

Nanzan Symposium IV

THE UNIVERSAL AND THE PARTICULAR IN RELIGION

—A Shinto-Christian Dialogue—

From March 16 through 18, 1983, after a lapse of just three years, the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture hosted its Fourth Interreligious Seminar. Like its predecessors, the Symposium was composed of ten panelists—joined by about thirty observers—and consisted of six sessions of two hours and twenty minutes each. In five of the sessions, previously distributed papers were presented, followed by a commentary by a participant of the other religious affiliation and opening up into a general discussion among the panelists. In the final session, a summary of the previous sessions by one of the participants was delivered in lieu of a prepared paper, and the observers were invited to join in the concluding discussion.

Participants

Representatives from the Shinto tradition:

<i>Kokugakuin University (Tokyo):</i>	Ueda Kenji Sonoda Minoru
<i>Ise Grand Shrine:</i>	Hatakake Seikō Ōgaki Toyotaka

Representatives from the Christian tradition:

<i>Catholic:</i>	Anzai Shin (Sophia University, Tokyo) Jan Swyngedouw (Nanzan University, Nagoya)
<i>Protestant:</i>	David Reid (Tokyo Union Theological Seminary) Yuki Hideo (Dōshisha University, Kyoto)

Scholars of religion:

Akaike Noriaki (Aichi Gakuin University, Nagoya)
Shimazono Susumu (Tokyo University of Foreign Languages)

Aims of the Symposium

As readers of the previous *Bulletins* will recall, the Nanzan Institute has hitherto organized three similar symposia in the form of interreligious dialogues, all of them engaging Christians with Buddhists. In 1976 the first Symposium dealt with "Religious Experience and Language;" the second, in 1978, focused on "Mass and Elite in Religion;" and the third, in 1980, treated "Christianity and the Kyoto School."

That Shinto was chosen as the partner-in-dialogue for the fourth Symposium is due to several reasons, among them the fact that, particularly in the present situation in which the whole of Japan is caught up in an almost frantic search for self-identity, Shinto represents one of the main pivots on which the religious dimension of that search turns. To quote the words of the sociologist of religion and noted scholar of Japan, Robert N. Bellah:

While Shinto does not express the whole of Japan's cultural identity, there is obviously a deep connection between Shinto, using that word in the broadest sense, and the most fundamental level of the native Japanese tradition.

This is not to diminish in any way the role that Buddhism has played and continues to play in the culture of this country. Yet no one can deny that Shinto, native to Japan as it is, is much more basic to the religious consciousness of the Japanese people, including Japanese Christians. Although this fact has always been accepted in theory by the Christian Churches of Japan, it is Buddhism rather than Shinto that has proved so far the more accessible partner for dialogue. Reasons for this state of affairs are legion and there is hardly room to go into them within the limits of this brief report. One factor that may be singled out, however, is the memory of Christianity's far from felicitous encounter with Shinto during the period prior to Japan's defeat in the War. That the demise of Shinto after the War did not take place as many foretold it would testifies to the inner strength of Japan's cultural identity and the role that Shinto performs in this respect. Moreover, certain events in recent years, such as the continuing controversy regarding proposed legislation authorizing governmental support of the Yasukuni Shrine, and similar problems that arise one after the other—including of course that rather dubious "dialogue" known as the International Conference on Religion and Ethics, finally held in mid-1981 after a number of postponements—have added strength to the idea that the dialogue between Shinto and Christianity should not take the form of large-scale conventions but should rather be conducted in the serene atmosphere of smaller circles. Several attempts in this direction have been made in recent months, both on the purely academic level as well as on levels of more immediate religious involvement.

It was not a great difficulty, at least not for the organizers of the Nanzan Symposium, to come up with an appropriate theme for dialogue. Christianity immediately calls to mind the notion of a "universal religion," while Shinto, in sharp contrast, evokes the idea of "particularism." A closer look at this contrast—as became clear during the course of the Symposium—shows, however, that things are not quite so

simple. The opposition "universal and particular" is not so much a way of distinguishing between one religion and another as it is a way of pointing to different dimensions present within each of them. For a religious tradition of such indelibly particularist stamp as Shinto, given its complete and deliberate restriction to the Japanese nation, it would at first glance seem a major problem to uncover anything of the universal in it. But there is much for Christians to learn from what Shinto believers have to say about this matter. As for Christianity, it is obvious that in spite of its claim to be universal, its universality is at every turn mediated to individual believers by the particular or local self-realization of the Christian community. The rediscovery of this particularism in the Churches—with all the tensions this entails in relation to the universality of the Christian message—seems to be a "sign of the times." While this question is at present being intensively studied in Christian circles (and this, of course, not only in Japan), the Nanzan Symposium aimed at deepening the scope of this study by bringing to it the dimension of interreligious dialogue, in particular dialogue with a tradition like Shinto which at first glance seems to adhere to a position directly opposed to that of Christianity. It is especially in this area that we have much to learn from and share with one another.

