

SHINRAN'S PHILOSOPHY OF SALVATION BY ABSOLUTE OTHER POWER

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Shinran, founder of the True Pure Land (Jōdo Shin-shū) school of Japanese Buddhism, has gained wide attention in recent years, not only among Japanese scholars but also among Western theologians. The most outstanding of the latter is Karl Barth, who takes note in his *Church Dogmatics*¹ of the striking parallel between Shinran's (and Hōnen's) thought and the theology of the Protestant Reformers. Nevertheless, Barth is unable to give adequate consideration to the character of (this) Pure Land thought because it has not been explored in sufficient detail in Western studies for him to be able to form a competent judgment.

It is the purpose of this essay to try to fill in this lacuna in Western studies by presenting two major themes of Shinran's thought, namely, his idea of the depravity of beings and also his interpretation of faith which presents novel aspects in view of the general understanding of religion in Buddhist tradition. The religious dialectic which appears here is the fact that the more absolute the depraved nature of beings is conceived, the more absolute must be the conception of the means of salva-

1. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson, Harold Knight, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, I-2, p. 342.

tion. On the basis of his own experience of twenty futile years of discipline on Mount Hiei, the Tendai Buddhist center, Shinran was enabled to plumb the depths of the spiritual life and to present a system of thought which is not only the peak of development of the Pure Land tradition, but also noteworthy in the history of the religions of mankind.

I. The Evil Condition of Sentient Beings

The background of Shinran's life is the age of upheaval between the Heian and Kamakura periods. He witnessed violence and brutality in both the secular and religious areas. Like other religious leaders of this age (i. e. Hōnen, Dōgen and Nichiren) Shinran experienced inner, spiritual anxiety as the traditional religious institutions failed to assuage uncertainties concerning the meaning of life and future destiny. In both Hōnen and Shinran, the anxiety was focussed on the sinful condition of humanity. This sinful condition had an ideological basis in the concept of *Mappō*, the Buddhist theory concerning the last stage in the degeneration of the Buddhist doctrine. According to this theory, it was believed that it was impossible to attain the highest Buddhist ideals in this period because of the rampancy of passion and ignorance.

Experiencing the pangs of a sense of sin within his own life as a result of his frustration in Buddhist discipline on Mount Hiei, Shinran painted a description in his writings of the ineradicable nature of sin in beings. He employed all the traditional terms to express his concept of the human predicament. He employed the famous picture of the burning house which

appeared in the Lotus Sutra.² In addition he was familiar with the analysis of existence which can be traced back to Gautama in the traits of passion and ignorance. He saw, as did others, that all evils lay in the human heart.

This analysis of the existence of sentient beings had become a part of the Pure Land tradition, and furnished the basis for the relaxation of disciplines and religious requirements which characterized its increasing popularity. This feature of the tradition is noteworthy because of the reorientation it brought about in Buddhist thought. In earlier forms of Buddhism the understanding that man was passion-ridden was calculated to encourage him to take up the discipline in order to purify himself, gain necessary merit, and thus be released from the process of births and deaths. Pure Land teachers, assisted by the concept of *Maṃpō*, reversed this appeal. They maintained that because men were passion-ridden and the age was against them, it was impossible to attain salvation through their own efforts, and therefore they must rely on Amida Buddha.

Shinran accepted these basic ideas when he became a Pure Land convert under Hōnen. However, the position was not simply an abstract theory for him, but as we can observe throughout his writings he was personally involved through the awareness of his own failures. We find many personal confessions which have given his writings a depth and attractiveness to the Japanese because he has indicated clearly his own identification with the human situation. His teachings are a testimony to his faith in having personally discovered the ex-

2. *The Saddharma Pundarika* (H. Kern, Trans.), *Sacred Books of the East*. F. Max Muller (ed.), Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1884, XXI, pp. 72-79.

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planation of man's eternal problem, that is, his own nature. Thus we find him lamenting sorrowfully in a poem :

Even though I take refuge in the True Pure Land faith,
It is difficult to have a mind of truth.
I am false and untrue,
And without the least purity of mind.

We men in our outward forms
Display wisdom, goodness and purity.
Since greed, anger, evil and deceit are frequent,
We are filled with naught but flattery.

With our evil natures hard to subdue,
Our minds are like asps and scorpions.
As the practice of virtue is mixed poison,
We call it false, vain practice.³

As he sets forth his theological views, Shinran suddenly interjects a confession of his temptation in being considered a teacher and that, even though he teaches the True Pure Land, he does not desire any more than any one else to go there because he is still moved by his passions :

I know truly how sad it is that I, Gutoku Shinran, am drowned in the broad sea of lust and wander confusedly in the great mountain of fame. I do not rejoice that I have entered the company of the truly assured; I do not enjoy (the fact) that I am approaching the realization of the true attainment. O how shameful, pitiful!⁴

He was very sympathetic with others like himself who found it difficult to arouse enthusiasm for a distant land of bliss or a desire to leave the realm of the tangible and the known.⁵

Because he was acutely aware of his own passion-ridden

3. *Shinshū Shogyō Zensho*, II, p. 527. 4. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 777—778.

nature, he realized that there was nothing he could do to purify his spirit sufficiently to gain the insight and assurance of enlightenment as prescribed in the traditional schools. He drew the ultimate conclusion that all disciplines were vain because they gave no assurance.⁶ He even came to doubt the verbal recitation of the Nembutsu though he maintained he held fast to Hōnen's doctrine.⁷ He criticised these practices on the basis that the devotees appear to think that they are doing a good deed which is the source of their salvation. He claimed such people lacked a deep insight into the depravity of beings and that they lacked understanding of the meaning of Buddha's assistance in the attainment of salvation.

