CHAPTER THREE

A NEW POSSIBILITY FOR A PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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When professors Miyamoto Takenosuke, Odajima Yoshihisa, Osuga Kiyoshi and Satō Toshio published the book *Tetsugaku to shingaku no taiwa* (Dialogue between philosophy and theology) in June 1967, I read it and wrote an article expressing my impressions of the book for the journal *Nihon no shingaku* (Theological Studies in Japan, No. 7, September 1968), issued by the Japanese Society for Christian Studies. Among the treatises included in the book, Professor Satō’s “Shūkyō-tetsugaku no kako to genzai” (Past and present in philosophy of religion) was the most stimulating and suggestive to me, and it partly occasioned the present article. Of course, this subject had long been a problem for me, and implicitly as well as explicitly it was one of the central problems in my book *Shingaku to shūkyō-tetsugaku to no aida* (Between Theology and Philosophy of Religion), published several years ago (1961). I have to refer to some of the points already mentioned in this book, however, in this article.

I want to investigate this problem from a new and somewhat different viewpoint. But since my present thinking on the subject is still developing, I must admit that this article is rather an essay in the original sense of the word.

Professor Satō wrote in his article as follows:

> For the last forty years, the situation of philosophy of religion in the world of Protestantism can be said to have been strongly determined by Dialectical Theology, particularly by Karl Barth’s theology. In relation to the increasing influence of Barth’s theology, philosophy of religion, which had occupied

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2 Miyamoto et al. (1967).
important position in Protestant theology until the first World War, came to be utterly neglected, or was relegated to a back corner.³

As to the reason why the concern about philosophy of religion has decreased, the fact has to be mentioned that this theology (sc. Dialectical Theology) started from revelation and not from religion. The theology of the nineteenth century had a tendency to seek its subject in religion and to build up theology by laying its foundation on philosophical explanations concerning the essence of religion. In contrast, Dialectical Theology carried out a fundamental change by making revelation the main subject of theology and basing theology on revelation. At the basis of this change lay the perception that, contrary to the previous tendency to dissolve Christianity into human religiosity in general, Christianity is based on revelation from above, which vertically cuts through the plane of human religiosity. The striking retreat in the concern about philosophy of religion results from here.⁴

Certainly, the narrow way of ‘revelation only’ had to be stressed in order to correct the mistakes of nineteenth-century philosophy of religion. At the same time, however, as far as revelation is claimed to be truth, discussions or confrontations with other sciences equally aiming at truth, or other thought systems equally claiming truth, have to be an obvious task; its evasion inevitably confines theology to a ghetto. Hence the concern about philosophy of religion revived as symbolized by the fact mentioned at the outset.⁵ It was, therefore, not a simple relapse into nineteenth-century philosophy of religion. Even if there certainly was an aspect of restoration to a certain degree, in fact it was a new start for philosophy of religion by accepting, in some way, the criticism of the nineteenth-century philosophy of religion by Dialectical Theology.⁶

Professor Satō’s recognition of the present trend and of the reasons for the restoration of philosophy of religion is quite appropriate, and in many points I can agree with him. Therefore, at such points I have to say the same in a similar way. For instance, the ebb of philosophy of religion after Dialectical Theology and Barth’s theology can be said, in a simple way, to be caused by this theology’s reaction against “religionism”

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³ Satō (1967: 203–204).
⁵ According to Professor Satō (1967: 203), “The publication of the Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie which had continued for a long time, was resumed a few years ago as the Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie. Soon afterwards, the title was changed to Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie to show that it was also a journal of philosophy of religion. This seems to symbolize, in a way, the trend in present Protestant theology concerning philosophy of religion.” (The Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie had been founded and edited by Carl Stange from 1923 until 1957. The Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie was launched 1959 by Paul Althaus and Carl Heinz Ratschow; in 1963, the term Religionsphilosophie was included in the title. All three editors were Lutheran systematic theologians. [Ed.])