

## In Memoriam Takeuchi Yoshinori (1913–2002)



ON MONDAY, April 15th, funeral services for Professor Takeuchi Yoshinori, who had passed away during the night of Friday the 12th, were held at Gansei-ji, his own rural (Takada-ha) Shinshū temple in the city of Yokkaichi. Sutras were recited by his fellow priests, incense and flowers were offered by the participants, and memorial addresses were delivered by the Administrative Head of the Takada-ha, by Tsujimura Kōichi on behalf of the National Academy of Sciences, by Hase Shōtō in the name of the Kyoto Society for the Philosophy of Religion, by his old friend Umehara Takeshi, and by a representative of the *danka* (parishioners) of Gansei-ji. The image from the event that will stay with me is that of Takeuchi's wife of more than 60 years having a moment of intimate conversation with him when the coffin was opened for the last time.

The Nanzan Institute was represented at the funeral by its director Paul Swanson, and by two former directors, Jan Van Bragt and James Heisig. With the demise of Takeuchi Yoshinori the Institute lost a strong support and a close friend. It is no exaggeration to say that he was one—the last surviving one—of the “god-fathers” who stood around the cradle of the Institute at its birth: these prominent

Japanese scholars of religion who, by their outspoken support, gave us, relatively unknown members of that tiny minority that is Christianity in Japan, the necessary self-confidence to engage in the dialogue on the academic level with the great religions that surround it. From the side of Tokyo (Tōdai), special mention may be made of professors Ōguchi Ichi and Yanagawa Keiichi; and from the side of Kyoto (Kyōdai), Nishitani Keiji and Takeuchi Yoshinori. Of these four, it was Professor Takeuchi who maintained closest contact with the Institute was its most active collaborator. By a happy coincidence, at the very moment the Institute began its activities in Nagoya in early 1976, Professor Takeuchi had just retired from Kyoto University, moved to his temple in Yokkaichi, and taken up a professorship at Aichi Gakuin University, also in Nagoya.

The highlights in this close relationship of Professor Takeuchi and Nanzan Institute as I remember them are these:

5 October 1976: Professor Takeuchi began a bi-weekly seminar at the Institute, which was to continue for several years, on Shinran's thought (especially on the texts of the octogenarian Shinran).

31 March–2 April 1980: Professor Takeuchi participated in the Institute's third Nanzan Symposium on "Christianity and the Kyoto School," delivering an outstanding paper on "Tanabe's Philosophy and Absolute Nothingness," later included in the volume published by the Institute, 『絶対無と神』 (Absolute nothingness and God).

In the 1983 issue of the Nanzan Bulletin there can be found the following notice: "2 February: we celebrate the 70th birthday of our mentor and collaborator, Professor Takeuchi Yoshinori."

In the same year, the book Takeuchi Yoshinori, *The Heart of Buddhism*, edited and translated by James Heisig, appeared as volume 4 in the Nanzan Studies on Religion and Culture.

Later in 1983, Professor Takeuchi, in explicit collaboration with the staff of the Nanzan Institute, takes upon himself the editorship of the two Buddhist volumes in the series on World Spirituality, planned by the Crossroad Publishing House in New York. This collaboration continued until 1999, when the second of the volumes was published.

Although blessed with a gift for writing splendid prose—"He is a master of metaphor," writes Thomas Kasulis, "a magician with imagery"—Professor Takeuchi was not a prolific writer. His *Collected Works*, prepared by a group of his disciples and published in 1999, amounts to "only" 5 volumes. But there is no doubt that his scholarship showed great depth and originality. This was officially recognized in 1977 when the Japanese government awarded him the Purple Ribbon, and again, at an advanced age, when he was named a member of the

National Academy of Sciences. At the same time, his wide-ranging interests (science of religion, philosophy, primitive Buddhism, Shinran's thought, etc.), the variety of influences he absorbed (Hegel's philosophy, the thought of Nishida Kitarō and his revered teacher, Tanabe Hajime, existentialism, theological exegesis, and so on), as well as the unique symbiosis of scholarship and religiosity that combined in his person make it difficult to put a label on his scholarship. As he once remarked of himself: "It is the problems of the contemporary philosophy of religion that engage me day to day, but for me personally, it is Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō* that is the true object of my life as a scholar. It is to this work that I look for the source of my thought."

In fact, already at the young age of 28, he published an epoch-making study of Shinran's main work under the title 『教行信証の哲学』 (The philosophy of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, 1941). One may be tempted to conclude, therefore, that Professor Takeuchi was basically a *shūgakusha* (Shinshu "theologian"), but the title suits him poorly. Unlike the Shinshū theologians, who study Shinran's texts from the inside, he studied them as it were "from the outside," from the standpoint of the philosophy of religion. But then again, neither does he slide completely into the category of "philosopher of religion." That he was, of course, but he was more—perhaps what we might call a "philosopher of Pure Land Buddhism."

Be that as it may, what strikes one most in Professor Takeuchi's writings on Pure Land Buddhism is his insistence that theory should harmonize with living faith at the grass-roots level. He wanted the learned doctrine to convey the feeling that the Pure Land path is, after all, the Buddhism of the *bombu* (the "little man"). It may not be irrelevant to add here that Professor Takeuchi had a lasting and profound empathy for Christianity, which he experienced as sharing many of the basic religious stirrings of his own Pure Land faith.

Permit me to end on a more personal note. The Shinshu priest Takeuchi Yoshinori, under whose guidance I had the privilege of studying at Kyoto University 35 years ago, soon became—and always remained—for me the living embodiment of that special brand of religiosity that is Pure Land Buddhism: a religiosity in which the unwavering conviction of being the chosen object of Amida's compassionate attention is accompanied by the deep humility of the common man and irredeemable sinner. I shall never forget the radiant smile, full of the total benevolence of the selfless person, with which Professor Takeuchi saw me off the last time I visited him at his temple in Yokkaichi in the middle of last year. I can only hope that it is with such a smile that the Father in heaven is looking on me...

To borrow the words which he himself used to characterize the figure of Albert Schweitzer, I shall always remember Professor Takeuchi Yoshinori as "an outstanding thinker with a profoundly religious personality—like a saint."

Jan VAN BRAGT