Papers Presented

The first paper of the Symposium was presented by Ueda Kenji and offered an outline of the problem of *The Universal and the Particular in the Shinto Tradition* from the standpoint of a scholar particularly active in the effort to build up a kind of Shinto theology.

Ueda began by acknowledging that while the problem stated in those terms sounds unfamiliar to Shinto ears, it is not one that Shinto can afford to go on ignoring, not only because it opens the way to relationships with other religious traditions that have faced the problem more directly, but also because it is a topic with implications for Shinto faith itself. He pointed out that the universal and the particular should not be understood in the first place as contradictory but rather as complementary concepts. Following this line, he first drew attention to what he saw as the universal elements present in Shinto, such as belief in nature *kami* and ancestral *kami* (also found in other religions), and the view of life and the establishment of ethical principles which, while enunciated in particularistic terms, connote a meaning transcending this limitation. He then proceeded to a discussion of the particular in Shinto such as the concept of Japan as a divine country, the divinity of the Emperor, and the Shinto forms of worship, all of which are "uniquely" Shinto. To clarify his ideas further, he completed his exposition by taking up the question of the possibility of non-Japanese entering the Shinto faith and the establishment of Shinto shrines in foreign countries. Although admitting that the universal elements in Shinto do not exclude such developments, he expressed strong reservations regarding them, stressing the importance of faith in the Emperor and of Imperial Household rituals as essential to Shinto.

The second paper, *The Universal and the Particular in the Catholic Tradition*, was

prepared by the author of the present report. In the attempt to introduce some order into the tangle of problems associated with the topic, the paper assumed the standpoint that the question of universality and particularity is intrinsically related to the question of unity and diversity. In the first part, attention was given to how Christianity, and in particular Catholic Christianity, has dealt theoretically with the ethnic and cultural diversity present in its own ranks and with the reality of religious diversity in the outside world. In the second part, the paper turned to a discussion of how this theory has been implemented on the particular level. Emphasis was laid on the plurality of theologies that have marked the course of Church history, resulting in a plurality of concrete attitudes and precluding a simplistic labeling of Christianity as being a "universal religion." In the third and final section of the paper, the same question was considered anew from the standpoint of *Religionswissenschaft* and the sociology of religion. Referring to Talcott Parsons' theory of universalistic and particularistic standards and orientations, Hans Mol's ideas on the role of identity in religion, and Bryan Wilson's stress on the bonds between religion and community, it was shown how Christianity, too, needs to acknowledge its own particularity while being oriented towards universalism and continuously striving to make it a reality. The paper concluded with a call for mutual education between those of the Shinto and the Christian faith in the spirit of a shared responsibility for the future of humanity.

In the third session it was again the turn for Shinto to present a paper. Hatakake Seikō, one of its main theoreticians and head of the Institute of Shinto Doctrine of the Grand Shrine of Ise, focused his exposition on an issue that has in recent times become an object of intense study in Shinto circles, namely the efforts to inculturate Christianity, and in particular Catholicism, in Japan as exemplified by highly respected Christian authors. He singled out the work of the Japanese Catholic priest, Inoue Yōji, whose writings present images of God and Christ that—similar to those found in the novels of his friend, the famous novelist, Endō Shūsaku—stress the maternal aspects of religion and bear numerous resemblances to *mu* (nothingness) and other notions found in Oriental religiosity. While professing his appreciation for these efforts at inculturation, which he interpreted in terms of the Shinto understanding of the co-existence of the universal and the particular, Hatakake also expressed an uneasiness towards this trend in Japanese Christianity. Quite straightforwardly he asked whether this was after all anything more than a ruse to propagate Christianity, and repeatedly inquired about the orthodoxy of Fr. Inoue and other Catholic writers on the grounds that their presentations of the divine departs from what he had considered to be Christian orthodoxy, namely a doctrine based on the opposition between the universal and the particular. In sort, Hatakake's paper was an extended query from a Shinto scholar who wanted clear answers from his Christian counterparts concerning the possibility of a theological pluralism that could lead to a rapprochement between the two traditions.

