A SHINTO-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

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The following report has been translated from the most recent issue of Deai, the Japanese-language journal published by the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions in Kyoto. A more detailed account of the papers and discussion from a somewhat different perspective will be forthcoming in Bulletin No. 7 of the Nanzan Institute.

The Opening of the Nanzan Symposium

From March 16 through 18 of this year a three-day symposium on Shinto-Christian dialogue entitled "The Universal and the Particular in Religion" was held under the sponsorship of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. Participants from the Shinto side were Hatakake Seiko, Ueda Kenji, Ogaki Toyotaka, and Sonoda Minoru; and from the Christian side, David Reid, Jan Swyngedouw, Anzai Shin, and the author of this report. Akaike Noriaki and Shimazono Susumu completed the group, which met for six sessions over two full days, each session opening with a 45—minute presentation and a 15—minute commentary, followed in turn by a discussion.

This was not the first time that Shinto and Christianity had met in dialogue. Over ten years ago, for example, we took up the theme of Shinto and Christianity in one of the summer sessions conducted by our NCC Center, centering the program on a serious dialogue concerning the "Yasukuni Shrine" problem. At the time, however, the focus was on issues like the interpretation of the Japanese Constitution concerning the Yasukuni bill and no inroads were made in the way of mutual understanding on essential points common to Shinto and Christianity as religions.

With the Nanzan symposium, too, there are problems as to how far mutual understanding was achieved, but as an attempt at dialogue demonstrating reciprocal respect and an eagerness to understand, one may, I think, term it successful.

In discussing the problem of the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism, Tillich noted two poles or two orientations to how the holy is experienced: on the one hand, a mystical orientation wherein the holy is experienced as something present in the here and now; on the other, an ethical orientation wherein the holy is experienced as something to be brought

into being.

To be sure, living religions are not constituted only in terms of one or the other element but possess them both. But Tillich thought that in the concrete one or the other element is predominant—in Buddhism the mystical, and in Christianity the ethical—and that the strongest possibility for interreligious dialogue rests in the fact that both religions have both elements.

Taken in this way the point holds true for the dialogue between Christianity and Shinto as well. Taking a clue from Inoue Yoji's book, *Japan and the Face of Jesus,* Mr. Hatakake attempted in his paper to consider what Shinto and Christianity might hold in common. Among his remarks we find for example the following:

> Given the standpoint of Christianity with its innate belief in a transcendent God, the fact that in the long history of Christianity mysticism has always held a position off to one side is not so surprising. But as one speaking from the standpoint of a Shinto, I rather find my heart drawn much closer to mysticism.

The Universal and the Particular in Shinto

To think of the problem in terms of such polar elements as the mystical and the ethical is of course important, but particularly in the case of the dialogue between Christianity and Shinto one wonders if other elements or poles might not be of greater weight, namely those of the universal and the particular which were the theme of the symposium. Taking our lead from the idea of Tillich's just referred to, we might speak of the universal and the particular as elements or poles, so that the special characteristics of a given religion can be seen in terms of which of the two is predominant. In the case of Christianity, universality would appear at first sight to be the predominant element, while in Shinto the particular is the stronger element. It would not, however, seem appropriate to conclude therefore that Christianity is a universal religion and Shinto a particular religion. For when the terms universal and particular are used as classifying concepts we can suppose the presence of the philosophical "bias" that the universal is of a higher order than the particular, and hence that the classification of religions as universal or particular is understood from the start to include a value judgment. A proper evaluation of different religions may be made by taking the universal and the particular not as concepts for classifying religions, but strictly as elements or poles. As Mr. Hatakake himself stressed, Shinto must of course also be seen to possess both of these elements:

> Since we cannot speak of Shinto in isolation from the coming about of Japan and the Japanese people, its initial basis is in that sense very much something particular. But in terms of its religiosity,

> Shinto may indeed be thought to contain things that are universal and to have points of unity allowing it to be considered with other particular religions and to cooperate with them here....

Adding that "insofar as the universal is truly universal, it should not conflict with the particular," he went on to ask: "Has there not been a history in the Catholic Church of taking the universal, which should not conflict with the particular, as *a universal in opposition to the particular?*"

If the universal and the particular are elements to be seen within every religion, we have here at once an issue for interreligious dialogue and at the same time a matter that needs examination within each religion. Professor Ueda observed:

> To speak from a standpoint of a general, formal typology of religions, might we not say that for Shinto, as a folk religion, the inquiry into the universal, the awareness of the particular, and so forth cannot become the sort of essential, fundamental issues for faith that they are for religions that aim at criticizing, conquering, or transcending reality?... Still, the attempt to examine the question of the universal and the particular is not simply a need or urgency pressed on Shinto from external circumstances, but may be considered a demand arising from the actuality of Shinto faith itself.

