

SHINSHŪ AND FOLK RELIGION:

TOWARD A POST-MODERN SHINSHŪ “THEOLOGY”

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In the 1984 issue of the Bulletin of the Dendō-in (Pastoral Institute) of the Nishi Hongan-ji branch of Shinshū, the present author published a report of the results of a collective research program on the practices of the Shinshū believers in Japan. He also suggested there some conclusions one ought to draw as to doctrine and pastoral policies. This report provoked strong reactions among the scholars of the sect.

Three years later he came back to the topic in an article published in the Chūgai Nippō, a religious newspaper. The article is based on a special lecture delivered at the Center for Religious Education of the Sōtō branch of Zen Buddhism, October 1986. The following is a somewhat abridged translation of that text.

We no longer belong to the “modern world.” In many areas of culture and in popular religiosity, fundamentally new trends have come to the fore, leading us to conclude that we have entered a “post-modern” period, which naturally requires a post-modern “theology.”

It is my contention here that tragedy awaits our sect in the future if we continue to absolutize a modernistic theology and refuse to face the many inadequacies of that theology attested by recent events. In this *fin de siècle* we must build a post-modern theology able to correct the aberrations of our modernistic theology.

The doctrine of the Nishi Hongan-ji

During the three hundred years of the Edo period, the doctrine of our sect had been built up to such a degree of scholastic minuteness that it is no exaggeration to say that our theologians since the Meiji Restora-

tion have had their hands full just with systematizing and cataloging the Edo legacy. That Edo doctrine may seem to be purely theological, but in fact it is intimately tied up with the political situation under the *bakufu* regime and bears the traces of many clashes with the other branches of the Pure Land School and with various other Buddhist sects. In sum, it shows a history of polemics against the “Path of the Sages” and the Jōdoshū.

Another legacy of the Edo period are the after-effects of the great doctrinal dispute that split our sect into two theological camps: the so-called *sangō wakuran*, the 18th century dispute concerning the conditions for *anjin* (assurance in faith). The theologians of the *Gakurin*, who came to be known as the *shingiha*, demanded that trust in Amida be expressed in the “three kinds of acts” (*sangō*), namely, thought, word, and deed. There was a strong reaction against this from scholars in the field—the so-called *kogiha*—and the ensuing polemics were so disruptive and sometimes even violent that the feudal government had to intervene in 1804 and declare orthodoxy to be on the side of the *kogiha*. As a result of this dispute over *anjin*, our theology up to the present has been oversensitive to the point of being centered on a nitpicking definition of *anjin* that does not leave room for the slightest jot or tittle of deviation.

Against the background of that theological history, our theology considers the question of folk religious practices to have been solved once and for all; there is no room for further questioning. The whole question is caught in the net of the *kyōhan* (critical classification of teachings) or the “discrimination of true-provisional-false.” Jōdo Shinshū is, of course, true; all other Buddhist schools are provisional; and all doctrines outside of Buddhism are false. It is clear that folk beliefs belong to the third category and must be rejected together with everything provisional and false.

In the troubled period of the Meiji Restoration, our Nishi Hongan-ji had the good fortune of clearly siding with the emperor against the feudal lords, but was of course caught together with all other Buddhist sects in the *haibutsu kishaku*, the anti-Buddhist campaign of the beginning of the Meiji era, and later in the policy of the Meiji government to make Shinto the state religion. For a time our theologians had their hands full with these things. During the Second World War our sect put up a “headquarters for war-time doctrine,” where indeed a war-time theology was developed. It was only with the establishment of the

Dendō-in that a beginning was made with the liquidation of that war-time doctrine. However, in November 1985, this *Dendō-in* was abolished by the senate of the sect and in its stead a “doctrinal headquarters” (*kyōgaku hombu*) established anew.

As for the post-war course of Shinshū doctrine, wherein Ryūkoku University plays a central role, I can say in summary that the influence of the democratization of Japan is certainly felt there, that a Conference of Indian Philosophy and Buddhist Studies was established, and that a modern kind of Shinran and Shinshū studies developed, not only within the sect this time but also among thinkers, literati, and historians at large. All this, of course, caused our theologians their share of headaches. There is at present some *Auseinandersetzung* of our theologians with scientific Buddhist studies, social sciences, humanism, Marxism, existentialism, and Christian theology. But since Meiji, folk beliefs and practices do not appear on the theological agenda; they have been barred from the theological precincts.

The Shinshū tradition as a religious organization that freed itself of magic

There is one more important reason why folk belief has not become a topic in Shinshū doctrine. I refer here to the original life style of Shinshū people: their particular way of relating to folk practices, which has been ridiculed by people of other sects in the saying, “Shinshū believers are ignoramuses” – meaning that they ignore taboos, unlucky days, etc. Folklorists have been saying that “Shinshū destroys local usages and beliefs, so that regions with a strong Shinshū influence are barren ground for folklorists.” Max Weber declared that while Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism have by and large played the role of fixing people in a “magical garden,” only Shinshū has greatly contributed to the breaking of the magical circle (*Entzauberung*), and he gives Shinshū high marks for it. Already in the Edo Period there were authors, like Dazai Shundai and Buyō Inshi, who expressed their amazement about the fact that there was this tradition of radical adherence to a single Buddha, Amida, without indulging in incantations, magical spells, the use of magical water, and so forth. Professor Kojima of the Maritime University observes that even today, on an island off Yamaguchi prefecture, Shinshū is still called “the does-not-care sect.” This points, for example, to the fact that even in the post-war period

the Shinshū people there, at the cremation of their deceased, simply left the remaining bones in the crematorium (except for a small part that was consigned to the local temple) without minding the taboos surrounding people's bones; and also the fact that they had no memorial tablets, death registers, or god shelves, did not put up any Jizō images, and even had no graves. In other words, in that region the original shape of a Shinshū community, that had done away with all these popular usages, had been preserved. Seen from this kind of tradition, it is perhaps natural that folk practices appeared in theology only as things to be rejected.

