



Dialogue

Creating the Next 60 Years

Project Report

June 10th, 2014

ICU 60th Anniversary Project



60th Anniversary Project INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY



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ICU 60th Anniversary Projects Date: June 10, 2014

[Founders Day Chapel Hour 2012: The 60th Anniversary]

Presider: Rev. Shouko Kitanaka

Hymn: Printed "Sunshine in the Soul"

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:38-42

The Sermon: One and Many Dr. Shigenari Kawashima
Board of Trustees, Emeriti Professor

“The One and the Many” Luke 10:38-42

Dr. Shigenari Kawashima

Board of Trustees, Emeriti Professor

Martha and Mary have often been viewed as the epitome of contrasting woman figures. Martha is the active and energetic woman; Mary is the obedient and quiet type of woman. Here also, Martha is depicted as a woman who warmly entertains Jesus as a guest, while Mary is depicted as a woman who sits at the feet of Jesus and quietly listens to his words. From these images, the sisters were perceived as allegories of the active life (*vita activa*) and the contemplative life (*vita contemplativa*), or *praxis* and *theoria*, in Western intellectual history. In so doing, there was an assumption that viewed *praxis* as necessary for living but secondary, and *theoria* as the essence of human life. This way of thinking, which perceives the way humans live as contrasts – *theoria* or *praxis*, contemplation or action – likely stems not from the Bible but from Aristotle’s ethics. However, it cannot be denied that the fact that Jesus approved Mary’s conduct in the verses in Luke served to back up this traditional perception.

If we once more question whether this Mary is a woman who symbolizes the

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contemplative life, we probably cannot say that such is the case. Rather, we probably should understand that Mary went so far as to abandon the duty expected of women of the time, namely attending to an important guest, and simply sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to his words. She is a woman who pulled off a shocking act, which would offend the sensibilities of the people of the time. As a woman, this decision probably was one that astonished. Since the impression of Mary as a quiet woman is strong, we cannot possibly think that this was her usual self. It probably was a special event – an event that became a moment for drawing forth from Jesus provocative words that tore through the conventions of the world: “there is need of only one thing” – that happened just once, at this place and at this time, and consequently came to be remembered as the story we know. Mary likely behaved as she did not because she actively chose to, but because a power that strongly moved her to behave as she did overwhelmed her at the time. The power was the encounter with Jesus. At the time, Mary probably divined that the only thing for her to do was to accept Jesus’ existence and listen to his words. That was precisely the proper way to



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welcome Jesus. Mary straightforwardly obeyed such inner prompting. Because she could not do otherwise, she simply opened her heart and answered the call. This probably was an astounding experience that freed Mary all at once from the bonds of convention regarding the behavior expected of women of the time and opened up a new wide horizon of self-awareness.

Elder sister Martha was irritated with Mary, who in this way chose to simply sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to his words, and she expressed her dissatisfaction to Jesus. Jesus spoke to Martha these astonishing words: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” How in the world would Martha have responded to these words of Jesus that completely overturned Martha’s expectations? The story is open-ended, and the rest is left to readers’ imaginations.

Martha is representative of earnest people to be found everywhere even today who live by leaning on conventional norms and sensibilities. Martha, being who she is, could not admit Mary’s unconventional attitude and said to Jesus: “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.” Here, Martha, rather than simply feeling dissatisfied with the situation in which she alone had to busily work, divined that her principles regarding the way of living and values were being shaken by Jesus’ unreasonable attitude that permitted Mary’s willfulness. As a result, she became discomposed and sought assurance of the correctness of her beliefs from Jesus.

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To this, Jesus gave a reply that completely went against Martha's feelings. In so doing, Jesus was actually trying to liberate Martha all at once from her bonds – bonds that meant fixating on her ethical norms and consciousness of her role as a woman, which are expressed by “worried and distracted by many things.” At this moment, Martha was made to experience a true encounter with Jesus. Would Martha have straightforwardly responded to this encounter with Jesus and his

to freedom? Or would she have shut her heart even further?