From there Professor Ueda went on in his paper to discuss problems such as God and the understanding of the human as primary factors of the universal in Shinto, and such topics as the idea of the "Land of the Gods" and the forms of religious services as elements of the particular. By way of an attempt at a general reflection on the question of the universal and the particular in Shinto, he concluded with some extremely interesting remarks covering questions like the possibility of Shinto faith for foreigners and the foundation and development of Shrines overseas.

The Universal and the Particular in Christianity

For Christianity the question of the universal and the particular has from its first beginnings been a major one. As Professor Swyngedouw explained in his paper, it is a question both "internal" to Christianity — in terms of the issue of its ethnic and cultural plurality — and "external" — in terms of contact with other religions.

Here I should like to give some thought to the problem of the universal and the particular by making a slight contrast between Catholicism and Protestantism. If we pursue the question along the lines of the two elements or poles referred to earlier, we might initially see Catholicism as giving the

predominance to the universal and Protestantism to the particular. No doubt the establishment of the Protestant Churches in the sixteenth century represented a revolt against the universalism of medieval Catholicism, a revolt whose ideological keynote was nominalism and whose social keynote sounded in the stress put on ethnicity and regionalism.

At the level of doctrine, as is well known, the reformer Luther emphasized "scripture alone" in opposition to "scripture and tradition." At the same time, it should not be forgotten that Protestants made efforts to make the scriptures accessible in their own languages. Luther completed a German translation of the Bible and with that is said to have given birth to modern German, but in fact translations of the Bible were widespread at the time not only in Germany but throughout the countries of Europe. Reading the scriptures in one's own language and worshipping in one's own language were the distinguishing traits of the Protestant Churches. The plurality of languages was seen not as the curse of the Tower of Babel but as the blessing of Pentecost day.

This tradition in Protestantism of stressing the translation of the scriptures was also carried on at the time of the nineteenth century world mission. From the start, translations of the Bible were undertaken in every land.

What is the general meaning of translating "scripture"? In Islam the Koran is not translated and is not supposed to be translated. Everywhere in the world the Koran is read in its original language, a fact that would seem at first glance to demonstrate the universalism of Islam. Seen from another angle, however, the critical question arises as to whether Islam does not in the final analysis remain within the confines of an Arabic religion. Something similar might be said with regard to Protestantism and Catholicism. In recent times Catholicism has also made efforts to translate the Bible in every land— including Japan, where good translations have been issued—and worship, too, has come to be conducted in the local language. Yet for a long time Catholicism took Latin as a universal language, as if to say "A universal religion is spoken of in a universal language." Even if we grant that Latin was a universal language for the European world, from the viewpoint of Asia and Africa it remains a "Western language." As we saw in the case of Islam, it reverts to a sign of the particular.

Now while the Protestant Churches stressed translation in contrast to the emphasis that Catholicism laid on Latin as a universal language, in actuality this presupposed the importance of the original languages of the Bible. Most likely some influence from the humanism current at the time of the reformation which laid great stress on the use of original sources was also at work here. Even sources in (what were thought to be) original languages that were no longer anywhere in use were taken in a way as absolute (whence stem radical theories of the inerrancy of the scriptures), to which all other languages were made relative. On this understanding the existence of a universal language was repudiated. Only particular languages exist. It was the

idea, we might say, that "A universal religion is spoken of in a particular language."

Seen in this way, it is precisely in Protestantism that the "universal" pole was given the accent. Translation is impossible without the basic assumption that one and the same meaning can be expressed in two languages. If one considers the content to change in translating, then there is no translation. In fact the question of whether or not any change occurs is a delicate one. Since the time of Francis Xavier the problem of how to translate "Deus" into Japanese has been a difficult one. For the Jesuits of that era such devices were adopted as using Roman letters like "Ds" without attempting a translation. (In China, too, there was an unresolved problem with the terms *t'ien, t'ien-chu,* and *shang-ti.)* By not translating it was thought the universality of Christianity would be preserved, but the result was that in some sense it continued to remain for the Japanese an alien, particular religion. Protestants adopted the word *kami* for the translation. Their idea that translating can and should be done was enabled by a conviction of the universality of their religion.

Universal and particular are not classifying concepts for religion. There are no universal religions and no particular religions. Within every religion both poles are present, and as we have just seen in the relationship between Protestantism and Catholicism, even in the opposition within a single religion one or the other of these poles becomes the stronger. But since with no more than a slight shift of perspective the opposite pole can become the stronger, the universal and the particular have to be spoken of as complementary and fluctuating.