On the question of the essential depravity of beings, Shinran held that it was entirely impossible for a person to do a good deed. Whatever good act he appeared to do on the finite level was still evil, because it was done with a calculation in mind and was intended ultimately to bring benefit to the doer. Thus all good deeds performed by people were seen as essentially self-centered and involved in the whole web of passion.

Also he noted that when good deeds are viewed from the standpoint of Amida Buddha, good deeds again become impossible because the standard of comparison must be Amida. This Buddha had practiced through long aeons of time without the slightest tinge of selfishness or insincerity in order to make it possible for men to be reborn into the True Pure Land. Amida was absolute, incomparable goodness and purity. Shinran drew a line between the nature of depraved beings and the Buddha that could never be bridged by petty good deeds.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 528. 7. *Ibid.*, p. 774.

Shinran diverged from the general tradition of Buddhism when he conceived Amida Buddha as the inimitable absolute, the source of salvation.

Shinran's rejection of all Buddhist practices which were motivated by a desire to accomplish some good effect was so categorical that he was even led to reject the time-honored ways of filial piety which he set aside on the basis that a common mortal had no virtue within him to benefit the beloved departed.⁸

With regard to the point that Buddhists generally misunderstand the nature of Buddha's assistance in gaining salvation, Shinran was very clear. *He shifted attention away from practices to attitude.* He criticised traditional practices because they were essentially egoistic in being aimed at gaining salvation. He even criticised the practice of Nembutsu in the Pure Land school because it was used to gain merit.

Shinran's own experience and sense of spiritual incapacity which he had developed caused him to see in the Vow of Amida Buddha the aspect of faith, the spiritual attitude to be possessed by the devotee. He came to understand that as the practice of recitation may have been given by the Buddha as an easy way for common mortals to gain salvation, so also the traits of mind which give rise to the aspiration for the practice must be given by the Buddha. *Thus he made the act of faith itself the essential basis of salvation.* Further, he observed that *the act of faith itself was not made by the individual, but by the Buddha in that person.* In this way Shinran designed to remove all self-calculating aspects from religion. He established a theory of Buddha's assistance which made every aspect of

8. *Ibid.*, p. 776.

religion derive ultimately from the Buddha himself.

Without the assistance of the Buddha, it was Shinran's view that all men would fall into hell, and he made it very clear that all men, good and evil, stand in need of Amida's compassion :

The idea is : However good a man may be, he is incapable, with all his deeds of goodness, of effecting his rebirth in Amida's Land of Recompense. Much less so with bad men. Except for the three (or four) evil paths of existence, where else can their evil deeds bear fruit? Being so, good deeds are of no effect and evil deeds of no hindrance as regards rebirth. Even the rebirth of good men is impossible without being helped by Amida's specific Vow issuing from his great love and compassion which are not at all of this world.⁹

One of the clearest results of the intense awareness of sin which Shinran exhibits is the religious logic in which the deeper and more absolute the involvement of mortals is in passions and sins, the greater is the need for an absolute power to release them from it, since they cannot release themselves. The deepening of Shinran's concept of man resulted in a parallel heightening of Amida's nature. Nowhere shall we find a better example of this change in perspective than in Shinran's interpretation of Shan-tao (a Chinese Pure Land teacher) and his passage on the three mental attitudes, i. e., his interpretation of faith.

In the *Kammuryōju-kyō*,¹⁰ (on which Shan-tao and Shinran based their views) it is made clear that in order for the recitation of Amida's name to be effective, the devotee must reproduce in himself the sincerity, faith, and aspiration which Amida Buddha as a Bodhisattva (Hōzō) had cultivated when

9. D. T. Suzuki, *Miscellany on the Shin Teaching of Buddhism*. Kyoto : Shin-shū Ōtani-ha Shūmusho, 1949. p. 142.

10. *Sacred Books of the East*, XLIX, F. Max Muller, ed. pp. 36-39.

he underwent austerities to establish the Pure Land.

Shan-tao, and Hōnen after him, regarded Amida Buddha in the light of this passage as the standard and pattern for religious faith and actions of the devotee. Out of his own experience Shinran diverged widely from their view, and he was able to inject his view into the statements of Shan-tao through the peculiar Japanese method of reading the Chinese text in the *kambun* style.

According to Shan-tao, the "devotee must not manifest the appearance of wisdom, goodness, and purity externally and embrace vanity and falsehood internally."¹¹ Hōnen followed this line of reasoning in the *Ōjōtaiyōshō* :

That which is called 'a most sincere heart' means a genuine and true heart, which in turn means that one's actions, words, and thoughts are without pretence, and in accord with, and an expression of, reality.¹² Shinran interpreted Shan-tao differently :

Do not manifest the appearance of wisdom, goodness, and purity externally, *because* (we) are vain and false within.¹³

In other words, what Shan-tao and Hōnen had warned against, i. e., hypocrisy, Shinran declared to be the general condition of beings.

Though space does not permit detailed study, it should be noted that Shinran's view of man had implications for other aspects of his thought. He devised a theory of religious progress commonly called the *Sangantennyū*, (turning through the

11. *Shinshū Shogyo Zensho*, I, p. 533.

12. H. H. Coates and R. Ishizuka, *Honen the Buddhist Saint*. Society for the Publication of the Sacred Books of the World, 1949. II, p. 348.