And so, when we took up this problem again in *Bulletin 29* of the *Dendō-in*, as a sect for whom the question of folk practices had long since been solved, we were roundly criticized by many learned people for being faithless, for taking the easy path of giving in to actual conditions without regard for Shinran's position, for being promoters of non-Shinshū ways, and for being insolent people throwing sand on the fire of the modernization movement of the sect. But the collective and interdisciplinary study of folk practices within our sect had not simply been undertaken from the standpoint of Shinshū doctrine. It has its origins in a scientific study of the religious consciousness of people in the field and in a resolve of taking the actual situation fully into consideration.

The actual religious consciousness of Shinshū believers

In 1961, on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of Shinran Shōnin's death, our sect launched the *Monshintō Undō*, a movement aiming at the transformation of the sect from a religion of the household (*ie*) into a religion of the individual. In 1971, the *Dōhō Undō* was started, attempting to promote among members of our sect, which serves more than half of the discriminated villages (*buraku*) but did not work for their emancipation, a better attitude towards these victims of discrimination. Both movements continue today.

In the meantime, *hōza* (round-table discussions) were organized to listen to the voice of the lay believers. There were also meetings of the believers on the occasion of the pastoral visitation of the Monshu to all the districts. On these and similar occasions it became clear that our sect is on the point of losing its character of—in Weberian terms—a community of people freed from magic. These findings were confirmed

by scientific research and we came to the conviction that we are facing here an important and urgent problem.

The data on which our present position is based are mainly those assembled by a psychology professor of Osaka Municipal University, Kaneko Satoru (a Shinshū believer and member of our team), through surveys conducted among temple priests and faithful over more than ten years. It became clear from these data that the religiosity of our people, far from being of the “does-not-care” type, exhibits a primitive mentality with Shintoism as its core. This religiosity is intimately bound up with ancestor worship—which Kaneko calls a factor of animism—and also shows a level of conservative “authority cult,” represented by the emperor ideology. One more important outcome of this research is that there exists a great difference in faith structure between the temple priests and the lay people—a real split or polarization of consciousness.

This constitutes, of course, a big problem for our sect, but the situation is further aggravated by demographic differences in the faith of the lay people according to locality, sex, profession, income bracket, education, etc. The “faith type” of our faithful can thus be characterized as one colored by a multi-layered and this-worldly-benefit-oriented folk religiosity, and tied up with not necessarily desirable strands of social consciousness such as conservatism, blind faith in authority, and social (especially political) indifferentism. Among the male believers, who in general appear to be rather weak in their faith (and are, for example, rather passive when it comes to attending religious services), the data point to a desire to see our sect become more of a “character building organization” (more directed at moral and spiritual training).

These data shook us terribly. But however much we might wish to flee the facts, the reality is there and we cannot ultimately afford to ignore it. We are thus driven to the conclusion that unless we shoulder this situation as a pastoral and doctrinal challenge and come to a critical appraisal of these facts, there is no hope of a concrete revival of our religion. For some reason, however, this judgment of our team appears to win very little understanding within our sect.

A flexible two-pronged post-modern theology

First of all, why do we speak, in this context, of a “post-modern” theol-

ogy? We certainly do not want to deny that many pre-modern elements survive in the make-up of our sect, and even in its theology. But when it comes to the attitude towards folk beliefs, the thinking in our sect has fallen in step with a theology that aims at a kind of *Aufklärung* or “modernism.” Our call for a post-modern theology is being criticized as if it were a call for an affirmation of the status-quo or for a return to pre-modern times. The reason for its being judged that way must lie in the fact that we have deliberately chosen anti-modern terminology, because we felt that, in the question of folk practices, the current theology shows an all too strong modernistic trend. I thought I made my meaning clear enough in my report in the *Bulletin*, but few people seem to have read it carefully. In fact we do not claim at all that pre-modern things are good and modern things bad. Nor do we say that all post-modern things are *ipso facto* good. All we said was that, because we recognized serious problems both in the pre-modern and modern, we wanted to look for a flexible two-pronged post-modern theology. We also expressed the hope that, in the present intellectual and religious situation of Japan, a post-modern approach might provide a road for the different Buddhist schools to the spirit of their respective founders.

A theology without grass-roots (“the field”)

To characterize the present situation of our theology we have used the expression “a theology without grass-roots.” This expression was eagerly taken up by journalists and has become a kind of fashion word. We meant by it that there is an all too big gap between what the priests are doing in the “field” of our religion and what theologians are talking about in their discourses. We then claimed that the filling up of this gap between field and theology is a primary requirement for the revival of our religion and called for a move from a “theology without field” and a “field without theology” to a “theology rooted in the field” and a “theologizing field.”