I cannot prevent the feeling of expecting that a new perspective for viewing her sister Mary and simultaneously herself opened wide before Martha. This story began by telling “a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.” Jesus was welcomed into a woman's home. According to John 12:1-3, Martha and Mary had a brother named Lazarus. However, in these verses of Luke, there is no sign of a man in this house [“her (Martha's) house” Luke 10:38 according to some Greek manuscripts]. Jesus visited a household of only women. He did something that rabbis of the time did not do. But this does not necessarily mean that we must concern ourselves only with the “woman's house” and read this story solely from the viewpoint of women's theory. As I have already mentioned, Martha is a representative of ordinary persons who are everywhere, regardless of sex, who must live with their hearts disturbed by various distractions of the world, much like us. It was the house of just such an ordinary person (a woman) that Jesus



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visited.

The visit of Jesus itself indicates the arrival of a blessing. I would like to believe that Martha's momentary tumult was nothing more than ripples created in the ocean of the large affirmation of the visit. Martha was called "Martha, Martha" in a friendly manner by Jesus and was counseled, "You are worried and distracted by many things." This of course is not a judgment. Rather, it was an invitation for her to straightforwardly receive the great joy of Jesus being there, as Mary did; in fact, that she should do so. I imagine that at this very moment, Martha must also have been moved by an emotion of overwhelming joy. Martha probably could not resist this at all. All she could do was accept it. The same one-time thought that struck Mary – that the only thing to do was to simply accept the blessing that was the existence of Jesus – probably became Martha's at this time. If so, then at this time Martha became Mary, another "listening person," while continuing to be the active woman Martha.

Similarly, it can be said that Mary, while continuing to be Mary, had been invited to take on the role of Martha on occasion and to engage in praxis freely and joyfully and not as a duty. "There is need of only one thing" is a very Jesus-like and amazing message. It probably does not deny the fact that there are many things that are necessary for living the life of humans before the arrival of the final, the ultimate. The reason for this is because Jesus himself, who spoke these words, is not refusing Martha's hospitality.

This is not to say that there is no distinction among the final, the ultimate, and what comes before. The final ("the only one thing needed") can only be accepted. However, human activity, which is clearly distinguished from the final and reaches up to one step before it, is neither more nor less than what it is. It is simply affirmed as such. Martha's hospitality should have been



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offered freely as such, and therefore without irritation, in which case it would have been joyfully accepted by Jesus. Martha, in her fervor regarding her role and what she felt was appropriate, momentarily had the illusion that such considerations were equivalent to the final, the ultimate. Her earnestness robbed her of the latitude and humor to differentiate between the final and the things before that. Jesus' reply to Martha can also be understood as encouragement to differentiate with humor between the one and the many, the absolute and the relative, the final and the things before that.

It was necessary for Martha first to simply listen, as Mary did, to God's word, to that which is deemed "the only one thing needed," and then to be called forth as one who serves people freely and with joy. It can be understood that Martha, in this way, was prompted to return to her true self, to a Martha who works diligently in the area of praxis with humor.

This likely means that Mary was also invited to become another Martha. That is to say, Martha becomes Mary, and Mary becomes Martha. Can it not be understood that Jesus indicated such a free way of being? This issue of way of living should by no means be limited to women. It was Jesus' call, and invitation to freedom, to all people, women and men.

In the remaining time, I would like to consider, in my own small way, how what I have said regarding Mary and Martha above relates to ICU, which has welcomed its 60th anniversary.

First, ICU should continue to be a university-like university that seeks the truth above all things. I am compelled to mention such an obvious matter

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because I believe that in Japan today, the reality is that a too near-sighted trend prevails. For example, universities sell students who respond to societal expectations and can make an immediate contribution, and the value of universities is measured by the [student] employment rate. If one says something like “seeking the truth,” it sounds nostalgic or even a bit embarrassing. Such an atmosphere is dominant today in Japanese universities in general. Is this not the reality? Amidst this atmosphere, ICU should be a place where, even after 60 years, ideals are youthfully held high and the philosophies of I, C, and U are passionately discussed with one another. According to John 8:32, “the truth will make you free.” I cannot stop hoping that ICU people – who seek the truth, think of the ideal, and having done that, can face various societal hardships with humor and joy; who are indeed simultaneously Mary and Martha – i.e. truly free ICU products, will continue to flourish.