The second paper from the Christian side was delivered by Yuki Hideo, who spoke from a Protestant point of view. Yuki opened his remarks with a clear rejection of the idea that Christianity defends an opposition between the universal and the particular,

stating that its stress of the universal pole is in fact heavily imbued with particularistic elements. Illustrating his claim with numerous examples drawn from the history of Protestantism, and above all its history in Japan, he explained how the universal and the particular are involved in a process of continual reconsideration and reinterpretation. For instance, while at the time of the Reformation Protestantism objected to the universal claims of the Roman Catholic Church and in a sense extolled the value of particular cultures, this trend was reversed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when Protestantism, through its missionary endeavors, was generally more reluctant than Catholicism to inculturate itself in non-Western societies. In this connection Yuki stressed the influence of Barthian theology in Japan, resulting in an "isolation" of Christianity from Japanese culture in its theological and doctrinal aspects. At the same time, however, Japanese Protestantism shows many particularistic elements in its concrete actuality, such as its stress on *enryo* (reserve, shame), a village mentality, and the conception of the local church as the "mother church," all typically Japanese. At the conclusion of his paper Yuki took up the question of government support for the Yasukuni Shrine, a bill still before the legislature that has become one of the main points of contention between Shinto and Christianity in Japan. He proposed that this problem be discussed in all serenity not so much in terms of an opposition between Christian universalism and Shinto particularism, but rather as an opposition between the nature of the universal claims made by Christianity and Shinto respectively.

Besides Shrine Shinto, one of the branches of Japanese Shinto is constituted by what is ordinarily called Sect Shinto. Since this branch is divided in a great number of religious organizations, it was difficult to select one of them as a representative partner for dialogue. Therefore, a discussion of the universal and the particular in Sect Shinto was pursued by Shimazono Susumu, a young scholar specializing in the study of Japan's new religious movements, particularly those of the Shinto tradition. Shimazono's paper on *Universalism in the Early Shinto Sects* focused in a special way on Tenrikyō, Konkōkyō, and other Shinto Sects founded in the later Tokugawa and early Meiji Periods.

In the first section of his paper, which dealt with "Religious Universalism and the Japanese *Kami*," Shimazono set forth a definition of universalism as containing both a claim of egalitarianism and a claim of absolute orthodoxy. Distinguishing between three types of *kami* belief in Japan—namely, *kami* of the collectivity, *kami* of the State, and *kami* with special spiritual powers—he argued that only in the third type can seeds of universalism be discovered. This third type of faith, he went on to assert, was especially strong in what he called Japan's "syncretic cults," which form the matrix from which Sect Shinto originated and which found its clearest expression in the Shugendō tradition with its amalgamation of Shinto, Buddhist, and other religious elements. He dealt more specifically with this topic in the second part of his paper, "Faith in *Kami* with Special Spiritual Powers in the Syncretic Cults," emphasizing that in addition to numerous particularistic elements, this faith contained several universalistic elements in its stress on the equality of all believers with regard to salvation. He then proceeded to a discussion of [continued on page 25]

[continued from page 19] "The Nature of the Kami in the Mass Syncretic Cults of the Late Edo Period and the Early Shinto Sects." Describing the close ties between the two, he emphasized that both the idea of a Parent-kami saving all human beings and the universe—which to a certain extent had its roots in Ise Shinto—gradually grew in strength. In the final section of his paper, "The Lack of Absolute Claims," Shimazono explained how universalism was well represented in early Shinto Sects through this aspect of equality before the Parent-kami, but that any claim to absoluteness and exclusive orthodoxy that characterizes universalism is absent there.

Summary of the Discussions

At this point, it is nearly impossible to give a full account of the discussions that followed the presentation of the papers in each session. The publication of the proceedings of the Symposium in book form (in Japanese) is presently in preparation and hopefully will give food for further reflection not only to those who took part in the event but to a wider circle as well.

The themes dealt with covered a wide range of interests and produced an exchange of ideas that, if not always flowing in tidy logical order, brought the participants closer together. Indeed, if there is one overall comment that can be made on the three-day Symposium, it is that almost nothing could be felt of the animosity that all too often nowadays gives a sharp edge to divisions between Christians and Shinto believers in this country because of the political implications of one another's activities. Even when rather sensitive subjects were taken up, an atmosphere of attentiveness to what the other side wanted to say prevailed throughout the meetings.