The problem lies not so much on the side of the field, since the priests there all had some kind of training in theology, but rather on the side of the theological establishment, where practically no theological reflection is done on what actually happens in the field. The wide-spread idea, however, that only the theologians would be faithful followers of Dōgen or Shinran, and the priests in the field simply religious figures serving a religious system of funeral services and folk practices, is lit-

tle more than the self-conceited prejudice of an élite without understanding of what religion is all about. One of our lay people, an assistant professor at the Osaka National Ethnological Museum and a participant in our research, had the following to say: "There is no other solution but that, and the religious establishment and each priest in the field shoulder both the respectable and the 'dirty' elements in a balanced way. Hōnen, Shinran, and all the eminent religious figures have, after all, done exactly that."

Our local temples and the religious life therein are not merely "localities." We have chosen to call them "fields," because we do not consider these local forms of our religion, shaped by historical processes, to be places without theological relevance or sites where Shinran would be absent. On the contrary, we see them as fields of theological sublimation of local folk beliefs and rites, where the question of how to make our Founder present to the present age is at stake. In a word, we see them as fields of bodhisattva activity by Shinran and the temple priests. It is this sense we wanted to restore to them by using the term "field." We have thus proposed to consider the local temple not merely as an administrative unit or as a place where the Buddha Dharma is for sale, but rather as a place for a concrete and realizable revitalization of our sect and a field of return to Shinran Shōnin.

We have, therefore, criticized the traditional theology which ignores or looks down on folk practices, ritual, religious community, and we have advocated instead a "field theology" which, within its system, would embrace these three elements. Post-war theology has done well in the question of its compatibility with science, but accords no place to a theology of folk practice, a theology of ritual, and a theology of religious community (ecclesiology). The position of these theologians appears to be that these things are not essential to our doctrine, and every temple priest can freely decide for himself about them. Modernistic theology even tends to say that these elements are alien or adverse to Shinran and should therefore be suppressed. Opposition to folk practice, to ritual, and to community are then treated as if they were self-evident characteristics of Shinran's religion. Folk practice, ritual, and community then are called alien to the spirit of Shinran, products of compromise with folk religion and secularized society, disreputable elements which it is better not to have. In that line one comes finally to advocating the dissolution of the *honzan* (head temple of the sect) as if this were the height of the Shinranesque.

In this view, the only thing that counts is for every individual to possess his faith as an autonomous subject. Therein would then lie the only path for a return to Shinran. That is truly a modern existentialist theology of unassailable respectability! It is the kind of theology which, during the forty years since the war the temple priests, this silent majority carrying the weight of temples and faithful, have been made to listen to. And since they were scolded by the professors with the words: "All your doings go against the spirit of Shinran," they have been listening with a feeling of guilt and loss of self-confidence. It is this trend we have challenged by calling for a post-modern theology. Indeed, there is something in what the professors are saying, but would their view really be the only concrete means for a revival of our sect? Would it not be good to have a theology that takes the actual situation of our religion, with all its accretions, really into account?

To say it somewhat differently, with the anthropologists, we wanted to stress that each culture has a system of thought and behavior with regard to the world and the human, and that this system comprises, besides the two complementary elements, science and religion, a third domain, which usually carries the labels of "folk belief," "superstition," "magic." Modern theology has had eyes only for the area where science and religion overlap, and has constantly ignored that third domain. We, on the other hand, wish to stress that the factual situation of our sect imposes on us the task of investigating the composite realm where religion and this third domain overlap. The profile not of pure theology but of the concrete faith of our believers in the field can only be drawn against the backdrop of this third domain, and precisely in the overlap of religion and this third domain lies the key to interpret the practices, rituals, and forms of community life of our sect.

Current theology considers that third domain as a kind of "low life" far beneath the level of religion and bound to disappear once people have real faith. Feeling themselves to be the real *nembutsu* practitioners, they have despised and ridiculed people involved in that domain. Considering themselves to be graduates from that realm of human frailty, they are unable, from that Buddha seat, to see the people as anything but recipients of their enlightening activity. Still, this third domain forms the basic religiosity of the Japanese people and is not likely to disappear merely because scholars in their theories condemn and reject it. It must be given due consideration when thinking of Japanese religion in the future.

We have then tried to catch this basic belief of the Japanese people under the categories of *okagesama* ("by your grace") and *tatari* ("curse"). The first one being an animistic trend and the second a shamanistic one, the religious mentality of the Japanese can then be characterized as an "animist-shamanist complex." The element of "by your grace" suits very well the requirements of the field and has been adopted there as "by the grace of Amida" and "thanks to Shinran." The element of "curse," however, is something of an embarrassment. One does then as if one does not see it, saying that such things do not exist in Buddhism. That, however, is a little too arbitrary. We have therefore claimed that it is extremely important and urgent to give full attention to the whole "animist-shamanist complex," and proposed this as a key for the interpretation of the folk practices, rituals, and forms of community in our sect. For there certainly exist in the field typical Shinshū folk practices, for example, in the way of preaching, in all kinds of ritual, in the organizational patterns, etc. And, as appears in the research of the above-mentioned professor Kaneko, one can certainly discern in the collective psychology of our faithful the spirit of *okagesama*, the fear of curses and, moreover, the consciousness of "living together with the dead" (or the belief that communication with the dead is possible).

