

Nanzan Symposium 17

RELIGION AND SCIENCE IN DIALOGUE

Consequences for Religious Education

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On 29 and 30 January 2016 the Nanzan Institute hosted an International Symposium to complete a three-year project funded by the John Templeton Foundation to explore avenues work bringing the results of the dialogue between science and religion to bear on textbooks for religious education in Japan.

NANZAN SYMPOSIUM 17, “Religion and Science in Dialogue: Consequences for Religious Education,” took place in the coldest January in ten years in the city of Nagoya. It was not snowing. Nor was it fine with the deep blue-sky of Japanese winter. But a cold drizzling rain welcomed five professors of theology and religious studies from Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, US, and Germany to their steaming two-day discussions on the significance, challenges, and praxes of the religion-science dialogue in its relation to religious education. This report gives short summaries of their presentations, overall significance of the scholarly meeting, and the future challenges that many of the participants could anticipate from their intellectual exchange with the presenters.

Summaries of Five Presentations

Lai Pan Chiu (The Chinese University of Hong Kong) described how religious education was incorporated into the wider context of the “liberal studies” at secondary schools in Hong Kong. In order to discuss the implication of the religion-science dialogue for religious education in his cultural background, he argued, we must look at how the interdisciplinary dialogue could benefit the wider context of liberal studies and also adopt the inter-religious perspective to reflect on the reality of multi-religious belongings shared among many Asian cultures.

The development of religious education in Hong Kong went through several transitions. It moved from the mono-religious to the multi-religious education in the 1970s and then to the inter-religious education in the 1990s. The mono-religious model is simply dogmatic (even in its effort to understand other religions) while the multi-religious education was merely informative of different religious doctrines. Unlike these two, the inter-religious education aims at providing a platform in which students can freely examine the different religious traditions without favoring one over the other, and thereby enabling them to come to understand themselves and the world through their engagement with various religious perspectives.

Lai further showed how the government policies for such religious education (in its process of adopting the inter-religious model) came to include scientific issues that directly deal with social and ethical problems. In relation to this governmental policy to accommodate the religion-science dialogue, he emphasized the importance of hosting a series of dialogues between inter-religious faith and scientific knowledge; and introduced ongoing scholarly projects that came out of these dialogues in Hong Kong.¹

Paul Swanson (Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture) introduced the past two symposia held at the Nanzan Institute for the project “Global Perspective on Science and Spirituality” (GPSS), as well as the past publications as a fruit of these meetings, on the notion of *kokoro* 心.² The quintessential Japanese term denotes a concept that we cannot exhaustively explain either through science or religion alone, thus rejecting the commonly conceived either/or standpoint in which we contract their relationship into a mere conflict. Rather, Swanson argues, this notion constitutes a “bridge concept” that re-minds us (and can cultivate our “hearts”) to take the philosophical and Buddhist attitude of “neither/nor,” that is to say, neither science nor religion alone is capable of comprehending the heart of human existence.

Swanson described his findings from the dialogue concerning the religious and scientific term with the scientists at the first GPSS meeting and then in reference to the second GPSS meeting, he referred to the inter-cultural and inter-linguistic significance of the term *kokoro*. A passage from the Buddhist text *Makashikan* 摩訶止觀 analyzed in four different languages (Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese, and English) efficiently highlighted this point and he further clarified

1. Lam Jason Tsz-shun 林子淳, Lai Pan-chiu 賴品超 and So Yuen-tai 蘇遠泰, *Friends or Foes? The Pluralistic Relationship between Science and Religion 是敵?是友?科學與宗教的多元關係* (Hong Kong: Ming Feng Press, 2012).

2. For more information of these symposia, see visit the Nanzan website at <http://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/en/publications/symposia/>. For the publications as the result of these meetings, see Paul L. Swanson, ed., *Science, Kokoro, Religion* (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2007); and *Brain Science and Kokoro: Some Asian Perspectives* (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion & Culture, 2011).

the profound difficulty of univocally defining this notion either from the side of religion or that of science. In conclusion, Swanson reiterated the significance of “avoiding absolute duality and total reductionism,” that is to take the standpoint of neither/nor and concluded his presentation with the suggested topics (e.g., “consciousness” and “emergence”) as the ways to continue the religion-science dialogue in Japan and beyond.