The educational philosophy that cultivates such truly free people is of course liberal arts. When referring to ICU’s undergraduate department as “College of Liberal Arts,” there is the possibility that for some reason or other, ICU is understood to be a place where one learns a little about many things compared with the specialized education of other universities. I believe this is an outrageous misunderstanding. I think rather that liberal arts entail broad and deep learning. Here, “deep” means, above all else, the continual pursuit with reverence of questions that are essential and fundamental for humans, such as “What are human beings?” and “What is the meaning of the fact that we are here now like this?” It is expected that students will devote themselves to research in disciplines such as economics, biology, and history while bearing such questions in mind -- they become truly free people who have been released from the bonds of

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the world while simultaneously acquiring skills to survive in this world.

I just mentioned “reverence,” which can be said to be a sense of “amazement” at how full of wonder is the fact that humans are humans. Here, I would like to quote several verses from the famous Psalms Chapter 8 of the Old Testament.

O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouths of babes and infants...

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?



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Psalms 8:1-4 NRSV

Here, the psalmist is deeply moved by the overwhelming greatness, sublimity, and beauty of the order of God's creation and gives thought to his, in comparison, truly inferior self. He expresses his frank amazement at the fact that such an insignificant thing is still the object of God's grace: "[W]hat are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?"

Position and role differ, but ICU people, whether students, faculty, staff, alumni, or members of the administration and Board of Trustees, should always continue to hold on to such a human sense. To nourish the foundation of such a human sense is, I think, the most essential characteristic of liberal arts backed up by Christianity. In this sense, I cannot help thinking once again how wonderful it is that ICU is given this chapel hour, during which students, faculty, and staff leave their post and together praise and extol God's glory as fellow human beings.

Just now, I mentioned liberal arts backed up by Christianity. I believe the same thing can be said more generally of Christianity, academic research, and educational activity overall at ICU. At ICU, there is The Institute for the Study of Christianity and Culture (ICC), which just welcomed its 50th anniversary. This is an institute that makes inquiries into the relationship between Christianity and culture as human activity, including academics and education. In Western intellectual history, this question has been traditionally discussed more narrowly, taking the form of inquiry into the relationship between "faith and reason." If everything could be explained by reason, there is no opening for faith. However, we know that things that cannot be grasped by human reason exist, and we cannot help kneeling down humbly before them with reverence and that sense of wonder. This existence beyond reason does indeed limit the activity of our reason, but by no means does it deny reason. Rather, it encourages our reason to vividly work as reason within its limitations. In other words, it is inconceivable that the Christian gospel denies free academic research. Rather, Christian gospel



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encourages and supports it. Is this not precisely a parallel with what I mentioned through the relationship between Mary and Martha?

Finally, I would like to express my opinion regarding ICU's unique *raison d'être* as a Christian university in Japan. ICU should stop rejoicing and lamenting over matters that are ranked in a variety of ways using a variety of measures of the world and going with the flow of the main current of the world. Instead it should devote itself to becoming a first-class, high-quality minority. That is to say, I would like ICU to consciously choose to be, as the Bible says, "wandering God's people." I am not saying that ICU does not need to have a beautiful, large campus and fine buildings. However, no matter how wonderful they are, they are nothing more than mere outward appearances. I think that ICU should in essence always have as its primary consideration "the only one thing needed" and not outward appearances. In this sense, I also think that ICU should continue to be an existence that is critical of the main current of the world. Metaphorically speaking, I would like ICU to be Galilee and not Jerusalem. In this sense, it is desirable that ICU is a peripheral existence. The reason for this is because the gospel of Jesus is peripheral. Jesus said to Martha "there is need of only one thing" and so tore through the conventions of the world. The world cannot truly accept and be content with this gospel. In this context, the gospel of Jesus was born in the outlying region of Galilee and not in Jerusalem.

Should not ICU defy the main current of the world as just such a peripheral existence, a first-class, high-quality minority? (I am purposely not saying where that main current is now trying to go.) Should not ICU always adhere



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to the only one thing that is necessary and as a result be a university that is free of the conventions of the world and in this sense first-class? In this way, we can probably serve God and also the world well in our own unique way. In other words, ICU should be a university that is simultaneously Mary and Martha.