13. *Shinshū Shogyo Zensho*, II, pp. 652—653; *Kyogyo shinsho*, Daiei Kaneko (Annotator), Tokyo : Iwanami Bunko, 1958, p. 135.

three Vows) which refers to the central Vows of the Buddha. These are fundamental to True Pure Land thought, but each Vow implies a certain view of the religious life according to Shinran. Thus, through this theory, Shinran at once affirms his relation to the Pure Land tradition, and at the same time he expresses the freedom from it which was stimulated by his inner experience. Also Shinran reflected on the basic practice of recitation in the Pure Land school and gave it an interpretation which voided the egoistic elements by stressing gratitude. He constructed a critical classification of doctrines which favorably compared the various teachings of Buddhism with other views in order to show why his teaching was superior. Here he stressed that salvation is by faith alone, and that nothing more is required of a man than an awareness of his sin, a strong sense of faith in Amida and consequent gratitude for salvation. Thus we come to a discussion of Shinran's doctrine of faith which grows directly out of his understanding of beings as completely sinful and unable to save themselves.

II. Shinran's Concept of Faith

As we have already noted, Shinran was stimulated by his sense of sin to explore the concept of faith as the way to salvation. Throughout his writings he exhorted men to place their faith in Amida Buddha and thereby give up their anxious concern for their future destiny. He found much support for the exaltation of faith in the Buddhist tradition, and he appropriated these passages for his own view, giving them a new interpretation.

A. The Definition of Faith.

There are several aspects to Shinran's conception of faith. From the standpoint of Amida Buddha, or what may be called the divine side of faith, he described the nature of faith in accordance with the three aspects in the Eighteenth Vow of Amida, the Vow of true faith. He also identified the essence of faith with the traditional concept of Buddha nature. From the human angle, he viewed faith as the absence of doubt in Amida's Vows. Other aspects of faith are its identification with the practice of recitation and the awareness of both sin and the need of Amida's compassion. Thus Shinran's conception of faith is very comprehensive. It embraces the nature of faith in terms of divine reality as well as human experience.

1. Faith as the Three Attitudes presented in the Eighteenth Vow.

When Shinran attempted to discover a description of faith which would not convey the connotation of a faith generated by human resolution of will, he was attracted to the three spiritual attitudes given in the Eighteenth Vow. Pure Land teachers had discussed faith in terms of the three mental states set forth in the *Kammuryōjukyō*, while they had interpreted the Eighteenth Vow primarily from the standpoint of discipline which could be implied in the phrase "until ten thoughts." As Shinran clearly observed, these two aspects pointed to a self-power ideal in which men strive to gain salvation for themselves.

The three elements which Shinran distinguished in the Eighteenth Vow were the sincere mind, trustfulness, and a

desire for rebirth (into the True Pure Land). It will be noted that these terms do not appear to differ significantly from the three mental states of the *Kammuryōju-kyō* such as sincerity, deep mind, and desire for rebirth through transfer of merit. The distinction between Shinran and the tradition at this point is his theological context and what is implied in it. Shinran focused his attention on the Eighteenth Vow to these spiritual attitudes rather than the aspect of practice. He implied that Amida not only gives the practice but the mind that stimulates it.

While these three spiritual attitudes were seen by Shinran as the gift of Amida Buddha, the sincere mind, or mind of truth, was regarded as the seed from which the other two aspects emerge. That is, the chief feature of Amida Buddha's endeavor to achieve salvation for beings lay in his utter sincerity and truthfulness from which he never deviated for even a single second in the long course of his work. His mind was characterized by the deep sincerity of his compassionate intention. It is this mind, which, when given mysteriously to men, aroused trust and the desire for birth in the True Pure Land. Shinran thus gave a deeper theological foundation to the understanding of the nature of faith in viewing it as a reflection of the very spirit of Amida Buddha himself, the fruit of his compassionate aspiration for all beings.

2. Faith in men as the achievement of Buddha nature.

This interpretation is related to the previous point in that Buddha nature is synonymous with the Buddha mind and essentially refers to the same phenomenon as above.

Despite the essential identity of the content of the concepts

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as they were taken up by Shinran, the idea that faith is Buddha nature is important for seeing his creative reinterpretation of traditional doctrine. In this belief he appropriated one of the most fundamental doctrines of Mahayana Buddhism which Pure Land teachers had tended to overlook in their emphasis on the degenerate natures of mortal beings. However, Shinran's experience of sin gave him deeper insight into the nature of Other Power than earlier Pure Land thinkers. As he conceived the nature of Amida Buddha in more absolute terms, he was able to revive this concept of the universal Buddha nature as a support for Other Power faith.

For Shinran, the concept of the Buddha nature in all beings was no longer the foundation for a theory and a process of purifying practices and meditations intended to realize the latent Buddha nature within man. Instead of being a process of self-realization where by one comes to see his nature as Buddha, one becomes more aware of his sinful nature and his need for Buddha's power to gain release.

Within Shinran's interpretation there were two aspects that were coordinated. On the one hand, he saw between mortal life and the Buddha, a great gulf which was impossible to span from the side of beings. On the other hand, he claimed that the fundamental unity that he saw between mortals and the Buddha (which was also held to exist in Mahayama Buddhism), came completely from the side of the Buddha through the gift of faith as the transfer of the qualities of his Buddha mind. In other words, it was by the Buddha's act of compassion that one attained Buddha nature.¹⁴ Shinran drew his interpretation from the *Nehangyō* which was the source of the

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concept of Buddha nature in Mahayana Buddhism :

The Nirvana sutra states : "O good men! We call the great mercy and the great pity "Buddha Nature." Why? (Because) the great mercy and the great pity follow the Bodhisattva as a shadow follows form. All beings assuredly are able to attain the great mercy and great pity ultimately. Therefore we say that all beings have the Buddha nature. Great mercy and great pity are called Buddha nature Buddha nature is called the great faith All beings assuredly attain great faith ultimately. Therefore it is taught that all beings have Buddha nature. Great faith is itself Buddha nature¹⁵