Jaeshik Shin (Honan Theological University and Seminary) discussed the interaction between religion and science in contemporary religious education in South Korea through his presentation, “The Religion and Science Dialogue in the Educational Context of Korea.” After explaining the religious pluralism in the Korean cultural context as well as the rise-and-fall of different religious sectors therein, he showed how small the number of schools that were run by the religious organizations. But since the 1980s, the South Korean Ministry of Education incorporated a “religion course” as a regular accredited curriculum for public high schools. This curriculum seems to land somewhere between what Lai previously described as the multi-religious and the inter-religious education. The high school students in South Korea are provided with a set of questions that different religious traditions have been asking and required to memorize a significant amount of historical facts about them. Yet at the same time, they seem to be moderately encouraged to use these perspectives for molding their own life-worlds.

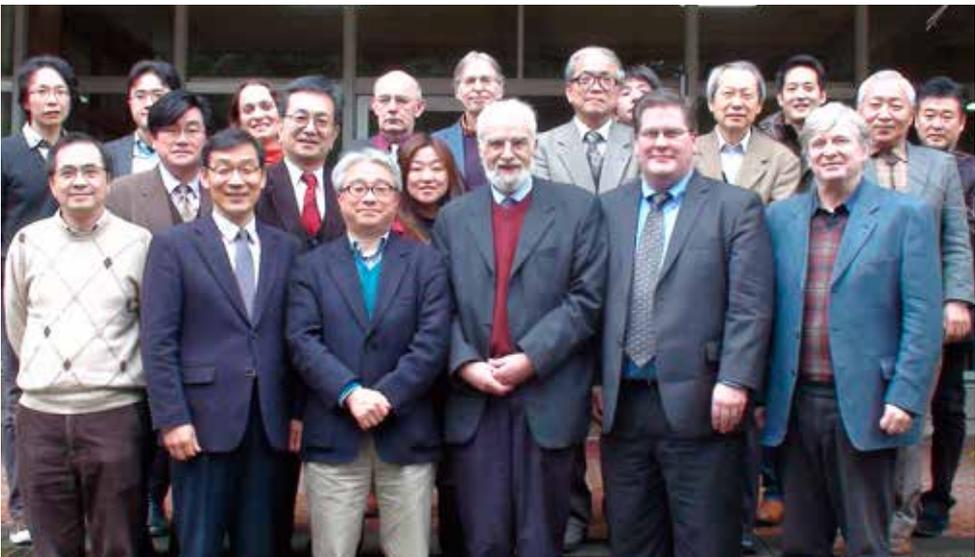
Given that the current textbook for religious studies at Korean high schools does not provide any meaningful religion-science dialogue, the most of the correspondences between these two disciplines are dominated by the conservative protestant Christianity addressing the contradictory relation of natural science and religious faith. Shin has provided us with a rich survey of the development of the religion-science dialogues in his country. However, perhaps due to the lack of an official school program that encourages students to hold an inter-religious perspective as we have seen in the case of Hong Kong, many of these dialogues seemed to be dominated by the American hustle (viz., a series of conservative theological responses to Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, etc.). As a response to the ongoing creationist-evolutionist quarrels, Shin shared the importance of teaching various religions (that are present in South Korea and beyond) through an inter-religious perspective in consonance with Lai’s point for the future of Hong Kong and other Asian countries.

Kenneth Reynhout (Bethel Seminary) brought his insight into, and wisdom for, teaching seminarians and theology students who are immersed in the mono-religious perspective of the US, to cultivate a proper understanding of natural science. He argued that what we would need to approach any inter-disciplinary topic was the cultural wisdom, namely, the “ability to effectively discern the contextual needs of others, to anticipate how their cultural backgrounds have

prepared them for dialogue and learning.” To achieve this wisdom, according to Reynhout, we must (1) have a clear objective, (2) know our audience, (3) pay attention to multiple perspectives, (4) move beyond knowledge and (5) achieve their healthy integration.

The first principle manifests itself when a theology instructor teaches his students to obtain an accurate understanding of a scientific theory as a part of a theology curriculum. Given that neither the instructor nor the students are specializing in natural science, they must set a reasonable expectation for what they are going to learn from a course if the course, for instance, requires an interdisciplinary approach to the theory of evolution. The second principle pays attention to the specific cultural background in which the students cultivate their basic attitudes toward science and/or religion while the rest of the principles aim at enabling students to both emotionally and intellectually cultivate their accurate understanding of theological and scientific ideas. Reynhout provided a detailed list of strategies to achieve these five principles by sketching out the specific problem of teaching Darwin’s theory of evolution to the American students whose “expectations [are] shaped by the toxic public discourse” on the conflict between science and religion in the US. In closing his presentation, Reynhout expressed his hope that some of these techniques, which were proven effective in his American cultural context, could be useful for other contexts.

