

SALVATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT:  
PURE LAND BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY

[4–6 September 1989]

JAN VAN BRAGT

It may seem a bit strange or unnatural that this dialogue session with representatives of the Pure Land School occurred so late in the day, namely only as number seven in the ongoing bi-annual series of Nanzan Symposia. This in view of the fact that the Pure Land denominational communities, certainly when taken together, constitute the strongest “branch” of Buddhism in Japan and, moreover, Pure Land thinking and devotion deeply influenced Japanese religiosity in general. And also because, on the face of it, Pure Land Buddhism and Christianity, sharing as they do the idea of salvation by “Other-Power,” show such a close affinity in their religiosity.

To this we can only plead guilty: *post factum* the lateness of this “Jōdo Symposium” looks uncalled-for even to us, members of the Institute. On the other hand, however, we can honestly say that in the daily activities of the Institute—as opposed to such highlights as symposia—dialogue with Shinshū people has loomed large (larger than the dialogue with any other of Japan’s religious communities) right from the beginning (now 15 years ago), both through meetings held at the Institute itself and through participation by members of the Institute in sessions held at Shinshū headquarters or universities. It is thus no mere subterfuge to say that this symposium happened so late mainly because of circumstances “beyond our will.”

With regard to the alleged affinity between Christianity and Pure Land Buddhism, it may be relevant to remark here that most Pure Land scholars in Japan, or at least most Shinshū scholars, rather tend to stress the great difference between Christian thinking and Pure Land thinking. Christianity, they will say, may be essentially a religion of

salvation by a “thou,” an agent totally other than the recipient of salvation, but Pure Land Buddhism, rooted as it is in Mahāyāna logic, is in the final analysis a religion of enlightenment, of awareness of the Buddha in the self. The reader will recognize this tendency in many places of this report but he may also find there confirmation of his “suspicions” that, on this point, there may exist a rather deep dividing line within the Pure Land School itself, between the greater part of the tradition, especially as embodied in Hōnen’s Jōdoshū (and as lived on the popular level) and, on the other hand, Shinran Shōnin and the Shinshū scholars.

However this may be, it is the above-mentioned polarity which prompted the organizers to choose as the sub-theme of the Symposium: “Salvation and Enlightenment in Religion.” Although, just as on several previous occasions, the sub-theme, which is supposed to serve as a kind of guiding thread in the discussions, was seldom taken up as the explicit topic of discussion, the reader may feel its presence in the background of the discussions most of the time.

A cursory glance at the following list of participants may be enough to convince one that the Pure Land representatives show a rich variety. Both Higashi Honganji (Ōtani Branch) and Nishi Honganji (Honganji Branch)—equally loyal to Shinran’s doctrine but evincing, nevertheless, subtle differences in their doctrinal traditions—had a highly qualified representative, but also the Jōdoshū was ably represented, this time by a younger “theologian.” The other two members of the team, equally Pure Land priests and scholars, were rather invited for their additional qualifications, one as a philosopher having invested considerable efforts in the elucidation of the philosophical implications of Pure Land thought, and the other as an American Buddhist able to bring Western sensibilities to bear on the Pure Land tradition.

The constellation of the Christian representatives shows a similar variety although maybe not the same nice balance. We had a well-known Protestant Scripture scholar of a liberal vintage, with a long history of experimentation with the limits of Christian tenets in confrontation with Buddhist ideas, and a Catholic theologian belonging to the post-conciliar mainline. Surrounding those two pillars there were, besides this reporter, a Protestant minister with more than thirty years of missionary and pastoral experience in Japan and a keen interest in all aspects of the religiosity of Japan’s ordinary people (*bonpu*), and a Catholic professor emeritus of Greek philosophy, whose

reflections on the relationship between his Christian faith and his Shinshū background found expression already in several books on the subject. An anecdote which this man often tells to illustrate his background, although not directly relevant, is too good not to tell here.

