

The NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions Report of the Activities in 2007/08

Establishing the Research Group on Christian Bioethics

In April 2007, the NCC Study Center launched a Research Group on Christian Bioethics. The group consists of theologians, medical doctors and nurses, medical scientists, a psychotherapist, a sociologist and philosophers. It meets almost every month. – Since quite some time, the NCC Study Center’s staff is concerned with the problems of bioethics. Especially the problem of organ transplantation from brain-death persons has been one of the most important issues. In Japan, such an operation had been done for the first time in 1999. At this time, the NCC Study Center organized an interreligious workshop on this theme and invited representatives of various religious groups (Buddhism, Christianity, Shinto and new religions). Its results were published under the title *Nōshi-Zōki ishoku to Nihon no shūkyō-sha* (Brain-death / Organ transplantation and Japanese Religionists) edited by NCC Shūkyō kenkyūjo (Rugāru-sha, Kyoto 1999). Since then we were hoping to establish a research group on bioethics especially from a Christian point of view. – The NCC Study Center is also a member of a network of research institutes of a number of religious groups in Japan which organizes a sub-section for studying the problem of bioethics from the perspectives of different religions.

Public Lectures

1. In the framework of the NCC Study Center’s research group on funerals, Prof. Sekiya Naohito (Doshisha University, School of Theology) gave a lecture on “Views on life and death in contemporary society – The case of funeral ceremonies in Amerika” on February 14, 2007.
2. At the occasion of the establishment of the research group on bioethics, Prof. Komatsu Yoshihiko gave a public lecture on “The revision of the law concerning organ transplantation and the trend to legalize euthanasia” on October 6, 2007. Prof. Komatsu is one of the most important scholars in this field in Japan.
3. The annual ISJP Memorial Lecture was held by Prof. Fujimoto Kiyohiko (Buddhist University) on “Language and religion – Standing on religious borders and the act of translation.” (Nov. 28, 2007) The ISJP Memorial Lecture is held annually since several years in order to make the Interreligious Studies in Japan Program (ISJP) better known in Japan.
4. The NCC Study Center organized a workshop on “Religion and State” on February 9, 2008, where Rev. Dr. Christian Wendebourg (München) gave a public lecture on “Religious education in German public schools.” Prof. Sugawara Nobuo, the author of a book on religious education in Europe and Japan, gave his comments on this topic in respect to the specific problems in Japan. Because of the separation of state and religion, there is no religious education in Japanese public

schools (only in private schools affiliated with a religion). Since the Aum incident 1995, the issue of the necessity of religious education for young people became subject of public discussions in Japan.

Lecture Series on “How Christianity thinks about ...” (2007)

Since the NCC Study Center is a Christian institute involved in interreligious dialogue in Japan, it has the responsibility to respond to critical questions from other religions. This is part of the apologetic task of the church. This lecture series was held from May 25 – July 20, 2007 and consisted of the following talks: 1. Why are evil and calamities occurring in this world? (Prof. em. Mizugaki Wataru, Kyoto University); 2. Has history a meaning? (Prof. em. Mizugaki); 3. Is it permitted for human beings to control nature? (Prof. em. Mizugaki); 4. Is Christianity for or against war? (Rev. Harada Hiromitsu); 5. How do Christians think about other religions? (Prof. Miyasho Tetsuo, Doshisha University)

Lecture series on the theme “Reviewing Christianity in Japan” (2008)

The first Catholic missionaries (P. Francisco Xavier S.J., etc.) arrived in Japan in 1549, and the first Protestant missionaries came in 1859. Therefore, Japanese Christians celebrate in 2009 a 460th and a 150th anniversary respectively. This is an important occasion to critically review and examine the history of Christianity in Japan and to reflect on its present and future way. The lectures were held in June and July 2008 and the following themes were treated: 1. Japanese Christianity in the context of the whole Church history; 2. Japanese Christianity from the standpoint of the Catholic church; 3. Japanese Christianity from the standpoint of the Protestant churches; 4. Japanese Christianity from the perspective of the Korean church.

**Report of the Interreligious Studies in Japan Program (ISJP)
Fall Semester 2007**

Participants

The following four students, all from Germany, participated in the ISJP Fall Semester 2007: Ms. Cornelia Buhk (Japanalogy, Hamburg University), Mr. Tobias Eckert (Theology, Kirchliche Hochschule Neuendettelsau), Ms. Angelika Germann (Theology, Heidelberg University), and Mr. Valentin Wendebourg (Theology, Tübingen University).

Orientation

The orientation took place from September 27 to October 6. It consisted of introductions to religions in Japan in general (Prof. Yuki, Ms. Patriacia Yamada,