Executive Director’s Annual Report, 1995

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As of March 31, 1995, the membership of our Society is 631 with 45 Christian institutions of higher learning and publishers as supporting members,—a slight increase in membership. We have technically a new regime after October 10, 1994, when an annual meeting of our society was held, and new officers and a new board of directors were approved by the general session of those who had come to attend. Our procedure is to have ballots by mail for a selecting committee, have it make a list of board members, and present it to the general session for approval. The President and officers are approved by the new board members. The major change for the coming two years is a new President, since the hitherto President, Prof. Peter Nemeshegyi of Sophia University had returned to Hungary, after his retirement from the university, to work for the reconstruction of the Church of his country in the remaining years of his life. Our President for the coming two years is Dr. Toshio Satō, theologian and Honorary Professor of Tokyo Union Theological Seminary (Tokyo Singaku Daigaku). The Rev. Nemeshegyi is internationally known as an Origen scholar, and had served our Society as President for four years. Dr. Satō is more active as a theologian after being relieved from teaching chore after his retirement from the Union Theological Seminary; his most recent work is Kirisuto-kyō Singaku Gairon (Christian Theology: an Introduction, 1994, 332pp.)

The annual general meeting for 1994 took place this year at International Christian University campus in Mitaka, Tokyo on October 10 (Monday) and 11 (Tuesday) under the general theme of Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces in Theology. What is meant by this title will largely be understood by the two main lectures each followed by a podium
discussion: “Natural Science and Christianity,” by Prof. Yoichiro Murakami, Tokyo University (afternoon, 10) and “Language and Theology” by Prof. Seiichi Yagi, Tōingakuen Yokohama University (afternoon, 11). Since we had so far usually had an open lecture and a symposium on the general theme of the year, this set-up was something new. Also this year, the morning session of the first day was exclusively allocated for sixteen papers read by the Society members in four simultaneous sessions, while four solicited papers were read by those of established names for the general session on the second day.

The papers read on the second day would indicate at least some areas the members are interested in,— “Theology of Dialogue between Religions” (Prof. Kuniyasu Take, Dōshisha Women’s University), “Is the Theology of Economic Life Possible?” (Prof. Yoshinobu Tōbo, Aoyama Gakuin University), “Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces in ‘Urgeschichte’” (Prof. Toshio Satō, Tokyo Union Theological Seminary) and “The Scientific Nature of Theology” (Prof. Yoshinori Inagaki, Fukuoka Jogakuin Women’s University). Papers responding to open entry read on the first day had diverse topics ranging from New Testament studies, Biblical hermeneutics, Patristics and Thomas Aquinas to Japanese Christian history and the reception of Christianity. Four solicited papers and two main lectures would suggest the Society members’ awareness of need to relate theology with other disciplines that are increasingly commanding the contemporary mind and directing the way of thinking in the contemporary world. It goes without saying that natural science has been regarded as the genuine science and non-scientific disciplines have practically been given a position analogous to natural science.

Theology has suffered most in this modern climate of opinion; it has somewhat succeeded mostly for those whose academic commitment lies in it by establishing itself as Glaubenswissenschaft. Prof. Satō’s paper dealt with the nature of theology against the background of a century-old discussion within the framework of the year’s general theme of centripetal and centrifugal nature in theology in terms of faith
and history. The thematicization of the problem in terms of faith and history is characteristic of German theology to be contrasted with that of British theology in terms of faith and nature. Contribution in this regard would be a paper by Prof. Motosuke Ogushi (Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary) reporting on the recent revival of controversy over biblical theology in special advertence to R. Alberz's *Religionsgeschichte Israel in Alttestamentlicher Zeit*. Prof. Inagaki's approach to the nature of theology seems intelligible, should we see it in terms of faith and nature. Prof. Inagaki with his Thomistic background tried in his paper to establish theology as an exact discipline in the sense in which Husserl had done as to philosophy, and to prove theological truth not as something pertinent to the community of Christian faith but as universal, demanding assent from human reason; implied was that theology be done in terms of rationity and by means of rational discourse.

Whether theology has validity as an academic discipline with universal truth claim or not is ever a *quaestio disputata*. It has been problematic especially in Japan's non-Christian academic culture with its special twist. Prof. Inagaki's discussion of theology as an exact discipline therefore seems tangent to what Prof. Take presented in his paper on Christianity and other religions, and also to Prof. Yagi's general lecture on theology and language in today's context of linguistic turn. The problem of theology and language can more clearly be thematicized as theological discipline (or speculation) and linguistics. Husserlian problematics of "exactness" is today linguistic exactness. Should theology make a universal truth claim, it must be able to explain to the academic world the nature and use of its discourse and the language it utilizes. It involves hermeneutics and language analysis. Prof. Yagi has long-standing experience with Zen practice and is internationally well-known for his active participation in religious dialogue together with Masao Abe and others. He drew on this experience for his discussion of the topic.

Today's intellectual reduction of knowledge to linguistic problem is an end-product of positivistic approach in classical natural science.
Prof. Murakami, an expert in the history of science, is known as a prolific writer on Christianity and natural science; he submitted a thesis that what is called science as a specification of objectively exact scientific knowledge has emerged in the larger process of Western secularization visible since the eighteenth century, i.e., the separation of faith in God as transcendental Creator from the body of knowledge as world/human understanding. This separation is an overall development including the field of modern economic life. In that sense, Prof. Tobô’s paper on the theology of economics which drew on an aspect of American theology seems highly stimulating for the Japanese theologians. And it means again that we have to invent language and discourse to make truth claim in the public forum.

The editorial committee for our Journal *Theological Studies in Japan* got together after Christmas as usual, and selected papers to be printed and important books published in 1994 in the field of Christian studies to be reviewed, and their reviewers; these are to appear in the coming issue, No.34. Two solicited papers out of the above four were selected to be printed for the issue: Prof. Satô’s and Prof. Inagaki, and three out of those of normal category were also selected: Mr. Ogaki’s above paper, “Paul’s doctrine of redemption” (ShuJi Ota, Seikei University, Tokyo) and Mr. Wataru Sasaki’s Thomistic anthropology as is to be seen in the use of *imago* to that of *filius* (Wataru Sasaki, Nanzan University, Nagoya). Meanwhile our issue, NO.33 contains four essays and reviews of books on diverse subjects from exegesis to religious sciences, as is to be seen from the translated titles of some major items at the back cover; in addition each participant in the symposium on the understanding of church in our time has contributed a summary of his account. This discussion on ecclesiology was already reported in last year’s annual report.

There is at present no dramatic development in the field of Japan’s Christian (theological) studies, but it is to hoped that the range and ambience of interests shown in the 1994 annual meeting of our Society will in future bear rich theological fruits to contribute to the theological
world, since there were presented so many stimulations. We cannot deal with regional conferences held between spring and early summer annually, but would like to especially mention one thing to conclude this report. Our memory is still vivid on the great earthquake around Kobe, where there are located many Christian universities and colleges whose building and personnel losses were great. We were afraid that this year’s Kinki regional conference would not possibly be held, as it had been scheduled to be held at Shōin Women's University located in the most heavily damaged area of Kobe, but the members of the Kinki branch courageously went on as scheduled and held a conference at Kyoto Sangyou University with the usual number of papers read, etc. We would like to congratulate Kinki steering committee members on their scholarly zeal and heroic feat. Also it was decided at a meeting of directors in Kyoto held after this regional conference that this year’s annual general meeting be held at Nanzan University, Nagoya on October 11 and 12 under the general theme of Christianity and Religions.