

Report on the 25th Anniversary Symposium

Paul L. SWANSON

THE NANZAN INSTITUTE for Religion and Culture celebrated its 25th anniversary by hosting a one-day symposium (25 March 2000) on the topic “Religious studies and the spirit of dialogue: The history of the Nanzan Institute and future challenges” (宗教研究と対話の精神—宗文研の歴史と今後の課題). The occasion also served as an opportunity to celebrate the publication of 「宗教と宗教の〈あいだ〉」 (“Between religion and religion,” Nagoya: Fūbaisha, 2000), a collection of essays on dialogue and various relationships between religions by twenty former and current members of the Nanzan Institute. The book was published to mark both the 50th anniversary of Nanzan University and the 25th anniversary of the Nanzan Institute. The festivities were attended by over 60 guests, including former permanent fellows, office staff, and research associates, Nanzan executives who helped establish the Institute, representatives of other institutes in Japan, and participants in previous symposia sponsored by Nanzan. Copies of the book were distributed to the guests at the Symposium.

The symposium itself was opened with comments by James Heisig, director of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture (NIRC), underscoring the mutually supportive relationship between Nanzan University and the NIRC. The first part of the afternoon session consisted of a look back at the history of the Institute as Jan Van Bragt (former Director and permanent fellow) and Ishiwaki Yoshifusa (long-term research fellow) shared their experiences as members of the NIRC. A number of the members of the audience then shared their memories of the early days of the NIRC.

During the mid-afternoon break, and after the inevitable group picture, a ceremony was held to commemorate the planting of a tree in honor of the 25th anniversary. A dogwood tree was planted near the front door of the Institute building with hopes that the NIRC will continue to grow and prosper.

For the second afternoon session we welcomed presentations by Shimazono Susumu and Ueda Shizuteru on “The challenges of the study of religion from the perspective of the spirit of dialogue” (これからの宗教研究に期待されること—対話の精神をふまえて). This proved to be an unusual face-to-face encounter between a religious studies scholar from Tokyo and a philosopher of religion from

Kyoto, and was illustrative of the NIRC's role as both a geographical and ideological bridge between the Tokyo and Kyoto approaches to the study of religion. Shimazono Susumu spoke on the theme of "Dialogue, evil, and violence" (対話・悪・暴力), pointing out the danger of, as well as the necessity to be aware of the possibility of encountering, evil and violence in connection with religion. He suggested the possibility of introducing terms such as "clinical" (臨床宗教学), "applied" (応用宗教学), or "practical" (実践宗教学) religious studies, while remaining sensitive to both the need and dangers of making judgments, and attempting to make contributions to people and society, as a religious studies scholar.

Ueda Shizuteru, the second speaker in the second session, spoke of the importance of continuing interreligious dialogue, not least because it is only through dialogue that people develop an understanding of other religious traditions. As an ideal model for dialogue, Ueda introduced Nishida Kitarō's idea that "I am I only by realizing what is not I." This requires a recognition of the other, even though the "other" is not transparent to oneself. Ueda also pointed out how one can enjoy contact with the "different" culture (and its unlimited richness) of the "other." A lively discussion followed these presentations, with pointed comments and questions from the audience.

The symposium was followed by a party held in DA-GA-NE, one of the cafeterias on the Nanzan University campus. Speeches were given by Sawaki Katsushige (Vice-President, Nanzan University), Yūki Hideo (Director, NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religion), Nagasaka Genichirō (professor emeritus of Nanzan University and one of the key figures in the founding of the NIRC), Aoyama Gen (professor emeritus in Theology, Nanzan University and one of the original fellows of the NIRC), Narita Ryōko (former librarian), Nishimura Eshin (Vice-President, Hanazono University), and Akaike Noriaki (Professor, Aichi Gakuin University). Greetings were read from Jan Swyngedouw, former permanent fellow of the NIRC, whose duties in Cameroon did not allow him to attend the festivities.

The celebration underscored the importance of the many interpersonal relationships established throughout the years at and through the Institute, and highlighted the challenges that face us in the future.