Next we must refer to the fact that in the actual faith of our believers "Amida belief," "founder belief" (in Shinran), and "ancestor worship" form a trinity. The problems concerning this triune structure of the faith of the Shinshū adherents will surely emerge as extremely important themes – if not as the problem of problems – for the policy making bodies of our sect. For that, we absolutely need a theology which does not run away from the actual mentality of our people. If our theology remains a solo flight of theory only, it is to be feared that in the future the Buddha Dharma will be found only in the study rooms of our universities – these "Naga palaces." Religious practices, rituals, and community must become the tripod supporting the theories of our theology. A solo flight of theory without this threefold support can possibly be interesting for a part of the élite as a kind of religious construct or philosophy of religion, but history sufficiently proves that it cannot be the religion of the people.

The meeting with the transcendent beyond the secular and the dialogue with the infinite cannot be expressed by the sole one-track logic of theory or, buddhistically speaking, "discriminatory knowledge," and it is very well possible that they are more accessible to our

people via the above tripod. The idea that everything can be solved by a merely theoretical doctrine, and that through it we could have direct access to our Founder, is certainly not very Buddhist. For, when it comes to looking through the illusions of the subject and the barrenness of logic only, Buddhism may have no rival.

In sum, our theology from now on must develop a doctrine of folk practice, a doctrine of ritual, and a doctrine of community; and clarify the realm where these three interpenetrate. I am convinced that, in so doing, a sketch-map can be drawn for the overcoming of the gap between our theology and the field, and for bringing our sect to a new life wherein our Founder is present.

A plea for Shinshū Catholicism ("Shinshū C")

It is time now to come to our central theme. The proposal which our collective research on Shinshū doctrine and folk practices-popular beliefs has come up with was baptized by us as "Shinshū Catholicism." The history of the religions of the world tells us that all world religions face the problem of the relationship of their doctrine with folk practices and thus of a theological interpretation of these practices. The case of Christianity with its two poles of Puritanism and Catholicism has struck us as typical, and so we have come to speak of Shinshū Puritanism (Shinshū P) over against Shinshū Catholicism (Shinshū C). Since this P-C polarity can be found in all religions, we have even thought of the possibility of this becoming a theme of common research for the theologies of different religions and sects.

In *Bulletin 30* of the *Dendō-in*, Ōmura Eishō, a professor of sociology at Osaka University, clarifies what we mean when we advocate a Shinshū Catholicism:

In Christian circles it has become common-sense to regard Puritanism and Catholicism both as ambivalent, each having positive and negative aspects. Puritanism has the positive aspect of maintaining the purity of the doctrine with rejection of all compromise, but the negative aspect of falling into a hardened and exclusivistic sectarianism. Catholicism, on the other hand, tends to nestle uncritically in the given situation, disguising its compromise under the label of the "universally human." But when we propose that we should learn from the Catholic Church, we are thinking of its flexible two-pronged attitude which, on the one

hand, promotes puritanism in its monastic orders and, on the other, tries to adopt even the Japanese ancestor cult. In other words, the Roman Catholics appear to be aiming at a meta-Catholicism wherein both Puritanism and Catholicism are *aufgehoben*. For that reason we think that there is much to be learned from them.

When we advocate a Shinshū Catholicism, it is certainly not in the sense of promoting more compromises with folk religion. On the contrary, we maintain that Shinshū has become infected with folk religion precisely because in our theology Shinshū Catholicism has not been thematized. We also have the expectation that a way back to our Founder can be opened by such a thematization.

Funeral services and theology

I have been asked to give special attention to funeral and memorial services, which play such a big role in Japanese religion. And indeed, it is in connection with them that we find in our sect, right from the beginning, the problematics of folk practices and the two trends of Shinshū P and Shinshū C. On the side of Shinshū P we find Kakunyo (1270–1325), the great-grandson of Shinran, and on the side of Shinshū C there is Zonkaku (1290–1373). Although father and son, these two were at loggerheads all their lives precisely on account of their difference in opinion on folk practices. Kakunyo even called Zonkaku an heretic and twice excommunicated him. We can thus say that our Shinshū theology comprises this tension right from its beginning and that our present problem must be seen against this background.

To begin then with Shinshū P, in his *Gaijashō*, Kakunyo writes:

Shinran has said: “When I shut my eyes for good, you must throw my body into the Kamo river as food for the fish.” What he meant was that we must despise our bodies and see faith in the Buddha Dharma as the only thing that counts. On reflection, it follows that we should not consider services for the dead as all-important but rather put an end to them.

Kakunyo thus appears as an abolitionist with regard to folk practices and an advocate of a “no-funeral-ism.” His theology is ideological and rigoristic; he is typical of a Shinshū P for which faith is so supreme as to exclude everything else.

On the side of Shinshū C, Zonkaku treats the question in three of his

treatises, *Hōonki*, *Jōdo kenmonshū*, and *Shidōshō*. He provides a theological underpinning for the Shinshū practice of funerals and memorial services, the monthly sūtra readings for the deceased, the memorial day in the month of death, and the yearly anniversary service. He writes, for example:

Since the Buddha is uniquely worthy of reverence among all beings past, present, and future, and the guide of the four classes of living beings, there is nobody above him in rank. Still, to show his piety to his father, and his reverence for the king, he raised his body into the air and, attending the funeral of his father, helped carry the coffin. He did that as an example to be followed by the sentient beings of the future.

