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Report on the Tenth Conference of Japanese and Korean Theologians

**Reflecting on a Milestone Meeting**

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The Conference of Japanese and Korean Theologians was successfully held on November 11, 2022. This year marks the tenth academic conference of theologians from Japan and Korea, an academic exchange program held annually based on the agreement between the two universities concluded in 2008. The tenth conference was scheduled to be held at Seigakuin University in accordance with the agreement to hold the conference at each campus every other year. However, due to COVID-19, the tenth conference could not be held for two years and was finally held this academic year.

The theme of the conference was set as “A Human Being: An East-Asian Anthropology and Theological Anthropology – A Holistic Convergence for the Recovery of Humanity in the 21st Century” following the ninth conference held three years ago. Under this theme, the two universities will work together to establish a new theology of Asia.

The main symposium of the Conference of Japanese and Korean Theologians was held on November 11, 2022, in the Faculty Room of Seigakuin University, with Associate Professor Amadeo Murase presiding and simultaneous interpretation by Pastor Paek Jeong-Hoo of Yoga Church of the United Church of Christ in Japan. Greetings were given at the beginning by President Masayuki Shimizu and Professor Shin Ok-Su, Dean of Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary and Director of the Department of Christian Thought Studies.

Since this was the 10th anniversary of the conference, Professor Nag

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Woon-Hae of the Seigakuin University General Research Institute made a timely opening presentation titled “Reflections on the Conference of Japanese and Korean Theologians (2009–2019).” It was a good opportunity to reflect on the history of this conference and the predecessors who have supported this history, and to express our gratitude once again.

Professor Katayanagi’s discussion of the history of the Japanese psyche and his broad-ranging discussion of Augustine, Kierkegaard, and Western philosophy took as its starting point the intrinsic understanding and criticism of Yukio Mishima, who, against a background of Buddhist resignation, embraced impermanence as resignation, and whose “aesthetic of perdition” found definitive literary expression in “Mono no Aware” (Motoori Norinaga). Mishima rejected both Kierkegaard’s ethical and religious decisions and chose the aesthetic decision of “this and that,” or decadence, and indulged in the love of love. Augustine, in contrast, has something in common with modern decadence, but at the same time, he achieved transcendence from “within” the deep self to “the other,” in other words, to God.

Assistant Professor Kim Young-Won’s lecture was based on an intrinsic understanding and analysis of Kazoh Kitamori’s *Theology of the Pain of God* from the viewpoint that the analysis of emotions representing a certain era, such as “grief and pain,” would be one of the best ways to grasp the ontological and epistemological core of the human being of that era. Kim pointed out that the foundation of Kitamori’s theology was not “Christology” or “Trinitarianism” but “the existence of human suffering, or more specifically, the existence of Japanese suffering.” While agreeing with the criticism that God’s pain reflects Japan’s pain but not Asia’s pain, Kim also points out problems with Kitamori’s criticism of Hegel and other theologies and attempts to position Kitamori’s theology in a direction beyond them. The foundation and focus of Kitamori’s theology is humanism, or “Japanese aestheticism,” which emphasizes “mono no aware,” the feeling and expression of nature and sorrow. The connection between God’s pain and human pain is by analogy and by the “symbolization of pain” that follows. In

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today's context, Kitamori's theology acknowledges the possibility of serving the world's pain based on the Japanese understanding of the human condition, but at the same time, provides the "insight that our acts of resistance and justice, or God's pain, can be a medium, an analogy, and a symbol for healing our pain," in other words, the "theodicy" of God. He concluded that the "humanism" of the "theology of God's pain" could be a practical theological humanism that serves the pain of not only Asia but the world.

The lectures presented Professor Katayanagi's suggestion of Japanese aestheticism or sensitivity and Professor Kim Young-Won's point of view on Japanese aestheticism. I believe that both countries' recognition of their feelings and sensitivities and confronting them is an important route or path to connect Asian theology and anthropology to the universal. In his *Theology of the Pain of God*, Kitamori states that God's pain is not the "truth of one country," Japan, and that it could not have become a reality without Japan as a mediator, and that the true Menschen-kenner (human-knower) is no other than a Gottes-kenner (God-knower). This "human being" is a human being in the universal sense. The format of the conference will change slightly after this year, but I am convinced that, in this tenth meeting, the exchange between the two universities has taken on a new dimension.

It will take time, but I sincerely hope that this academic conference of theologians will be a small step toward a human solution based on theological foundations.