In his resume of the papers that opened the final session, Akaike Noriaki singled out five major themes treated in the various papers and the subsequent discussions. The first, obviously, was "the universal (or universalism) and the particular (or particularism) in religion," which was the general topic of the conference. A general consensus emerged concerning what nearly all of those who presented papers had firmly asserted: that the universal and the particular are not opposing but complementary concepts to be found in all religions. Admittedly it is possible to classify religions according to which of the two "poles" is dominant, but it would be misleading simply to label certain religions as "universal(istic)" and others as "particular(istic)." In other words, the universal and the particular are far less categories for classification than they are primary concepts for analysis, and in addition are fluid and constantly in a process of change.

The second and third themes on which the discussions focused, Akaike went on, were the application of these general ideas to Shinto and Christianity respectively. Since Shinto refers to a religion that is exclusively Japanese, the label "particularistic" would appear unavoidable. However, the Shinto participants repeatedly stressed that this sort of label tends to obscure the presence of universal elements in Shinto. Accordingly, they asked for a more balanced view that would take into account these universal human elements of their tradition. From their side, the Christian participants were eager to stress that their religion is, when all is said and

done, not nearly so universal as it is usually said to be, and they called attention to the actual pluralism of Christianity in its concreteness. In a word, it was very clear that these assertions from both sides were partly prompted by the positive willingness to draw closer to one another that characterized the general mood of the Symposium. In this respect, the participants reflected a tendency that exists at present in certain religious circles in Japan, namely the tendency to reappraise values hitherto undervalued in one's own tradition, and to deemphasize values hitherto emphasized too unilaterally. Here I would add that throughout the meetings this subject of the universal and the particular in religion was discussed not so much in terms of abstract philosophy but more in terms of a concrete, phenomenological-sociological analysis.

A fourth theme that came up repeatedly was the specific issue of the relationship, including the conflicts, that characterizes Shinto (and, in a wider sense, Japanese culture as a whole) and Christianity in Japan. While interreligious dialogue has flourished well in Japan, it remains a fact that conferences like the present one between Shinto and Christianity with its focus on an in-depth, academic study of a specific theme have been exceedingly rare. The Shinto participants openly admitted that they felt a certain reserve toward forms of interreligious dialogue of this nature, which go beyond the exchange of cordialities and official speeches. This lack of experience in deeper dialogue, they confessed, may have been one of the reasons for the shallowness of their awareness of existing problems. The Christians, in contrast, while eager to meet and discuss, reflected on their negligence at inviting Shinto believers as partners for dialogue. Ironically enough, one reason for this might have been an unconscious assumption that for a religion as universal as Christianity it is difficult to speak on an equal level with so particularistic a religion as Shinto. But to these reasons was added the fact that the political connotations of problems like the Yasukuni Shrine bill and the Emperor system have frequently driven a wedge between the two religions, making peaceful encounter difficult in the extreme.

Akaike next drew attention to one final point that came up in the papers and discussions: the attempt to set up a sort of theoretical model for studying the problem of the universal and the particular in religion. Here, however, it has to be said that too many difficulties stood in the way of pursuing the question to any depth. While such ideas as the relation between the cognitive and cathetic orientations to the universal and the particular along the lines of the Parsonian model were pointed out, the question was raised of whether variables of achievement and ascription should not be added to this theoretical blueprint.

In a word, as a result of the papers and discussions clearer insight into the complexities of the issue was certainly forthcoming, but this in turn, as might be expected, led to a wealth of new questions which could not be fully investigated within the limits of a short conference. A consensus gradually took shape that the present Symposium ought to be followed up in later workshops and seminars of a similar nature.

In the final session, after Akaike's resume, discussion focused on a fundamental problem that had somehow eluded mention earlier: the relationship between Shrine Shinto and Japanese culture. It was agreed that the tendency to equate the two—a tendency particularly marked in Shinto circles—needs to be modified not only in the

light of the existence of Sect Shinto, but also because of the presence of Christians and adherents to other religions in Japan, who identify themselves with Japanese culture but not with Shinto. In this regard, the suggestion was made that symposia like this ought to be held not only between Christianity and other religions (which is almost exclusively the case), but also among other religions (for example, Shinto and Buddhism) aside from the Christian initiative. Whether such an ideal is to be realized in the near future remains at the present moment unclear.

Jan Swyngedouw