After all her children had become Christians, old mother Kokubu, who had been a fervent Nenbutsu practitioner, also decided to join the Catholic Church. During her final illness, then, the priest regularly brought her holy communion and it then so happened that, after receiving the host with great faith and devotion, her heartfelt words of thanksgiving often reached the ears of her children: *Namu Amida Butsu! Namu Amida Butsu!*

### PANELISTS

#### Pure Land Representatives

Fujimoto Kiyohiko 藤本浄彦	Jōdoshū Priest and Professor of Pure Land Studies at Bukkyō University (Kyoto)
Ōmine Akira 大峯 顕	Shinshū Priest and Professor of Philosophy at Ōsaka University
Shigaraki Takamaro 信楽峻磨	Shinshū Priest and President of Ryūkoku University (Kyoto)
Terakawa Shunshō 寺川俊昭	Shinshū Priest and President of Ōtani University (Kyoto)
Taitetsu Unno	Shinshū Priest and Professor of Religion at Smith College, Northampton, U. S. A.

#### Representatives of the Christian Tradition

Kokubu Keiji 国分敬治	Catholic, Professor Emeritus of Nanzan University (Nagoya)
Momose Fumiaki 百瀬文晃	Catholic Priest and Professor of Theology at Sophia University (Tokyo)
Clark Offner	Protestant Missionary in Japan and Presbyter of the Christian Catholic Church in Japan.
Jan Van Bragt	Catholic Priest and Director of the Nanzan Institute
Yagi Seiichi 八木誠一	Protestant Bible Scholar and Professor at Tōin Gakuen Yokohama University

**First Session:  
Shigaraki Takamaro, “The Nature of Salvation in Shinran”**

In a forceful presentation Professor Shigaraki explained to us his vision on Shinran’s idea of salvation and, thereby also, of course, of Shinran’s religiosity. He himself warned us that this vision does not represent on all points the most common way of thinking of Nishi Honganji doctrinal scholars.

Shigaraki defined his ideas in the framework of the conception of liberation in Buddhism in general and over against the traditional interpretation that held sway in the feudal period and even up to recent times. This traditional thinking was characterized, he explained, by the following traits: (1) A merely conceptual and philological analysis of Shinran’s texts, whereby Shinran’s global idea of what salvation really means for the human being does not obtain any existential content; (2) a reduction of salvation to the inner life of the individual, unrelated to the actual social and political conditions; (3) an idea of salvation totally centered on the after-life, so that in the present life salvation finds no concrete, experiential content and its benefit merely consists in the dim ray of light which the hope for future bliss throws back on the present (the “logic of Saturday”).

The general Buddhist idea of deliverance or crossing-over was then described as neither a reliance on the intervention of higher powers for a change in one’s situation, nor a negation of one’s desires by the setting up of a higher ideal, but as the establishment of a higher subjectivity or consciousness, whereby reality is accepted as it is but is experienced in a totally different, i.e. true, way. Shigaraki located the Pure Land ideal squarely within this Buddhist framework, as one following fundamentally the same logic – whereby negating (the old ego) is “becoming” (the real self or subject), but secondarily interpreting this “becoming” as “a being visited by graceful truth from the outside” (and calling this “salvation”), rather than as truth manifesting itself from inside (and calling this “enlightenment” or self-awareness) as most Buddhist schools (especially Zen) do. Since this positioning of the Pure Land School within the mainstream of Buddhism could be called the main purport of Shigaraki’s talk, it may be good to quote his *ipsissima verba*: “Within Buddhism, the reality of what is called, respectively, salvation and enlightenment, is always the establishment of the true subject and, thereby, the opening up of the true world. In their

basic reality salvation and enlightenment are the same but, by a difference in doctrinal interpretation, one arrives at these two different names.”

There followed a direct description of Shinran’s view of salvation. Here the following points were stressed.

1. Differently from the way faith is usually considered in religion, for Shinran “faith” (*shinjin*) is first and foremost a “truth experience,” the awakening to a new wisdom, “an utterly personal and basic self-awareness,” the attainment of a new insight, especially in the true reality of one’s own existence (sinfulness and impotence with regard to salvation) but at the same time an awakening to the depths of the Buddha’s graciousness, “a seeing of the Buddha even in this life.”

2. For Shinran, salvation is centered on this life; it is obtained at the very moment of faith. “Everything of salvation is already perfectly present and realized in faith, so the after-life does not bring any new element.” Through faith one’s *kokoro* (heart or mind) is already dwelling in the Pure Land.”

