of World Spirituality being prepared by the Crossroad Publishing Company of New York.

On the further important events I shall be brief. In 1983, we finally succeeded in finding a suitable candidate to propose as our first permanent Japanese member, Watanabe Manabu. (Prior to that, our longest residing Japanese co-worker had been Nagakura Hisako, who was with us for five years before moving to the Faculty of Arts and Letters.) He is now working at his doctoral dissertation at Tsukuba University, having interrupted his work to complete an M. A. in religious studies at the University of Chicago this past year. On October 1, 1983, Ishiwaki Yoshifusa, a specialist in theology who had completed doctoral studies at Rome's Gregoriana, was appointed to our Institute to fill in until young Watanabe would have completed his studies. Rev. Ishiwaki quickly made himself so indispensable a member of the staff that we have come to dread the thought of having to part with him. On November 30, 1982, an Agreement of Collaboration was signed with the Contemporary Religious Problem Institute at Daegu, South Korea, and in August of the following year we were happy to welcome one of its members, Lee Wan-jae, professor of Chinese philosophy at Daegu's Yeungnam University, as our first East Asian long-term visiting scholar. Since then, we have invited other foreign scholars from East Asia on a similar basis. Our most recent initiative has been the inauguration of an annual Seminar for Interreligious Encounter aimed at promoting the dialogue among future leaders of the Japanese Catholic Church. A report on the first seminar appears elsewhere in this issue of the *Bulletin*.

What daily life in the Institute looks like with all of this—and a host of individual commitments, more or less connected with the aims of the Institute—I can only leave to the reader's imagination. Since jubilees invite reflection, I

would rather like to close my remarks by reflecting for a moment on two questions: What are we? and What important chances did we miss?

What are we? The question asks for the characteristic traits, if any, of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. It has been said—not without a certain sentiment of envy—that we are “parade horses.” And it is true that being set free from most teaching and administrative duties of the departments enables us to concentrate the bulk of our energies on the activities of the Institute. Far from creating a life of leisure for us, it has made “work horses” of us, who find less and less time to parade about. We sometimes hear ourselves admired as a “real team.” And I suppose we are all sufficiently different from one another in personality and specialty to be able to complement one another and pull our weight together when need be. But really, it is only when outsiders stick such labels on us that we stop to think in such terms. What is more obvious to us—rugged individualists though we be—is that the character and fate of the Institute are determined by time and place, as much as, or perhaps even more so than, by persons.

As for time, we have the strong feeling that we are riding the crest of a wave that is easy to trust because it moves us pretty much where we had wanted to go in the first place. In other words, we are offering a bridge precisely at a moment when many people have come to look in the direction of the other shore and to feel the urge to cross. Twenty-five years ago we might have been a voice crying in the wilderness—if indeed we would have been crying at all. Would we have had so many first-rate scholars willing to collaborate with us or to stay and work with us then? Would our books have sold then? I think not. With the time, the place. More than anything else, it is our location in Japan that seals our fate—a Japan that just now represents a challenge to the countries of East Asia (as a model of development and breaker of Western monopolies, economic and others) and to the peoples of the West as well (as a representative of Eastern culture and as a strong and safe society). Would we have been able to do comparable work had we been part of a Western university or been situated, say, in Bangkok or Jakarta? Again, I think not. But this puts us before the tricky question of our belonging to Japan.

Is the Nanzan Institute “Japanese”? For better or worse, the answer has to be: no. As indicated earlier, it began basically as the brainchild of two German missionaries and, strongly as we would wish it to be otherwise, the permanent staff has been overwhelmingly non-Japanese since the beginning. Partly as a natural outflow of this but also as the result of conscious decisions made in the course of its history, the Nanzan Institute appears to follow scarcely any of the sacred rules that govern the life of Japanese research institutes. Our annual *Bulletin* is a clear example. Since the first point on the program of virtually any research institute in Japan, religiously affiliated or not, is the publication of a “Year Book” to make known the results of the scholastic endeavors of its members, considerable pressure was brought to bear on us during the first years of our existence to follow that pattern. Our resistance to that

idea was motivated by the following considerations: (1) Such publications rely on contributions by the members, and with our small numbers we cannot dream of competing. If we want to accomplish anything, we must draw and rely on the collaboration of “outsiders.” (2) These Year Books provide an easy venue for publication for the members but the result is often a miscellany of articles hard to monitor for quality and harder still to make into a unified whole. Our members, we felt, would do better to publish their work “on the competitive market,” each in specialized journals of his or her field. (3) The danger of “inbreeding” in such publications is not imaginary, and this must be avoided at all costs in an institute that wants to be a cultural and religious bridge, a transit house, a hyphen.