This passage was interpreted by Shinran in line with his understanding that all spiritual benefit proceeds *from* the Buddha to beings. For him the Buddha nature was not a metaphysical concept intended to show that mortals were all essentially Buddhas and grounded in the same reality. Though Shinran may have believed that there was a common metaphysical bond which linked beings and Buddha, he did not employ this idea to establish a system of practice to realize the bond. Thus he wrote :

Tathagata is Nirvana ;
Nirvana is called Buddha nature.
Unable to realize enlightenment in the land of mortals,
We will attain it in the Land of Bliss.¹⁶

Rather, he took a completely religious view of this concept and defined the attainment of Buddha nature in this life as the existence of faith within man as the result of Buddha's activity :

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14. Shinryū Umehara, *Kyogyoshinsho Shinshaku*. Toyama-ken : Senchōji Bunscho Dendōbu, 1957, II, pp. 229—237. Also Shūgaku Yamabe, and Chizen Akanuma, *Kyogyoshinsho Kogi*. Kyōto : Hōzōkan, 1952. II, pp. 717—724. Shōjun Taneuchi, *Shinshu Gaiyo*. Kyōto : Hōzōkan, 1953. pp. 226-227.
 15. *Shinshu Shogyo Zensho*, pp. 62—63. 16. *Ibid.*, p. 497.

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One who lives in faith is equal
To Tathagata, the Buddha.
Great Faith is the Buddha Nature :
This is at once Tathagata¹⁷

Shinran perceived correctly in the passage of the *Nehan-gyō* that Buddha nature meant the qualities of the Buddha that operate to bring beings to enlightenment, i. e., the Buddha's compassion. Buddha nature therefore refers essentially to the Tathagata's work of salvation, and this is achieved when faith is stimulated in man.

3. Faith as the absence of doubt.

Shinran maintained that the three spiritual attitudes of the Eighteenth Vow were all united within the experience of the individual as the absence of doubt with respect to Amida Buddha's work of salvation. The doubt to which he referred was not merely intellectual doubt resulting from uncertainties of knowledge, but might be called religious doubt in that the individual refused to rely on the Buddha's power but depended on his own. Doubt here is synonymous with self-power and Shinran regarded it as a most serious error which called for deep repentance.¹⁸

Shinran's emphasis on the absence of doubt was designed to appeal to two types of individuals, the one who does not believe that he is good enough to be saved and the individual who has confidence in his own good deeds.

Those who believed they were too sinful to be saved by Amida Buddha already had been encountered by Hōnen. Like Hōnen, Shinran repeatedly had to console such individuals

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, p. 525.

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with assurance that Amida Buddha made evil persons the specific object of his salvation.¹⁹ Encouraging evil men to faith, he reminded them that "as His Vow is thus specifically meant for them, they need not feel humiliated because of their evil karma."²⁰

The second type of individual about whom Shinran was concerned was the person who believed that he was able to gain salvation for himself apart from Amida Buddha's compassion. With such people in mind, he declared that faith was difficult to attain, despite the fact that it was termed "the easy path." Thus he commented:

For evil men with pride and false views
Faith in the Nembutsu of Amida Buddha's Original Vow
Is extremely hard to accept.
Nothing exceeds this most difficult among the difficult.²¹

Self-confidence and self-righteousness in religion were considered by Shinran as the grand illusion. In contrast with the absolute purity and compassion of Amida Buddha no good deeds were possible for mortal beings. Driven by inescapable passions, beings could not avoid the essential egoism that infects all activity.

According to Shinran, both types of individual, the sinner and the good man, were in a desperate situation because their understanding of Buddhism prevented them from availing themselves of the salvation offered by Amida Buddha. Both suffered from the same basic misunderstanding of Buddhism. They interpreted it legalistically and viewed the way of salvation as merely a matter of following the rules and acquiring sufficient

19. *Ibid.*, 777—778. 20. Suzuki, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

21. *Shinshū Shōgyō Zensho*, II, pp. 44, 454.

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merit to gain Nirvana. With this attitude, true faith, though depicted as the easy way, became the most difficult.²²

The evil man, in view of such an understanding of religion, was doomed out of hand. He simply could not measure up and, knowing it, he probably gave up in despair. Shinran was very sympathetic to such people, for he acknowledged that he also carried a burden of sin.

The good man, confident in his goodness, might become hypercritical or calculating as he strove to gain salvation. Religion for such people might become a form of self-serving and source of pride. Shinran regarded pride in one's goodness as reprehensible; it was a barrier to enlightenment.

However, his faith in Amida's Vows was so great that he declared there was no evil which could obstruct its work, and there was no good superior to it. Thus the evil man need not fear for salvation, because it has been achieved, and the good man should give up petty good deeds that do not equal Buddha's.²³

4. Faith as the Recitation of Amida Buddha's Name.

In the process of arousing faith, Shinran developed a theory based on the Seventeenth Vow in which it is promised that Amida's name would be sounded through the universe by all the Buddhas of the Cosmos. This universal recitation of the name was viewed as the manifestation of the subjective aspect of faith in beings. Thus the practice of recitation was not done to generate faith or to gain salvation in Shinran's thought, but it marked the existence of faith in the individual and the

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 165.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 773, 786.

prior achievement of salvation.²⁴ In another context Shinran interpreted the character 念 (*Nen*, usually meaning "thought," also "recitation" in Pure Land teaching) to signify that one believed Tathagata's Vow without a doubttemind.²⁵

5. Faith as the Double Awareness of Sin and the Need of Grace.

This aspect of faith derives from Shinran's own spiritual experience. It reflects the content of his consciousness as we have outlined it above with respect to the depravity of beings, and therefore we need not discuss it further.