(The reference is to an *Āgama Sūtra*). And again:

In life, one must admonish to zeal in self-cultivation, giving priority to filial piety; after somebody's death, one must fulfill one's duty of gratitude, giving priority to working good deeds for the deceased. . . .

One must not neglect the monthly services for the deceased, and certainly not the yearly observances on the anniversary of the death. Even after many years have passed, on these anniversaries one must absolutely lay aside one's worldly affairs to pray for the peace of these souls.

There is certainly something here that not only Kakunyo but also present-day theologians cannot but see as folk religion, which is un-Shinshū, un-Shinran, and even un-Buddhist. Thus, since the Meiji era these folk religious texts by Zonkaku have been taboo in our sect and have received no attention at all from the theology professors. However, when looking at the life in our temples, it is clear enough that the greater half of that life consists of funeral rites, memorial services in the temple and monthly sūtra readings in the houses of the faithful. Therefore, it is precisely Zonkaku's theology that takes these practices seriously as theological topics and is a "theology of the field" totally incomprehensible to people engaged in "pure theology only." It is a theology for the temple priests whose life goes up in keeping our temples going, taking care of our faithful, and performing funeral rites and memorial services; a theology imbued with the sadness of not being understood by people who never toiled in tears to lead people to Shinran in the midst of all this.

How would Kakunyo and Zonkaku, while living by the same Anida-

given faith, have come to such diametrically opposed theological positions with regard to funeral practices? Present-day theologians have nothing but praise for the Shinshū P of Kakunyo and consider it to be a faithful expression of Shinran's true intentions. Zonkaku's Shinshū C, on the other hand, is judged negatively as a theology that came to betray true faith through compromise with folk religion, and consider it therefore as inadmissible. But is this the true state of affairs? The crux of the matter might lie in a correct understanding of Zonkaku's texts. For, Zonkaku knew very well that Shinshū is not a kind of Confucianism or ancestor cult, and is not built on the performance by us of good works whose merits would be transferred to the deceased; he understood better than anyone else the centrality in Shinshū of Other-Power *nembutsu*. Still he wrote kindly that funerals, memorial services, and so forth are important – while adding sometimes that he did not like writing these things. What is the secret here? We think that we found the key to this mystery in Zonkaku's "give-and-take logic."

Dōgen, Shinran, and still Zonkaku lived in an age that presented an extremely vivid picture of hell (which is all but lost to the modern imagination), permeated with magic, folk beliefs, evil spirits, and wherein the powers of man were absolutely helpless before disease and natural disasters. It is then only natural that people had recourse to superstition and magic in order to ward off the ills that befell them one after the other. Up to a point that is still true today, of course, and we are all inclined to look down on people who run to "new new" religions, magic, fortune-tellers, and what have you, and to see ourselves as the true Buddhists. However, rather than looking at these superstitions themselves, we should pay attention to the fact that the people who have recourse to them have good reasons to do so. And there are plenty of reasons: incurable diseases, anguishes one cannot tell anybody about, the loneliness so typical of our age, and so on and so forth. Scolding people for their foolish superstitious behavior in self-righteous sermons without any appreciation of these woes in the background, is an exercise in self-satisfaction unworthy of a religionist. In the face of the 100 million Japanese who indulge in superstition, we should rather reflect on our lamentable failure as guides of the people, and come to the conviction that it is high time that we make folk practice and popular belief a topic of our theology.

Give-and-take logic as Shinshū C

A “give-and-take logic” was the outcome of Zonkaku’s serious consideration of the question how the people of his time, beset as they were by all kind of ills and relying on folk beliefs and magical practices to relieve them, could be set free from magic and brought to lead a life of true *nembutsu*. It consists in looking hard at the sufferings which induce people to indulge in magical practices, in understanding that psychology, and from there, with great sensitivity for the intricacies of human feelings, in sharply analyzing these superstitions. This then becomes a way to “jump into the inner castle of the enemy and to make what one grasps there into one’s own medicine.” Contrary to theology P, which cuts down superstition by logic and rejects it forthwith, one does not directly negate here, but looks for salvation by way of empathy. One spares and embraces the popular practices to turn them into something Shinshū-like; one gives in to them in order to take them back to one’s own side. Rather than drawing one’s sword against the sword of the enemy, one grasps the other’s sword to remold it into the shape of the *nembutsu* and give it back as a *nembutsu* sword that cuts through all superstition. This is ultra-C supreme swordsmanship!

In the eyes of the puritanists, this expedient means appears only as heresy, wishy-washiness, unwarranted detour, or even as a way of suicide, in that the possibility exists of being cut down by the other’s sword; or again as un-Shinran-like logic. It has thus drawn the concentrated fire of the purists. I myself, who have gone through a period of existentialist faith, can very well imagine how I would be on the side of that firing squad if I were an armchair theologian without contact with the field of temple life. Indeed, this give-and-take logic is a pitiful logic one cannot really feel for if one is not a temple priest in the true sense, for whom the relationship of Shinshū doctrine and folk belief is a *kōan* that besets one 24 hours a day in one’s care for temple and believers. When advocating this logic as a characteristic of Shinshū C, we are well aware that nearly all theology of the Edo period and since Meiji as well, and also the studies on Shinshū and the Shinshū community by the modernists, are of the Shinshū P type, and that this theology has made very valuable contributions to our doctrine. But this does not mean as such that this theology is the only viable one. When the P people say that there are principles which cannot be tampered with if one wants to return to Shinran, I am completely with them, but

on the point of folk beliefs I beg to disagree with much of what they say.