Accordingly we settled on the idea of a modest bulletin for our yearly publication, a kind of dignified newsletter, which would make our Institute known and serve as an appeal for collaboration directed to those interested in the East-West dialogue. The choice of English as the language of this liaison organ is only reasonable if one considers that our aims are intrinsically international. In fact, it was also determined in part by the absence, in the early stages, of a qualified Japanese member willing to take on the editorial responsibilities.

Does all this mean that we are a *Fremdkörper*, a kind of wart on Japanese academia? We like to flatter ourselves that we are playing a positive role in and for Japan—and a truly *Japanese* one at that: Japan has never functioned without its mavericks—and that we are accepted by the Japanese religious and academic worlds as “part of Japan.” Lest the meaning of that boast be misunderstood, a short explanation is in order. To begin with, the Institute belongs to a Catholic university and is thus seen, in a sense, as part of the Christian presence which—as long as it “knows its place”—is considered a welcome addition to the Japanese pantheon of religions. And for someone who wants to engage in dialogue, I am inclined to add, a Catholic might be the best thing to be, since in Japan we have no history of feuds with anybody . . . and nobody is afraid of us! But there is more. The first two permanent members of the Institute, although foreigners, had the good fortune of being accepted each as a *sodalis* of one of the most influential academic “in-groups” in the Japanese world of religious studies, Tokyo University and Kyoto University, and these personal links have naturally carried over to the Institute. But, most important of all, we are an accepted part of the Japanese scene as foreigners playing a necessary role not easily played by true-blooded Japanese. To appreciate this, one should have an idea of the degree of isolation to which the Japanese human and social sciences are subjected as a result of the Japanese language, which is “Greek” to most of the rest of the world. Once again I have to appeal to the reader’s imagination, but there is a special service to be rendered by “outsiders” with a sufficient grasp of the Japanese language. To summarize this *oratio pro domo* we could say: If for some foreigners we can be a door to Japan, for Japanese religion we offer one window to the world.

This only means that we have much to be thankful for. But are not there graces which we failed to catch in their flight, things we ought to have done and did not, plans that did not materialize for one reason or another, weaknesses we should remind ourselves of on the occasion of this jubilee? That there are, and plenty of them. If I may mention a few off the top of my head and without any particular order, the following come immediately to mind.

We were altogether too slow to search for a full-time Japanese member. Though we were not directly responsible for the fact, we are pained at the lack among our full-time personnel of a specialist in Christian theology and a full-fledged Buddhist scholar. We had good hopes once of attracting a first-rate Buddhist scholar, himself a Buddhist monk, to a planned chair of Buddhist Studies, but the plan foundered with the death of President Hirschmeier who had been nursing along singlehandedly a plan for funding the project. The absence of a full-time theologian accounts for the failure of another idea to materialize: the organization of seminars to read Christian texts with an inter-religious group of people. Moreover, our network of contacts shows considerable gaps. Among our Buddhist friends, Nichiren, Tendai, and Shingon are still insufficiently represented; while our nationwide contacts are rather impressive, we have neglected to approach our neighbor religionists in the Nagoya area; among our friends and collaborators abroad, Europe and Asia limp far behind America.

But when it comes to laying the finger on our main foible, we need only look as far as the name we have not lived up to fully. We are an Institute for *Religion and Culture*. The name suggests the ideal of studying religion in its concrete setting and context, but we have done far too little to bridge the gap between the spiritual and the socioeconomic—which may well turn out to be the main task facing the Japanese religious world today.

Allow me to conclude in grateful remembrance of those who have left us: Our founding father, Johannes Hirschmeier, S.V.D. (deceased on June 16, 1983); our first director, Heinrich Dumoulin, S.J.; two of the pioneers, Kadowaki Kakichi, S.J., and Nagasaka Gen'ichirō; one of the initial members, Nagakura Hisako; Matthias Eder, S.V.D., founder and editor of *Asian Folklore Studies*, who was a fatherly presence among us as an "unofficial member" from 1977 till his death on April 28, 1980; two copy editors who successively took good care of our journals, Michael Kelsey (August 1, 1981 to July 31, 1984) and John Keenan (July 1, 1984 to July 31, 1986); our young research associates: Kōketsu Kōhei, Oda Yoshiko, Narikawa Mineo, Kobayashi Kazushige, Hino Shōun, Akamatsu Akihiko, Igeta Midori, Keta Masako, and Tsuchida Tomoaki; our successive secretaries and, finally, all visiting scholars who passed through the Institute to work and live with us for a time, adding a special touch of variety and challenge to our lives.

A heartfelt thanks to all who gave us their unstinting support. God bless you all!