However, we should point out that Shinran's exaltation of faith as the only way of salvation opened the door to a new understanding of existence. He taught men to accept themselves for what they are — passion-ridden mortals, lacking the capacity to free themselves from its bondage. In view of self-acceptance, all legalistic, meritorious practices were rejected and with them such traditional ways of Buddhism as monasticism, celibacy, and abstention from meat or intoxicating beverages. There was no asceticism or privation and no need to appease Buddhas or gods in order to win their acceptance or assistance in gaining some goal.

This new way of life which grew out of Shinran's reflection on human nature and the idea of faith has sometimes been termed "naturalism." The Japanese term for it is *Kono Mama*, and it is depicted somewhat perhaps in the Christian hymn, "Just as I am." Because one is accepted as he is by the compassionate Buddha, one can take life just as one finds it, and

24. Umehara, *Kyogyoshinsho Shinshaku*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 62—63.

25. *Shinshū Shogyo Zensho*, II, p. 628. Also p. 693.

in the midst of this life find the ultimate reality. This basic philosophy of Shinran's is set forth in the famous *Jinen Honi Sho* passage.²⁶

B. Faith as a Gift of Amida Buddha.

As we have already indicated, it is the outstanding feature of Shinran's thought that he made faith the primary or root cause (*Shinjin'ihon*) for the achievement of salvation. In this emphasis Shinran made a great contribution to the history of Buddhist thought by elaborating aspects hitherto only implicit and unrecognized in the Mahayana tradition. His insight makes him comparable to the Protestant Reformers, Luther and Calvin whose theories of grace and faith worked a revolution in Christian theology.

The principle that faith is a gift of Amida Buddha is set forth in the volume on Faith in the *Kyōgyōshinsho*, Shinran's major work. He gives a concise statement of his theory :

The mind of the Buddha is difficult to understand, but if we may infer concerning his mind, (we might say) that the whole sea of sentient beings, from the beginningless past even until the present time are defiled, impure, and stained. Their minds are not pure and, being false, they do not have a mind of truth. For this reason, the Tathagata had compassion on the whole sea of suffering sentient beings. For incomprehensibly infinite kalpas he performed the disciplines of a Bodhisattva, and never for even a single moment were his practices of the mouth, mind, or body, impure or untrue. By his pure, sincere mind, the Tathagata perfected his completely harmonious, unimpeded, mysterious, inexpressible, incomprehensible, supreme virtue. *He transferred the sincere mind of the Tathagata* to all the sea of sentient beings who are passion-ridden, evil in deed and in mind. Hence this manifests the true mind for helping others; therefore it was never

26. See Tomitarō Karasawa, *Shinran no Sekai*. Tokyo : Kōbundō, 1953. pp. 46—56.

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mixed with doubts. Hence this sincere mind has his virtuous name as its essence.²⁷

In order to clarify Shinran's insight, we must observe that faith in the general Buddhist tradition was regarded as an act of the will, aroused by the individual and directed toward the Buddha, his teaching, and his community of followers. In the declaration of refuge in the three treasures, the devotee reveals his resolve to attain enlightenment. There is no question that faith has always been an essential element in Buddhist religious life, but it has generally been regarded as a faith arrived at through inquiry and decision cultivated in the devotee himself.

Shinran's personal religious experience caused him to diverge significantly from this understanding of faith in Buddhist tradition. So compelling was his insight that he had to rend the grammar of the sutra in order to get an authoritative basis for it.

Shinran read his epoch-making idea into the text of the *Muryōjukyō* where it relates the fulfillment of the Eighteenth Vow of Amida Buddha. He was able to do this through the application of certain Japanese principles of grammar devised for reading Chinese texts. By applying the Japanese grammar to the text, he implied that the faith and thought of the Buddha were given to beings by Buddha himself. The Chinese text read strictly states :

If all those beings hear that name, believe, and rejoice even for one thought (moment), and sincerely transfer (the merit of the thought)

27. Shūgaku Yamabe and Chizen Akanuma, *Kyogyoshinsho Kogi*, I, pp. 87—89. gives a detailed discussion of Ekō, Shinran's reinterpretation and his textual supports.

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desiring to be reborn in that Land, then they will obtain rebirth and abide in the state of non-retrogression. Only those are excluded who have committed the five deadly sins and slandered the Dharma.²⁸

When the same text is read according to Shinran's Japanese construction his insight appears :

If all beings who hear that name, believe and rejoice, even for one moment, as a result of the fact (Amida) has sincerely transferred (His Name), and desire to be born in that country, they will obtain birth and abide in the state of non-retrogression, excluding those alone who have committed the five deadly sins and slandered the Dharma.²⁹

The problem in the alteration of the grammar of the text revolves about the term *Shishin Ekō* which normally means "to transfer (merit) sincerely." With the addition of the honorific ending *Seshimetamaeri*, Shinran converted what originally was an act of human beings into an act of the Buddha.

For Shinran all transfer of merit proceeds from Buddha to man, not vice versa. Men have nothing to transfer since they are desperately sinful, but Amida Buddha, as absolute purity and love, has infinite merit, as the result of his sacrificial activity, to bring about the salvation of beings. Wherever Shinran discovered the term *Ekō* in any text he uniformly interpreted it to refer to Amida's work.³⁰

This view has been called Absolute Other Power, and it can

28. *Shinshū Shogyo Zensho*, I, p. 24.