According to Shinshū P people, faith was everything for Shinran, and religious organizations and priests were superfluous. Nor is there any need for temples, temple ornaments, funerals, memorial services, tombs, rituals, Buddha images, sūtra readings, priestly robes, . . . Even *danka* (people belonging to a temple and supporting it) are not necessary. Those things did not exist in Shinran's time and Shinran would have proscribed them. A truly no-no theology of faith only! In this view, temple priests become parasites in the body of the lion, feasting on a Dharma that leads to hell!

However, although funerals and memorial services may be unnecessary according to Shinshū P people, it remains an historical fact that they have been practiced from the beginning in our sect. Shinshū P theology is then obliged to say that these Shinshū practices and rituals are all "praise to the Buddha's virtues," "thanksgiving for Amida's benefits," "savoring the taste of the Dharma," or "inducement to faith." Beautiful phrases those, but while we were caught up in that melody, the alienation of the people and the temple priests from official doctrine went on apace.

According to P theology, Shinshū consists only in this: At the moment of attainment of faith one enters the state of non-retrogression, and at the moment of death one enters great *nirvāṇa*. Birth in the Pure Land is attainment of Buddhahood and enlightenment, identical with that of Amida. One then immediately becomes a bodhisattva of returning transference, i. e., one returns to this world to work for the salvation of all sentient beings. In this scheme, of course, the memorial services for the dead, about which Zonkaku had been racking his brains in his essays, do not come into the picture and are absolutely meaningless. But, of course, Zonkaku himself was well aware of that. He also wrote the *Rokuyōshō*, a commentary on the *Kyōgyōshinshō* which is considered by theologians as the most authoritative commentary on the *magnum opus* of Shinran. This should be sufficient proof of Zonkaku's theological acumen. Our P theologians gladly accept his *Rokuyōshō* but want nothing to do with his thought on folk practices as expressed in the other works.

Zonkaku used the memorial services in question as means to bring the ordinary people of his day to the practice of the *nembutsu*. For these people in distress over the parting with their beloved ones, in great

fear of curses worked by the spirits of the dead, and irresistibly inclined to offer prayers and good works for the salvation of their deceased, Zonkaku adopted the whole range of memorial services, found in the sūtras and even some not found there, as "usages of our land." This can be compared with the current tendency among Catholics to adopt the ancestor cult as a beautiful usage of the Japanese people. While observing these memorial services and anniversaries, he endeavored to assuage the pain of parting, to allay the fear of curses, and most of all to make people into true *nembutsu* practitioners, with the help of beautiful funeral rites, which he sought to imbue with the spirit of the *nembutsu*, according to which the deceased is first of all a bodhisattva who comes to save me, and it is first of all the people who sincerely revere the Buddha who are set free from the defilements and curses of the dead. In that sense, the *Jōdo kenmonshū* begins indeed with a quotation from the (apocryphal and popular) *Jūō Sūtra* but ends with a quote from Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō*.

There are, thus, in our sect, two trends as to the theology of funeral services. On the point of pure doctrine, P theology is clear-cut, but from the viewpoint of the field with its C practice, there must be found a way to realize a community of *nembutsu* practitioners as envisaged by Shinran, in trying to liberate the people from their animist-shamanist complex and to transform this into true Shinshū belief, by observing the funeral rites with heart and soul. That is certainly what we are looking for and, therefore, our endeavor to establish a theology that articulates Shinshū C must not evoke the fear that we would be going away from Shinran. Would this not also apply to the Sōtō Zen school? I believe that also in Sōtō, where for 700 years the temple priests have elaborated Sōtō practices, Sōtō rituals and Sōtō patterns of community life, the introduction of a theology C, that evaluates these elements, could prove to be a way of return to Dōgen and could well reveal aspects of Dōgen and of Zen for which the theologians up to now have had no eye.

All of our faithful have the spirit of "love for the sect and defense of the Dharma." Therefore, freedom to express their faith should be guaranteed to them. If not, we cannot really speak of a *saṅgha*, a religious community. If we have trust in the Buddha and in our Founder, there is nothing to fear. The Shinshū P people are admirable in their absolutizing of faith. They may be the bodhisattvas of the era of the final law, and our Founder may have been like them. I, however, am not the Founder and I can live only a Shinshū C.

Over against the simple negation of the existence in our sect of a founder cult, of this-worldly benefits, and of prayers and good works for the dead, we have advocated a "theology of the founder cult," a "theology of this-worldly benefits," and a "theology of ancestor cult." This has upset the P people and brought some turmoil in our sect, but the majority of the temple priests, to whom we talked, showed appreciation for what we are trying to do, and start feeling that theology is an important affair of theirs and that the establishment of a "field theology" would be an un hoped for blessing.

Praying for the dead and curses

As already said above, prayers for the dead and fear of curses worked by the dead certainly belong to the deepest layers of Japanese religiosity. If we simply keep on rejecting these elements, the result will only be that our believers will stray away from our religion. We have therefore opted for a Shinshū C type theology with a give-and-take logic.