3. Faith implies the experience of one’s settledness on the path to Buddhahood, of one’s “kinship with the Tathāgata.” Thereby one becomes a changed person, a new subject, dead to the old ego and born to the life of Amida.

Finally, Shigaraki faced the objection: Why does not Shinran speak then of Buddhahood in this life? Indeed, Shinran speaks only of Buddhahood in the next life, but this does not imply that Amida’s salvation would still be somehow imperfect in this life. This postponement of full enlightenment is due to our human corporeity in this life. Our body is a “defiled body,” the seat of the passions. For the person who obtained faith there is no need for further Birth, except for the fact that this will enable him to really benefit others, to practice *gensō ekō* ( 還相回向 , returning merit-transference).

In his response the present chronicler, partly out of conviction and partly for the sake of argument, took as much as possible the opposite position in addressing the following objections to Professor Shigaraki.

In general, in your endeavor to safeguard the original Buddhist inspiration within Shinshū’s doctrine, praiseworthy as this may be, do you not lose sight of the beautiful originality of the Pure Land tradition and narrow down Shinran’s rich religiosity to a rather intellectualistic pattern? And more specifically:

1. Is it not true that even for Śākyamuni wisdom is not the aim but

rather the *means* to salvation, which is liberation from the suffering of “birth-old age-sickness-death; that in the Pure Land tradition Amida is not only immeasurable light but also immeasurable life; and that Shinran’s existential problem was rather the attainment of the *certainty* of salvation?”

2. In view of the existential importance of the moment of death, was not also Shinran’s conception of the relationship between salvation in this life and salvation after death a more dialectical one, somewhat more in the line of the Christian view of salvation on earth as “already” and “not yet?”

3. Does not Shinran’s deep conviction of the depravity of the human being militate against presenting faith as an “experienced change in personality?”

4. Can one really say that the world changes by the fact that the individual changes? Does not the salvation of the objective world require a distinct social agency?

The first point taken up in the ensuing discussion was that of Shinran’s idea of the body. Shinran appears, indeed, to gainsay the oft-repeated proposition that the East sees body and mind as one, while the body-soul dichotomy is a Western idea traceable back to the Greeks. For him, the body is “defiled” and remains in this impure land while the heart is already dwelling in the Pure Land. So, he cannot share the ideas of several of his contemporaries, who would say: “Buddhahood in this very body,” or “I am Buddha.” For him, “akin to the Buddha” clearly denotes a state one step away from Buddhahood, with a definite stress on the “not one” of the Buddhist “not one and not two” of Buddha and *bonpu*. But are there then no bodies in the Pure Land? Is not the body needed for the self-identity of the person, for its social nature and, specifically in Shinran’s doctrine, for *gensō* working? (Is not a mouth needed for preaching?) Thus the discussion turned to the question of the nature of Pure *Land* and Buddha *Body*. It was then tentatively pointed out that, indeed, land and body are interconnected as both “the place of the working of a function,” but that the *sūtras* seem to speak of “transformed bodies” (“supple bodies” with “interchanging senses”) in the Pure Land. Two of the Shinshū panelists then agreed that the ambivalence in Shinran’s idea of *ōjō* (往生 Birth in the Pure Land) indicates that Shinran really sees *ōjō* as a process, a path we are firmly situated on by faith.

We then came to the tricky question of what *gensō* really means for

Shinran: whether he sees this as reserved for the after-life and how this then relates to “activity for the benefit of others” (利他 *rita*) and “constant practice of Great Mercy” (常行大悲 *jōgyō daihi*). The idea, proffered by a Christian participant, that *ōsō* and *gensō* would be the two sides of the same coin, so that the one cannot be had without the other, was firmly rejected. “Returning” indeed presupposes that one has first gone to the Pure Land; only then one is enabled to truly benefit others, by entering into (participating in) Amida’s merciful working. Shinran abandoned the ordinary idea of the bodhisattva who has to work for the benefit of others in order to become a Buddha himself. One Shinshū panelist remarked that Shinran sees as the subject of *gensō* never himself but only persons of the past who benefited him, like Śākyamuni and his master, Hōnen. There was, however, no unanimity on the question whether also *rita* and *jōgyō daihi* belong only to the Buddha world (as synonyms of *gensō*) or can be attributed to people here on earth.