29. For a word-for-word interpretation of this passage by Shinran, refer *Ibid.*, II, pp. 604—605.

30. For discussion of this point the reader may refer to D. T. Suzuki, *Miscellany on the Shin Teaching of Buddhism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 61—63; also Shinryū Umehara, *Kyogyoshinsho Shinshaku*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 46—50; Tomitarō Karasawa, *Shinran no Sekai*, *op. cit.*, pp. 138—141; Yamabe and Akanuma, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 87—89.

be observed in Shinran's treatment of certain Chinese characters taken from the sutra and interpreted in such a way as to support his contention that salvation is all the work of Amida Buddha. These characters are 自 (*Ji-Onozukara*), 横 (*Ō-Yoko*) and 即 (*Soku-sunawachi*).

The character 自 has the meaning "naturally" and in this context was interpreted to mean that the individual attained birth in the True Pure Land naturally, that is, without any striving or calculation on his part. The term *Shikarashimeru*, "to cause to be," is applied here as a meaning for natural and it signifies that salvation comes through the natural working of Amida Buddha as symbolized in his Vow.³¹

Similarly Shinran saw the principles of Absolute Other Power in the character 横 which has the sense of "crosswise," "transverse." It is used in the terms *Ōshi* (横死) violent death, *Ōryō* (横領) seizing, and *Ōbō* (横暴), oppression. There is an implied sense of suddenness which indicated to Shinran the instantaneous aspect of salvation, hence the operation of Buddha's Vow apart from the individual's contrivance or calculation.³²

The third character 即 has the sense of principle, law, rule. Also it can mean "thereupon" or "accordingly" which conveys the implication that the succeeding statement followed the former as its "natural" outcome. Again all contrivance and effort on the part of the individual were ruled out. Thus Shinran interpreted the character :

Soku (即) means *sunawachi* (thereupon) or *nori* (rule). When one

31. See *Shinshū Shogyo Zensho*, I, p. 26 and *Ibid.*, II, p. 579.

32. *Ibid.*, I, p. 31 and II, p. 580.

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believes in the Original Vow of the Tathagata for one moment, he is assuredly *caused to receive* unsurpassed virtue without soliciting it. Unconsciously he receives profound blessing. It is the law which manifests therefore various insights (*satori*) *naturally* (*jinen*).³³

An inspection of Shinran's grammatical and linguistical method of interpreting traditional texts makes it clear that the central point of his teaching was not only the primacy of faith in salvation, but also that *faith is not the result of human resolut. on to believe* nor the cultivation individually of a sense of dependence. Other Pure Land teachers, and Buddhists through all periods, stressed that faith was required for embarking on the discipline leading to spiritual emancipation. The qualitative difference between Shinran's perspective and the traditional is the assertion that for Shinran, faith was aroused in the individual through the mysterious operation of Amida Buddha in the heart and mind of the person. It was precisely because Amida Buddha gave faith that faith alone could be the true and only cause for birth in the Pure Land. From this significant change in viewpoint flowed other important contributions of Shinran's thought.

It should be noted that the belief that faith is given by Amida Buddha did not inhibit Shinran from preaching in order to stimulate conversion, just as it does not in Christian or Islamic thought of the same type. Further, Shinran reconciled the apparent contradiction between the theory that faith is given and the actual human experience of believing. He indicated that what one is aware of as his act of faith is actually the manifestation of Amida Buddha's gift of faith in his mind.³⁴

33. *Ibid.*, I, p. 46 and II, p. 611.

34. *Ibid.*, II, p. 48 for a paradoxical statement of the two aspects of faith.

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We do not have space for detailed discussion of the actual process by which faith occurs theologically, though psychologically its manifestation would not differ from faith elsewhere. The basic elements of Shinran's theory are his novel interpretation of the Seventeenth Vow which gives the universal scope of salvation as the Buddhas of the Cosmos sound forth to praise Amida Buddha's name. The name of Amida Buddha and the ineffable light which proceeds from him operates directly on the individual's mind to illuminate his sinfulness and to give assurance of the gift of salvation. In working out this theory, Shinran depended on ancient conceptions of the Buddha's name and the concept of light within Buddhist thought. Therefore we shall not elaborate here on this process except to point out that it completely excludes the idea that faith in any way results from the intention of the individual to attain his own salvation.

In conclusion it should also be observed that Shinran's theory of faith overcame certain Problems in the Pure Land tradition and gave a more unified and theological expression of that teaching. With respect to the religious life, he made it clear that without the dependence on meritorious practices a man could be assured of salvation in the present moment. He thus overcame anxiety developing in self-powered traditions as to whether one has done enough, or if his mind will always be in a proper religious attitude to gain the necessary purification. Also, with the rejection of meritorious practices, religious devotion became a life of gratitude for a salvation already granted. Such a standpoint removes considerably the self-centered attitude evident in the traditional practices aimed at achieving salvation. Based

on his concept of the Buddha as compassion, Shinran conceived birth in the True Pure Land, not merely as the gaining of self-pleasure but as the transformation to Buddha nature which identifies the religious life with the highest altruism of saving all beings. Thus Shinran's thought is revealed as theologically and psychologically astute, the result of deep reflection on human nature. However, its evident popularity among the Japanese people lies in the meaning and hope which it offered to the meanest person in the assurance of Amida's grace.

