

POSITIONING OF “SPIRITUALITY” AND “DIALOGUE” IN THE EAST-WEST SPIRITUAL EXCHANGES

Akihi Muto

Actualities of the dialogue and interpretations of spirituality

The Spiritual Exchange East-West is often called “dialogue in silence”. This word is used by its participants, thus it is clear that they regard the Exchange as dialogue. In this case, what does “dialogue” mean?

Even in the Spiritual Exchange East-West, there is dialogue by words. For example in the end of the Exchanges there is a symposium and particularly in the 11th Spiritual Exchange East-West, the Zen monks had many conversations with the Christian monks in the monastery we stayed. However it is clear that dialogue with words have not been important in the Exchanges. Then, “dialogue” means, assumedly, mutual understanding. Thus the Spiritual Exchange East-West is a mutual understanding that does not depend on words but on spirituality.

Then what is “spirituality”? For example, Sodo Yasunaga said that ‘Through Spiritual Exchange East-West we....might seek something called “spirituality” which makes Zen and Christianity what they each are’¹. Moreover, although Seiko Hirata does not directly mention “spirituality”, he said that ‘I understood that they [Christian monks] are in the same world as us [Zen monks]. I saw vividly through my eyes a kind of origin of religion from which Christian faith and Zen came out’². Hence, Zen people tend to regard “spirituality” as something substantial and a kind of super-religious ground. In the same way they often say that Zen and Christianity have the same origin.

On the other hand, the Christian monks’ interpretation of spirituality differs from the Zen monks’. The monks whom I have interviewed said that spirituality is ‘experience above us’ or ‘seeking meaning of life and true life’. Add to this, the Popes in recent years are using spirituality as ‘a way, tool and form to guide spiritual life’³. Thus Christians don’t regard spirituality as something substantial

¹ 安永祖堂「靈性ということ：第七回東西靈性交流レポート」『禅文化』第179号、2001年、26頁。

² 第二回東西靈性交流編修委員会編『カトリック修道士の禅堂体験：「第二回東西靈性交流」報告』第二回東西靈性交流実行委員会、1984年、2頁。

³ 日本カトリック司教協議会 諸宗教部門編『カトリック教会の諸宗教対話の手引き：実践Q&A』カトリック中央協議会、2009年、128頁。

but a kind of “attitude”. This difference may affect the achievement of mutual understanding.

In terms of mutual understanding, there is an important difference between Zen and Christianity: the form of life.

For Christian monks, the monastery is where they stay in all their life. For lay people or Fathers who live out of monastery, the monastery is where they lead a spiritual life. Therefore, monasteries (particularly Benedictine) have guesthouses and monks are used to having visitors. Each monk has a personal room and they can have personal time relatively.

For Zen monks, the monastery is a provisional training hall (*Zendo*). Monks who are relatively young stay there. Most *Zendo* are composed of only Zen monks and do not have guesthouses. In *Zendo* there are no personal rooms or time.

As mentioned earlier in the 11th Spiritual Exchange East-West, the Zen monks did not stay and eat in the guesthouse but the same building as the Christian monks. Then although the Zen monks tried to identify with the Christian monks, the Christian monks requested the Zen monks to act as “Zen monks” many times. In addition, regarding clothing, they wore Zen monk’s frock. On the other hand in the 12th Spiritual Exchange East-West, the Christian monks were not requested to act as “Christian monks” but rather as “Zen monks”. Regarding clothes, they wore *hakama* or *samue*.

Accordingly the understanding of Zen for Christian monks in *Zendo* is to learn *Zendo* life without words. Fitting into *Zendo* life, they understand what Zen is. However, Zen monks who receive them are not able to understand what Christianity is. Of course the understanding of Christianity for Zen monks in Christian monasteries does not depend on words. As mentioned, although Zen monks in Christian monasteries have tried to identify with Christian monks, a monk who has participated in the 11th Exchange said that behaving as a Zen monk, he has gotten more understanding about Christianity than before. It shows that one can understand the other through differences from oneself.

Conclusion

As we have seen, there are many different aspects in spiritual exchange. For example, understandings of spirituality are various. Zen people tend to regard spirituality as something substantial and a kind of super-religious ground, and Christians regard it as a kind of “attitude”. Moreover, there is a difference in how to receive guests between *Zendo* and Christian monasteries. In *Zendo*, Christian monks are requested to act as Zen monks and in Christian monasteries, Zen monks are requested to act not only as Christian monks but also as Zen monks. These differences affect mutual understanding. Zen monks emphasize commonalities and

they try to understand through those commonalities. On the other hand, Christian monks emphasize differences and they try to understand through those differences.

Of course, studies on Inter-religious dialogue hardly refer to spiritual exchange and these studies grasp only one aspect. This report is spadework to consider what Inter-religious dialogue is and what spiritual exchange is. We must look more carefully into actualities of Inter-religious dialogue and spiritual exchanges.