The Problem of Japanese Protestantism

At the time that Protestantism came into being in the sixteenth century, the pole of the particular was strong in opposition to the Catholic universal, while in the mission movement in Asia and Africa that began in the nineteenth century this tendency gave way to a strengthening of the universal pole in opposition to the plurality of local religions. In contrast to those in Catholicism who took rather a flexible view towards local religions and cultures, the world mission of Protestantism at the time, which had its base of operations in modern, industrial developed lands, saw as its mission the bringing of "modern civilization" as the sole goal for developing lands. Here the pole of the particular was radically weakened if not at times nearly eliminated.

Even the main stream of Protestant Christianity that was accepted in Japan during the early years of the Meiji Period followed this pattern for the most part. Here the particularity of "things Japanese" was given almost no significance and Christianity was accepted as something possessed only of universal elements. The result was that Christianity isolated itself from Jap—

anese culture without ever really having set foot on Japanese soil.

In reaction to this there arose a standpoint stressing the indigenous,giving importance to the particularity of Japan in things great and small. This radical form eliminated—we might say "buried"— the universal pole in favor of the particular alone. In his novel *Silence,* Endo Shusaku points out how indigenization in Japan leads to "burial" (i.e. being neutralized by absorption) by having one of his characters say that Japan is a swamp in which the roots of everything rot. There are various viewpoints from which to consider Japanese Buddhism, but the distance between the teachings of primitive Buddhism and the reality of countless temples absorbed only in funeral rites can only be explained, it would seem, as another instance of such a burial.

The hundred or so years of the history of Japanese Protestantism that began with the end of feudalism is a history that teeter—totters as it were between isolation (i.e. aloofness) and burial, and may be called a history preoccupied with finding a balance between the two poles of the universal and the particular. Seen as a whole, may we not say that in the effort not to let the roots rot, the weight has fallen principally on the side of preserving purity, which in turn ended up in an isolation incapable of giving vitality to the particular?

Uchimura Kanzo's expression, "the trunk of a fulling—block tree onto which I myself am grafted as a Christian believer," is ingenious and frequently quoted, but there is a problem with generalizing what is possible only for the adept. For it means making Japan's Christianity into a religion only for experts, and this way of taking Christianity itself, far from being a grafting in reality became an isolation.

At one point after the Second World War the widespread theory of indigenization represented a sound argument hitting on important points but, due to a reaction against an abstract stress on the universal, over—idealized the particular and was not able adequately to think through its relation to the Japanese homeland in the concrete.

Seen in the light of prewar experience and the spirit of the Constitution in force at the time, the response of Christians to the Yasukuni Shrine bill that surfaced in the 1960s was something quite to be expected as a matter of course, though there may now be cause to reflect on the fact that this is one of the things no longer able to reach the ears of the people.

Japanese Christianity and Christians

What has just been said belongs rather to the theological or doctrinal aspect of Japanese Christianity, and we should not overlook the fact that there are areas in the actuality of Japan's Christians where the particular pole is unexpectedly strong.

In speaking of ordinary Japanese Protestantism, it is easy to come up with things which show a rational, modem lifestyle that has departed from Jap—

anese tradition. In reality, however, the “shame culture” that Ruth Benedict spoke of is still alive, and the awareness of “hometown” and “village” are far from weak. To be more concrete, let us have a look at the problem of the identity and sense of belonging of Japan’s Protestants.

Among the expressions very frequently used by Japanese Protestants is that of “Mother Church.” To call the “Church” one’s “mother” belongs to Christian tradition wherein God is seen as father and the Church as mother, meaning the universal Church that spans the entire earth. But this is not what the words mean in the vocabulary of the Japanese Protestant.

A large number of churches publish their own anthologies, and it would be good to have a look at them. Here I restrict myself to a quotation from one of them:

> I have always thought of K church as a church that calls to mind a warm and motherly atmosphere, a restfulness beyond all reason, a church that makes one sense an insufferable nostalgia whenever one is away from it. And I have felt that I understand the feeling of church members who have moved to other provinces and cannot bring themselves to change churches.
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> It has come about unexpectedly that I had to leave Tokyo to live in the north and now I see that my feelings were right. My memories fix themselves on K church and I find it hard to bring myself to the decision to change churches, wishing only to postpone it for another day....

The characterization of the relationship of Japanese Protestants to culture and society as isolation remains true at the conceptual level, while the actual life of faith (church life) can be seen to carry a form we might call truly “Japanese.” Speaking figuratively, the words “I find it hard to bring myself to the decision to change churches, wishing only to postpone it for another day,” are the equivalent of saying that even if one should move to a new town, one would still wish to remain registered in one’s old town.