Kanji Glossary

Akanuma, Chizen 赤沼智善	Kyōgyō Shinshō Shinshaku
Amida 阿弥陀	教行信証新釈
Dōgen 道元	Kyōto 京都
Ekō 回向	Lotus Sutra (See. Hoke-kyō)
Gutoku 愚禿	Mappō 末法
Heian 平安	Nehan-gyō 涅槃經
Hiei 比叡	Nembutsu 念佛
Hoke-kyō 法華經	Nichiren 日蓮
Hōnen 法然	Ōjōtaiyōshō 往生大要抄
Hōzō 法藏	Sangantennyū 三願轉入
Hōzōkan 法藏館	Shan-tao 善導
Ishizuka 石塚	Shinjin ihon 信心為本
Iwanami Bunko 岩波文庫	Shinran 親鸞
Jinen Hōni Shō 自然法爾章	Shinran no Sekai 親鸞の世界
Jōdo Shin-shū 浄土真宗	Shinshū Gaiyō 真宗概要
Kamakura 鎌倉	Shinshū Shōgyō Zensho 真宗聖教全書
Kammuryōju-kyō 觀無量壽經	Shishin Ekō 至心回向
Kaneko, Daiei 金子大栄	Tendai 天台
Karasawa, Tomitarō 唐沢富太郎	Toyama Ken 富山県
Kōbundō 弘文堂	Umehara, Shinryū 梅原真隆
Kyōgyō Shinshō 教行信証	Yamabe, Shūgaku 山辺習学
Kyōgyōshinshō Kōgi 教行信証講義	

SOKA GAKKAI'S THEORY OF VALUE

— An Analysis —

Noah Brannen

Sōka Gakkai is based on a utilitarian philosophy of life or theory of value which was originally formulated by Tsunesaburō Makiguchi. It is from this theory that the Society derives its name: *Sō* (Creation), *ka* (Value), *Gakkai*^a (Society), in other words, “The Value Creation Society.”

I. The Irrelevance of Truth and the Relevance of Value

Makiguchi's theory claims to be a correction of the alleged aberrations of the traditional platonic values — truth, goodness, and beauty — by the substitution of the concept of “benefit” for that of “truth.” The reason for this is said to be that truth and value are entirely different concepts. Truth reveals that which is; value connotes a subject-object relationship. Truth makes epistemological statements about an object. Value relates the object to man. Truth says, “Here is a horse”; value says, “The horse is beautiful.” Truth remains truth regardless of any human relationship. Truth is unchanging. Value, on the other hand, is altered by time and space.

a. 創価学会

* *Kachi-ron* (*Theory of Value*), Tsunesaburō Makiguchi, Sōka Gakkai, 1956 (4th ed., by Jōsei Toda), 255pp.

Creation of Value

Truth is not created ; it remains always as that which is, that which is discovered. In contrast to this, value is created. There are, in fact, innumerable values which remain to be created. All the materials man uses in his daily life are the products of nature. During uncounted centuries, through man's own effort and for his own benefit, these have been improved and transformed into the form in which they exist today. This is what is meant by the *creation of value*.

Creation involves the discovery of a relationship which nature has to man, evaluating it, and by human effort making that relationship closer or more important. Man alters nature to make it beneficial to him. By this definition creation is a term relevant only to value ; it is not relevant to truth.

Thus man creates values and in this lies man's greatness. Man finds happiness — the goal of human life — in the pursuit of values. Happiness is the ideal state which is realized by means of the possession of values. Scientific history is the record of values as they are related to man's culture.

The Separate Realms of Truth and Value

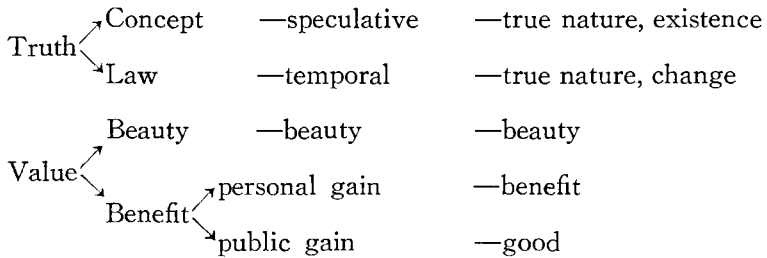
The truth or falsehood of a thing or an occurrence cannot be decided upon the basis of human emotion or sentiment. At times human emotion will reject the true and believe the false. Similarly the true-false realm does not coincide with the good-evil realm. Because a thing is true does not make it good, nor is the false to be equated with evil. Sometimes the true is evil to us ; sometimes the false is good. For example, we

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hear a rumor of an earthquake and subsequent fire. If the rumor is substantiated, it is not good but evil. If the rumor is proven to be false, it is good.

In like manner it can be shown that the true-false realm is distinct from the two other realms of values: beauty-ugliness and benefit-harm. Truth and falsehood have their independent existence apart from their effect upon man, but the values beauty-ugliness, good-evil, benefit-harm are determined in the context of their relation to the evaluating subject.

The two separate realms of truth and value may be charted as follows:



Pragmatism is mistaken because it confuses truth and value. To say “true value” is to imply that the opposite, that is, “false value” or “mistaken value” also exists. Actually, truth neither manifests nor contains value. Pragmatism, however, claims that truth and value are alike and equal. Pragmatism is based on the false premise that if a thing is true it is beneficial to man. This premise is not born out in experience. In fact, some things are true which are of no benefit to man at all. Ultimately the investigation of truth must be made irrespective of its usefulness to man.

Truth is unchanging. Though the Copernican theory seemed

to upset the truth, actually it only upset false theories concerning the truth. Truth and the common law which controls the universe are essentially one and the same thing. The Copernican theory itself is not the truth, but only the explanation of that common law which is fixed and unchanging.

