Executive Director's Annual Report, 1998

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The 1997 academic conference of the Japan Society of Christian Studies was held in Sapporo, Hokkaido on August 29-30 at Hokusei Gakuen University. The theme of this year's conference was "Christianity and Culture." In a public symposium, three scholars read papers focusing on this theme and participated in an animated discussion with conference participants.

These three papers appear in the present volume. Takenaka Masao spoke on the theme of "Christianity and Culture in Japan," focusing mainly on the life of well-known artist Tanaka Tadao. Born as the son of a Congregational Church pastor, Tanaka tried to portray the biblical message, not as distant ancient events, but via images which arose from his actual experience. In this way, Tanaka created religious paintings in the very midst of Japanese social situation. Two representative Tanaka works are "Christ of the Military Base" and "Behold the Birds of the Air." Takenaka points out that it is possible to see the real struggle between Christianity and Japan in the "double image" style which joins biblical events with modern experience.

Mizugaki began his presentation with an orderly examination of the basic issues of "Christianity and Culture." Next he suggested that the concept of "culture" in this context has a dual character. On the one hand, there is the dimension of "Christianity versus culture," and secondly, the dimension of "Christianity versus cultural diversity." Mizugaki went on to point out three huge practical issues: 1.) The public character of Christianity and other religions; 2.) Culture and evil; and 3.) Anti-culture. He mainly focused on the first issue of "public character." When seen from this perspective, he suggested that Christianity needs to rediscover "culture" for itself. Some of the sub-

themes which will need to be treated after such a rediscovery are "Culture as Theology," "The Relation of Logos and Media," "Relations with Other Religions," and "Public Social Ethics." Mizugaki suggests that, in this context, there is a possibility for a new reappraisal of the ancient church's concept of Logos.

Tsuchiya discussed the problem of "Christianity and Culture from a Religious Studies Perspective." He described the shift in modern cultural theory from a neo-Kantian to a cultural anthropological perspective and the need to grasp the more recent changes in the concept of culture from a postmodern perspective. Next, he spoke of the need to pay attention to the plurality of religious concepts. In order to accomplish this, he points to the need for religious studies to understand religion as a particular cultural phenomenon. Placing Christianity within the basic framework of "religion as culture," he spoke of the ongoing effort of Christian Studies to be distinguished from contemporary theology as a meaningful enterprise, especially in the midst of changes in the concept of culture.

Additionally, there were twenty-five individual research papers presented at this year's conference, making it one of our more active conferences in recent years. Among these papers, there were two on Pauline research and two on Luther, while others focused on Old Testament theology, ancient, medieval and modern historical research and modern theological issues. Also, there were an especially large number of papers dealing with issues related to modern Japanese Christianity. From these presentations, we have chosen to include two particularly outstanding papers in this issue. The first is Yasukata Toshimasa's "Lessing's Concept of God," and Kohara Katsuhiro's "A Consideration of the Imago Deo." Among the many other outstanding papers, our editorial board agreed that Takehara's, Morimoto's and Shigeru's papers were especially worthy of publication.

Yasukata's paper explores the so-called dimension of Spinozan truth which appears in Lessing's concept of God. Yasukata traces Yacobi's post-Lessing assessment of Lessing's work as having a Spi-

nozan character as well as an interpretation of the Goethe poem "Prometheus" which provided the occasion for Yacobi's view. After making a preliminary distinction between Lessing's and Spinoza's views of God, Yasukata next speaks of the need to clarify the differences between Lessing's views of God as "One and All" and "a personal God who exists outside of the world." Finally, he concludes that Lessing's view is panentheistic and not pantheistic and therefore, rather than being grounded in Spinozism, is actually more spiritualistic.

Kohara Katsuhiro first treats the critiques of Christian anthropology which have arisen from feminist and ecological perspectives and then considers how the concept of Imago Dei might suggest a response to such critiques. According to Kohara, when viewed from the feminist angle, the traditional concept of Imago Dei, rather than being a ground for an inclusive and egalitarian anthropology, has concealed a male domination of women. Also, when seen from an ecological perspective, it must be admitted that, by separating humanity from the rest of creation, the Imago Dei provides a theological basis for ranking. Kohara calls for a dual reconceptualization of the Imago Dei which, on the first hand can provide a basis for an anthropology which strengthens the creativity and relationality of gender and, secondly, makes possible a sacramental natural understanding which can include all of nature as one aspect of the drama of salvation. Thus he calls for a positive development of the Imago Dei which may include the relationality of gender and nature.

This issue also contains fourteen reviews of books of a Christian and theological nature which have been published in Japan during the past year. The editors were planning to include five additional reviews, but being unable to find appropriate reviewers, we had to postpone them to the next issue.

Local chapter meetings were held in Kanto, Kinki and Kyushu districts. In the Kanto district, five scholars gave papers in a symposium held on the theme of "Christianity and the Jewish People" at Toyo Eiwa Woman's University on March 26, 1998. In the Kinki district, six

scholars gave papers in a symposium held on the theme of "Theology in the Information Age" at Doshisha University on March 27th. The Kyushu Meeting, held on March 30th at Seinan Gakuin University, included five papers and a public lecture by Z. Yelle on the theme of "The Dead Sea Manuscripts and Biblical Studies: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls." The Tohoku and Hokkaido Districts are presently making preparations for their meetings. The Tohoku meeting, planned for June 19th at Sendai's Shirayuri Woman's University, will include three presentations and a public lecture by S. Takayanagi on the theme of "Trends in Church and Theology in the Twenty-First Century."

It seems that, after the dismantling of the cold-war structure, the world is groping for a new order or standard. In the midst of this, the United States, which seemed to be temporarily assailed by a confusion of economic and social problems, is displaying a remarkable recovery of self-confidence while Europe is moving toward greater internal unity. It appears that at least at the outset, the world of the twenty-first century will continue to be dominated by American and European leadership. Against this background, strange tragic-comedies are emerging around issues like struggles over border disputes in developing countries and investment in resources used in nuclear development. The search for a new world order must take into account basic moral and religious foundations. It must be said that Christianity has been given a big responsibility to continue as a spiritual force in the twenty-first century. Thus, this year's theme of "Christianity and Culture" actually has relevance in the light of the history of the world. At the same time, isn't it also true that among the various developments of Christian thought, there are many which tend toward a dismantling of Christian self-identity? It is doubtful that such a weakened Christianity has the power to save our civilizations from the present crisis. Of course, theology is not simply reactionary or only a wrestling with traditionalist issues. Hasn't the time come for us to once again to touch upon the true eschatological strength of Christian faith? We need a Chris-

tological and pneumatological assesment of the basis for the “sanctification of the world” and the grace of “the perseverance of the saints” and “the maintenance of the church”. In light of this situation, the Japan Society of Christian Studies still has an even more vital mission in carrying forward the development of theology in this country.

In the fall of this year, there will be an election of new officers and a new editorial team for our journal. We wish to express our hope for the continued progress of our academy and its journal under its new leadership.

英訳：Thomas John Hastings