Next, in connection with Shinran’s stress on the “right settled state” (正定聚 *shōjōju*), the question was asked how one can be sure that one is saved. To this the answer came that, in the Shinshū tradition, this is a question of inner conviction, a question between Amida and the person, not mediated by any other human being, differently from the Zen tradition where the certainty of enlightenment depends on the recognition by the master (*inka*). In a last, and pastorally-oriented, question, a Christian panelist wanted to know in how far Shigaraki’s theological interpretation, especially the stress on salvation in this life, was shared by the ordinary faithful. Shigaraki then answered that, especially in his own School, the Nishi Honganji, the stress is traditionally on salvation in the after-life, but that nevertheless a group of Tokugawa theologians had seen things differently and that the *myō-kōnin* too saw salvation mostly as in this life.

### Session Two:

#### Yagi Seiichi, “Religious Language: The Case of Christianity”

In both Pure Land Buddhism, centered as it is on the Nenbutsu, and Christianity, with its confession of Jesus as the Word of God, language plays a primary role. It is thus not fortuitous that the speaker, who had already expressed his ideas on the relationship between Pure Land

Buddhism and Christianity in several well-known books, chose this time to approach the problem from the angle of religious language.

From Wittgenstein's dictum that "only that language is meaningful wherein words and things can be shown to correspond one by one," it would appear that religious language is meaningless because unverifiable. Granting that Wittgenstein is right as far as "informative language" (wherein the information imparted by the language is central) is concerned, the meaning of religious language, Professor Yagi contended, will have to be sought in the direction of "expressive language" (wherein the awareness of the speaker is central) and "imperative language" (wherein the expected action of the addressee is central).

Christian language as kerygmatic (a message about Christ and an appeal to believe in Him) looks, at first sight, like a combination of informative and imperative language; and the same could probably be said about Jōdo language. On the other hand, in primitive Buddhism and in Zen, language clearly functions as expression of the (higher) self and, at a closer look, also Jesus' language is fundamentally expression of His self-awareness. The language of primitive Christianity, however, appears to function on a double level: informative (the message to the world that "Christ is risen") and expressive (of the awareness that "Christ is alive in me"). These two different ways of speaking can be reconciled with one another, once one realizes that Jesus – like Zen – speaks on the level of the (higher) self, while Paul, for instance sometimes speaks on that same level (of identity with Christ) but more often speaks on the level of the human ego that reflects the self as an "other" (and for whom Christ is a "thou," an objective reality). In the latter case informative language is used, as if announcing objective facts, for what is in fact objectification of religious experience. Again, a similar thing would apply to most Pure Land language.

It is then, Yagi asserted, the common task of Pure Land believers and of Christians to purify their religious language, and to reformulate what has been transmitted in informative language into language expressive of the self.

In retrospect, it might have been better if an immediate response from a more mainline Christian perspective had been scheduled to this rather radical interiorization and individualization of the Christ event – an interpretation of Christianity that, in Professor Yagi's own words, wanted to express his own personal view and not to present this as representative of Protestant theological thinking. (It might have



spared us some later spirited interchanges that at times threatened to turn the symposium into an inner-Christian family spat). As it was, the response had been assigned to the Pure Land side in the person of Professor Ōmine Akira, who had himself recently published several probing essays on the Nenbutsu as a linguistic phenomenon and, more generally, wants to rethink religion as a problem of language.

After expressing his support for Yagi's endeavor to find meaning in language other than the informative variety, Ōmine immediately showed his philosophical bent by asking what the nature of language could be, if one accepts the three functions Yagi assigned to it. And is not "expressive language" too vague a term, he asked further, to cover both a totally subjective experience as "I have a headache" and the experience of the indwelling of a transcendent reality, like "Christ lives in me?" Further, is there any indication that Paul identified the Christ living in him with his own self? In *Shinshū*, he added, Amida is not seen as the self, but as a Thou with whom one is so familiar that the cold objective distinctions may sometimes, indeed, become blurred in an intimate exchange.