But values change. Since values are the product of the relation between an object and a subject, if either of these factors changes then the value itself changes. The eternal argument started between Socrates and the Sophists has echoed until this very day. Socrates held that truth is unchanging; the Sophists held that man is the measure of all things. This conflict can be resolved only when we realize that the realm of truth and the realm of value are separate.

II. The Importance of Evaluation.

Evaluation and Cognition

Evaluation is the consciousness of the influence of an object upon the subject. Cognition is the grasping of the meaning of an impression. Evaluation, therefore, is subjective; cognition is objective. For example, cognition asserts "A is B," or "A is not C." Thus cognition receives an object as it is without relating it to the subject. Evaluation, on the other hand, says "A is beautiful," etc., and relates it to the evaluating subject.

Cognition, therefore, is concerned with truth while evaluation is concerned with values. Truth is a qualitative concept grasped by intellectual response to the stimuli of phenomena; that is, by cognition. Value is a quantitative concept relating the influence of phenomena to man through emotional and

intellectual responses; that is, by evaluation. Cognition is mental reception or intellectual activity; evaluation is sense reception or feeling activity.

Cognition comes by the relation of a new perception to a past experience. Kant says that man perceives by *a priori* standards; but the truth is that man first decides whether something is the "same or different" on the basis of his experience. It isn't necessary to adopt the method of some philosopher (such as Kant) when we have the time-tested method of "same or different."

The relation of cognition to external phenomena we call "experience." This term experience is defined to mean the sensual, intellectual connection of subject and object. The relation of evaluation to external phenomena we call "intercourse." Intercourse is defined as the emotional, sentimental connection of subject and object. In the case of the former, the external world has its independent existence and is not directly connected with our personal world. In the case of the latter, the external world has a vital, intimate connection with our world. The latter is like the meeting of lovers:

<p><i>Shinoburedo</i> <i>iro ni ide ni keru</i> <i>waga koi wa</i> <i>mono ya omou to</i> <i>hito no tou made.*</i></p>	<p><i>My love,</i> <i>though I try to hide it,</i> <i>shows in my face, until</i> <i>people begin</i> <i>to question.</i></p>
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No matter how they may try to suppress their feelings for one another, lovers cannot deny or escape the influence of each

* A poem by Taira no Kanemori 平兼盛 in the *Hyakunin Isshu* 百人一首, "One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets."

other.

In order to know the external world it is necessary to employ both cognition and evaluation. If either is neglected one's understanding is incomplete. But science has pursued the objective method of cognition, and has analyzed and classified phenomena until we are left with only the pieces. This is why Bergson contends that science cannot get beyond the outer wall.

The truth is that cognition and evaluation do not need to be in conflict. When they appear to conflict in describing phenomena, it is essentially only a conflict arising out of the opposition of the whole to the parts, and not a basic conflict.

The ability to determine values is a human attribute. An object touches us — we react ; this is a value judgment. There are thus three relationships between object and subject : non-value — when an object has no value to any one ; value — when an object has value to someone ; and non-value — when value is ascribed to something that has no intrinsic value.

III. The Three Values : Beauty, Benefit, Goodness

There are three values : beauty, benefit, and goodness. The value "beauty" is an emotional value relative only to a part of a man's life. It is a temporary value appropriated through one or more of the five sense organs. The value "benefit" is an individual value relative to the whole of human life. It describes the relationship which the individual has with an object that contributes to maintaining and advancing his life.

The value "goodness" is a social value relative to the life of the group. It describes the meaningful acts which man performs that contribute to the formation and development of a unified society, that is, goodness is public benefit.

Benefit Marx and other economists have said: "All which has utility is wealth." But Marx confuses value and wealth. Others have confused property and wealth. Property is anything of utility which man possesses. Wealth is the accumulation of property for the satisfaction of human desires. "Benefit" concerns the extent to which property has importance to man. Man can create "benefit" by arranging all factors so that they will contribute to his well-being.

Goodness Good and evil are concepts which belong exclusively to society. The term "good" is equivalent to the term "public benefit." Instinct, man's common life-drive, is the absolute standard for judging all values. However, man possesses not only individual instinct but also the herd instinct. Therefore, social evaluation is necessary; but the common benefit of the mass cannot be the maximum benefit, it must be the lowest common denominator. The common benefit of the mass is only objective and negative. Thus moral value (good-evil) is fixed by the negative criterion: not desirable for the masses.

In contrast to this, however, is the Western adage, "Do unto others what you would have them do unto you." This is not based on the lowest common denominator and, thus, does not have universal validity or appropriateness. The personal standard of what is good for one cannot be forced onto

another. This is certainly not a scientific standard for morality. On the other hand, the Eastern adage, "Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you," is a truth which science can accept, since it is based on the lowest common denominator. It is possible to set the line below which all men can say, "This is undesirable." Hence, the Eastern adage has universal validity, and, as such, is scientific.

Socrates says that the purpose of action is not to achieve pleasure but to attain good. How does he measure good and evil? The answer is, when a thought is right, it is good; when it is not right, it is evil. The Socrates-Plato idea is: pleasure and good are not to be equated. Pleasure is pursued for the sake of good. If we, or things, are good this is only because we, or things, possess some virtue. But we cannot agree with this idea. If the sense of right judges the good, and if all things possess this sense, then we are left with the question: what is right? That by which we judge right and wrong is not truth but the general benefit (as opposed to individual benefit).

As for good, the individualist defines this as love of others. The ancient Greek said good equals might. Thus we see that the concept of good has changed with social history. The one fact which does not change is that good has its background in society. Good is therefore a social concept.

Beauty That which reaches us through an object of the sense belongs to the value beauty, which is a temporary, sensory value. But the aesthetic object is not limited to physical phenomena. Experience tells us that beauty can be found else-