For example, a believer who feels threatened by a curse is not saved if we simply tell him that curses do not exist. He will then most probably start drifting from one religion or folk belief to another in search of salvation. That is not a solution, and it has become clear from the data of field research on new religions, new new religions, Mount Ikoma, etc., that among the people frequenting them surprisingly many are Shinshū believers. One of the motivations behind our movement is the conviction that this is not right, that all the sufferings of the believers must be taken up at our temples by the temple priest and his consort, and that we want our sect to become such that the faithful can come to the temple with whatever concerns or ails them, with the certainty that they will listened to, even if their feelings are not precisely Shinshū-like. If all our people could be helped by Shinshū P there would be no need for a Shinshū C. In fact, however, there are probably more C people than P people among our faithful.

When someone in fear of a curse comes to the temple, we try first of all to empathize with that person's feelings. And once we have grasped the content of the curse and the suffering lying in its background, we do not directly force Shinshū dogma on that person, but try to instill Shinshū doctrine within that content and background of the supposed

curse. Only when we are sure that the power of that injected *nembutsu* has done its work, can we finally say: for one embraced by Amida's Primal Vow and living the *nembutsu*, there are no curses; fear no longer. "Let curse what wants, I am protected by Namu Amida Butsu!" The difference between P and C on this point might be that P proclaims that there are no curses, while C assures that curses cannot touch the faithful. Our believers in the field are very sensitive to the grateful feeling that the *nembutsu* protects them from curses.

As for the transference of the merits of one's prayers and good works to the dead, would it not be good that there were a give-and-take kind of theology here too, which does not directly say that such transference does not exist but rather gradually leads to the awareness that it is the *nembutsu* transferred to us by the Other-Power of Amida which is the true help for the dead.

Theology as folk practices – a problem for all Buddhist schools

Our research and publications are animated by the hope of seeing our sect transformed into a community that does not run away from what is actually happening in the field, but takes it all upon itself and knows how to transform it into something wherein our Founder is present.

In the theology of folk practices, the Shinshū P line, running back from Rennyo to Shinran via Kakunyo, has been the mainstream. We are now advocating a line running back from Rennyo to Shinran via Zonkaku. Our fundamental position is that, in a big sect like ours which is like a smaller scale map of the pluriform society, the existence of a pluriform theology is a good thing. We believe then that Shinshū C is one of the concrete and realizable roads of a return to Shinran.

We further believe that the theme of theology and folk beliefs is practical not only for our sect but equally so for all Japanese Buddhist sects, since it appears to be the case everywhere that theology is dominated by a Buddhist Puritanism, and the practices of the faithful are left without theological reflection. It is therefore necessary that, among the theologians of every sect, there emerge people who specialize in the theology of folk beliefs and practices, the theology of rituals, and the theology of community. We are also convinced that the time has come for the different sects as such to establish research institutes to study these problems on a continual basis. It is true that each sect has already

institutes for the study of its theology, but research into folk practice, ritual, community cannot be done by theologians alone. It requires post-modern avant-garde theory and can be brought to a good end only by an interdisciplinary approach with the collaboration of folklorists, anthropologists, scientists of religion, etc.

I have not limited my proposal to folk belief and practice, but also involved ritual and community, for the simple reason that these too are not treated by traditional theology. It will finally be a question, not of theology and folk practices, etc., but of theology = folk practice, theology = ritual, theology = community. If not, our communities will always appear as betrayals of our founders, necessary evils, or something to be left to the sociologists. The time has come to consider the community as the doctrine of the sect. Funeral rites – this center of our talk today – are not merely folk practice and ritual. Praise of the Buddha and thanksgiving for his benefits are not enough by themselves. There is Zen and Nembutsu in the funeral rites. We intend the identification: funeral rites = Zen = Dōgen Zenji; or again, funeral rites = *nembutsu* = Shinran Shōnin.

Spirit belief as post-modern religion

Up to now, I have given you a rather free rendering of what was written up as the report of our research in the *Dendō-in Bulletins* 29 and 30 (1984 and 1985), under the general title of “Shinshū Doctrine and Folk Practices.” To round off my talk, I now want to add a few words on some points that transpired since then, and use this to put into clearer relief some themes which I have left rather vague.

I consider as very relevant for our problematics, and in a sense epoch-making, a paper delivered by professor Shimazono Susumu of Tokyo University at the 1986 convention of the Kantō Sociological Conference. In that paper, Shimazono divides Japan’s “new religions” into two categories. The first are religious organizations, like Tenrikyō and Konkōkyō, which originated among the rural population around the time of the Meiji Restoration. These represent a belief in a single saving deity and have much in common with the Amida belief of the Pure Land School. It is the “entrusting, relying type.” The second category are those new religions which, like Ōmotokyō, Reiyūkai, Seichō no Ie, originated in urban centers in the Taishō era and the beginning of the

Shōwa era. They are of the "spirit belief" type. They stress the existence of spirits, see them as the causes of all the ills of human life, and promote communication with the spirits in magic saving rituals. The so-called "new new religions," like Mahikari and Agonshū, which have come into existence since 1970, still belong to this second type.