In checking out the statistics for numbers of believers in the Protestant Churches of Japan conforming to this pattern, one finds them extremely high. They are registered in their former churches as “members residing elsewhere.” They will attend the Church in the area to which they have moved, but since they have not re—registered they are called “guest members” (a word that appears in the standard Japanese dictionary with the explanation, “not a formal member, but welcomed as a guest”).

The case we have just seen is of someone who has moved and is actually attending the local church without changing registration. In addition there has been a dramatic rise of late in the figures of those belonging to an urban church who, having moved to an outlying area and taken up residence there, do not attend the nearby Church but continue to remain as members of their “mother church.” No matter that the round trip might take several

hours, they will make it in order to attend Sunday services—all of which may seem a colossal waste of time, money, and energy but nevertheless remains the fact. Although it may be true that this would not happen if we had the Catholic parish (diocesan) system, still it is a situation that one cannot think of resolving by structures and laws.

How does this sort of thing come about? Perhaps these Christians, who are supposed to accept a highly modern rationalist stance with regard to traditional culture, are being "Japanese" in their mode of behavior as Christians?

How is it with other religions and religious sects in Japan? To speak in general terms, it would appear that in the case of traditional Buddhist communities, the sense of the sect is fairly strong, so that even if members move they search for a temple of their sect and establish ties with it. But in the case of the "new religions" we find a situation like that of the "mother Church" we have just seen in Protestantism. When one enters Christianity or one of the new religions, one as it were cuts ties of blood and land with the "home town" or "village" to enter into a new "communion." In this case it seems that this "communion" acts as a substitute for the "home town" or village" and supplies the feeling of being oriented to a home town.

What about Japanese Christians overseas? In Hawaii one finds a similar orientation to a "mother Church" which differs from the sense of belonging seen among Caucasians or those of Japanese descent.

What we have just seen in the above should not be considered an exceptional problem restricted to the Japanese. Professor Swyngedouw pointed to the importance of "the question of how far the emphasis on the universality of the Church is actually internalized by the members of the Church." On his view, the stress that Christians put on the universal is internalized through the mediation of elements of the particular: "No matter how universal *Christianity* is, to what extent *Christians* can be said to be universalists is a major question." But is it not the case with Japanese Protestantism that "emphasis on the universal"—or in the terms used earlier, their condition of "isolation"—remains largely at a conceptual level while its life may even approximate a "burial"?

The Task for Dialogue

Looking at the problem of the particular and the universal from several angles, both at the level of theory and on the plane of actuality, one learns that the problem is by no means a simple one. Contemporary Christian theology, through the encounter with its own inner pluralism as well as the plurality of religions across the world, has come to engage in a fundamental reflection on such things as the naive proselytism or one-sided sense of superiority present in its history up until now. That this kind of symposium should be held at a Catholic University like Nanzan may be said to represent a step in the direction of that reflection.

As stated above, Christianity and Shinto should not be characterized respectively as universal and particular. The elements of the universal and the particular are present in both, and dialogue is not only an understanding of one another but must also deepen self-understanding. For various ideas advanced in the dialogue the Christian side can only be grateful, and at the same time would, I think, like to express in all honesty what they hope for from the Shinto side. Briefly put, at a time when Christianity is seeking to give shape to a new theology out of its experience of facing pluralism in the world, it is desirable that Shinto also come face to face with the pluralism present within the borders of Japan and develop a new flexibility in its line of thought. I would only be too happy to be mistaken, but I have the impression that those from Shinto do not see, or perhaps do not wish to see, the multidimensional reality of religion in modernized Japanese society.

The Yasukuni Shrine problem highlights the point plainly. In reality there are various religions and various sects. Why must the Japanese commemorate and mourn all those who died in the war without exception at the Yasukuni Shrine? Granted it is only reasonable for those connected with Shinto to strive so that as many as possible might wish to worship at the Yasukuni Shrine. The problem is rather with an insistence that does not admit of exceptions, taking the form, “If one is a Japanese, then...” Is it not something close to the heart of each person to commemorate and mourn the dead in accord with the religion that one believes in as one’s own?

To continue, at present there is also a problem with the emphasis put on the de facto “official worship” practiced by the Emperor and Prime Minister. That someone in a certain position or someone serving in a particular capacity, for reason of being in that position or serving in that capacity, should participate in worship is to turn commemoration and mourning into a mere facade. Why not remember the fact that for those unnamed individuals who from the bottom of their hearts wish to visit the Shrine there is a meaning to their worship?

I suppose that from the Shinto side as well there are criticisms and opinions concerning Christianity. This symposium is not en event that takes place only once and then comes to an end, but one that goes on with the wish that the dialogue may continue in the future in many different forms.