In “The Tension Between Faith in Creation and Evolutionary Science: How Should Religious Education Respond?” Friedrich Schweitzer (University of Tübingen) focused on the mental and emotional growth of children towards the relation of religion and science (or more specifically Christian theology and evolutionary science). Given that instructors of religion should know basic



world-views that their students share before addressing the issue of faith and science to them, Schweitzer conducted an extensive survey of the basic (mis-) understandings of religious beliefs among the European youth. The result of interviewing 10,000 adolescents that are attending at one year church program ending with their confirmation showed that most of them did not believe in the notion of creation. From this fact, Schweitzer inferred three points: (1) academic discussions concerning the inter-relation of theology and science never reach the majority of the young European minds, (2) primary and secondary school educations are unsuccessful in teaching the basic understanding of religious beliefs, and (3) the popularization of scientific theories has prevented many students from obtaining an accurate understanding of religion and science.

After going through a variety of pedagogical examples in which young peers demonstrated their abilities to conceptualize the inter-relation between science and religion, Schweitzer set forth seven suggestions for the future praxis of religious education that would stimulate the religion-science dialogue. These suggestions can be summarized into the following three points: (a) we must always pay attention to the different developmental stages of our students' understanding concerning religion and science, (b) prepare the pedagogical infrastructure to cultivate their ability to think the sophisticated and complementary relation of things that seem contradictory at the outset and finally (c) deepen our own understanding of science and religion in general; and evolution and creation in particular.

Preliminary Reflections on the Significance of the Symposium and Future Challenges

The symposium served as an occasion to gather facts about the current state of the religion-science dialogue in different cultural contexts and shed light on various insights that emerged from them. This comprehensive approach to the ongoing discussions concerning the inter-relation of religion and science (or the lack thereof) across the world is an enormous achievement as a scholarly survey. Beyond such intellectual gathering, however, the questions still remain: How are these information and insights relevant to the overarching and ongoing project, "Science and Religion Dialogue: An Exploratory Assessment of the Science and Religion Dialogue in Japan"? How are they meaningful for the project that aims at constructing textbooks for courses on religions in Japan?

Lai's description of the historical development of the religious education in Hong Kong clearly supported his argument that we should adopt the inter-religious perspective for configuring the meaningful interrelation between science and religions in a society that embraces "multi-religious belongings." His presentation did not provide the justification for adopting the interreligious

perspective besides the fact that Hong Kong has traditionally accommodated more than one religious faith while his analysis of the three models of the religion-science dialogue (i.e., the mono-religious, the multi-religious and the inter-religious dialogue) was extremely helpful for navigating our discussions on the future of religious education in Japan. For the methodology of religious education that remains attentive to the open community of religion and science, Swanson's presentation was particularly illuminating. It focused on the specific concept that bridges two disciplines of science and religion in a specific cultural context without falling victim to a complete reductionism or their absolute separation. It is important for the next Nanzan Symposium to think about these methodologies that were presented by Lai and Swanson as a foundation for the meaningful dialogue between science and religion, for without these methodological insights, it would be very difficult to conceive of an open dialogue between multiple religions that exist in Japan and science.

The remaining three presentations given by Shin, Reynhout and Schweitzer were quite challenging not only for the participants, but also for the presenters themselves. Many of us were not entirely sure how their findings were relevant to the general theme of the ongoing project at the Nanzan Institute. Unless the general public in Japan suddenly feels the need to engage in the "toxic" conflict between creationism and evolutionism or fall victim to the mono-religious perspective, we cannot directly use what they find essential for dissolving the conflict between scientific knowledge and religious faith. It is simply a type of conflict that seems quite foreign to Japanese understanding of their religions and natural science. Shin's presentation on the Korean struggle clearly indicated that Japan should probably not adopt a carbon copy of the American conflict between mono-religious faith and natural science. The basic methodology that Reynhout provided for teaching the students that suffer from both unscientific and anti-theological biases toward religion and science, however, was of the highest importance for teaching religions in Japan. As Schweitzer acutely emphasized, we should never forget the constant need to pay attention to our students either. It is now up to the Science-Religion Dialogue team to convert the main nutrients of the Symposium 17 into the textbooks for the future courses on religion in Japan.