Shimazono asks himself then why this kind of religion flourishes in modern urban society, and comes up with a startling answer. In contrast with belief in a saving deity, wherein one sees the will of the deity behind all events and aims at an I-thou relationship with that deity, this spirit belief perfectly matches the way of thinking and the manipulative attitude of modern technique. Each spirit is one factor in the environment, which can be captured and manipulated by the proper techniques. Spirit belief thus presents itself as experimental and functional, and exudes a feeling of certainty and efficacy. We could call this a "manipulative" type of belief. This can be seen as a simple discovery, somewhat like the egg of Columbus, but still comes as quite a shock. We, who had been looking down on the new religions as pre-modern, even primitive, and have made great efforts to show that our Buddhism can coexist with science, now are confronted with the idea that the true match for a scientific-technical world is spirit belief, the magical, pseudo-scientific, manipulative type of religion.

Our team is of the opinion that we must take this shocking idea into account in our further research, but did not come to any clear conclusions yet.

Fervent Shinshū believers and folk practices

Around the same time, also one of the researchers of our team, the above-mentioned Kaneko, divulged some surprising results of his research. The idea of Shinshū P is that folk belief diminishes where Shinshū belief deepens and, conversely, folk belief grows rampant where Shinshū belief declines. However, from the field research on the belief structure of average lay believers and of lay representatives of our temples the following picture emerges. First, among the majority of ordinary lay believers, folk belief is strong and, in general, the stronger specific Shinshū belief the stronger also the belief in folk religious elements. However, when it comes to the temple repre-

sentatives, this syncretistic trend breaks down. With them, indeed, folk belief appears to be swept away by deep Shinshū faith.

But, in fact, things are a bit more complicated. Among these leaders of our communities, shamanistic folk belief (belief in curses) is beautifully overcome but, at the same time, the deeper their Shinshū faith, the deeper also their faith in two other elements of folk belief, namely, ancestor cult and founder belief, become. For example, as to regular visits to the graves of the ancestors, polls among the general Japanese public of the same age group may register 76% yes, while among the said representatives 94% answer in the affirmative. Similarly, “founder belief,” the veneration of our Founder Shinran as a Buddha, tends to become very strong.

It is not easy to say which conclusions should be drawn from this, but one thing seems clear enough. A theology of folk belief cannot simply carry on with the presupposition of Shinshū P that all folk belief is a minus and to be rejected. For the moment it seems as if our Shinshū practice makes a distinction between the animist (*okagesama*) element and the shamanistic (curse) element of the Japanese religious complex. The shamanistic level of Japan's folk belief, which is rejected by our temples, has vicariously been taken care of by the new religions, like Reiyūkai, Mahikari, etc. These new religions do not ask our believers to reject Shinshū; they rather say: Since the temples take care of the services for the bones of the dead, you must respect them, but we shall take care of your ancestor's spirits and of all your anguishes and distresses. In fact, as I pointed out before, the number of our faithful who run to the new religions with their difficulties is very high.

The lack of a “doctrine for emergencies”

It looks thus as if we have built up a theodicy for the happy days by adopting the animistic *okagesama* mentality, but have nothing to offer when misfortune visits our believers. We may then have to say that we have no theodicy for unhappy days, no doctrine for the emergencies of life.

I myself have come to know how necessary such a doctrine is through the unutterable anguish I experienced when my second son drowned in the temple pond. For years afterwards, my *nembutsu* was interspersed with the cry: “Why? Why?” Religionists who tend to despise the prac-

tices of folk belief would do good to visit one of these places, say for example the Kamikiri Jinja on Mt. Ikoma, where people go to pray for beloved ones who are incurably sick, and have a good look at the faces of the people there . . .

The lack of a theology of ancestor veneration

Recently, first class authorities on Japanese religion, like Yanagawa Keiichi and Yamaori Tetsuo, have again highlighted the important place of the ancestor cult in Japanese religiosity. They have also stressed the stability which this vertical dimension imparts on the family system—a stability not assured by the sole horizontal relationships of husband and wife. And we have already said a few words on how deeply this ancestor cult has penetrated the life in the field of our sect.

In view of these facts and the challenge they present for our sect, it is extremely regrettable that we do not have a “theology of ancestor cult.” This reminds me again of the fact that our promotion of Shinshū Catholicism was originally triggered by the publication of the *Guidelines Concerning Ancestors and the Deceased* by the Catholics. Therein the Japanese usages are boldly admitted into the lives of Catholic believers, and there is no shade of fear that this would corrupt Catholic faith. It is admirable in its trust in the strength of the faith of the own religion.

The lack of a theology of this-worldly benefits

Would our believers be running to New Religions in times of need, if we truly had a theology of this-worldly benefits (*genze riyaku*)? It is probably true that Shinran speaks much more about this-worldly benefits than Dōgen, and Kaneko Daiei, one of our most famous theologians of the former generation, has expressed the opinion that we have to rethink fundamentally our doctrine on “non-retrogression in this life” and “this-worldly benefits.” In a conference he said for example: “I want you to study carefully what is meant exactly by earthly benefits. We must come to understand why there is no contradiction between, on the one hand, maintaining that there is no true worldly benefit outside of the Jōdo School and, on the other, rejecting all religion that seeks worldly benefits.”

Bandō Shōjun, the priest of the famous Hōon-ji temple in Tokyo, has once said: "The *nembutsu* at times deigns to enter into the midst of folk practice and magic belief, from there to turn people to a true Buddhist life." May I finally express the heartfelt wish that you, who shoulder the future of Sōtō Zen, may elaborate a theology, not merely of folk practice, but of Zen folk practice, a theology of the true folk practice of Sōtō Zen.

[Translated by Jan VAN BRAGT]