The term "expressive language," Ōmine went on to say, may fit some parts of Shinran's words, as for example the *Tannishō*, many of the letters, etc. (although it becomes a bit problematic where the systematic *Kyōgyōshinshō* is concerned), but the central language phenomenon in Pure Land Buddhism, namely the Nenbutsu itself, belongs to a different and deeper layer of language. It must be seen as a kind of *Ur-wort* that, instead of expressing Amida, is Amida himself. In it Amida does not express anything about himself but simply "names" himself, very much like poetry, whose fundamental working it is to name things.

The discussion that followed centered completely on the Nenbutsu, with an occasional side glance at the Jesus Prayer of the Eastern Church. The fundamental question was whether the Nenbutsu implies in the devotees a strong feeling for the person of Amida (comparable to the reference to the historical Jesus and the love for Him in Christian prayer). From the answers by the Pure Land participants, the following could be learnt. For Hōnen, the Nenbutsu implies a very personal link with Amida and the event of the fulfillment of his Vow. Hōnen, thus, sees the "namu" (the two characters) as "I entrust myself to" Amida Butsu (the four characters), while Shinran interprets the Namu Amida Butsu (the six characters combined) as the only real Amida, wherein

my “namu” (self) is implied. The recitation of the Nenbutsu can then be interpreted as the “arousal of self-awareness.”

Which feelings in the practitioner does the Nenbutsu express? Not loyalty, since Amida is not experienced as Lord, and not even as Father, but rather as Mother, and not a cry for mercy, but gratitude for mercy already shown, praise, contrition, and desire for Birth. To the question, whether in popular devotion the ancestors would not be the most personal element in the Nenbutsu, the answer was given that, indeed, the Buddha and the ancestors are intimately interwoven in the religiosity of the people, but that, through temple activity, a process of purification of the Nenbutsu of the people is being carried out.

### Session Three:

#### Fujimoto Kiyohiko, “On Salvation in Hōnen’s Pure Land Doctrine”

The picture which Professor Fujimoto, himself a priest of Hōnen’s Jōdoshū, sketched of Hōnen’s religiosity stood in sharp contrast with the tenor of Shigaraki’s presentation, and also with the later one by Professor Terakawa. Here, Pure Land doctrine appeared much more in line with what a Christian would spontaneously expect it to be and maybe also with the way it mostly functioned in history, especially at the level of the *bonpu*: ordinary (foolish, sinful) human beings.

Right from the beginning—in his first part, wherein he presented the high points of Hōnen’s life and quoted from Hōnen’s reflections at these moments—Fujimoto put the stress squarely on this theme: Hōnen’s religion is essentially a path for the *bonpu*. Reflecting on his desperate search for salvation while living (from the age of 24) in the Saga hermitage on Mount Hiei, Hōnen laments: “The Buddhist path consists of the ‘threefold learning’ (precepts, concentration, wisdom) but I do not make any headway in any of these three. How sad! Is there then no other path, besides these three, that would save people like me?” When he then finally gains the conviction, by reading Shan-tao at age 42, that there is such a path to save the *bonpu*, namely the Nenbutsu, and starts preaching that path, he says: “My intention in establishing the Pure Land School is to show that the *bonpu* can be born in the Pure Land.”

As a path for the *bonpu*, Hōnen’s faith was then characterized by the following three traits. The aim it proposes is not a formless *nirvāna* but a Pure Land with definite forms. The object of its devotion is not

an impersonal buddhahood but the *sambhoga-kāya* (reward-body), Amida, who is endowed with personality and a history, and enters into a very personal relationship of action and reaction, call and answer, with the believer. And the praxis of faith, the means to salvation, is Nenbutsu recitation. In the Nenbutsu all Amida's virtues and powers are contained. It therefore precedes everything else: faith itself (with its "threefold mind") results naturally from it. And as an easy practice, accessible to all, it brings all people to equality in salvation. Its recitation also brings the certainty of being saved, a conviction which then naturally blossoms into Birth in the Pure Land after death. For Hōnen the Nenbutsu does not convey the feeling of "oneness" with Amida but rather that of a personal relationship; believing is not becoming one with Amida but "believing together with Amida."

Hōnen presented salvation fundamentally as "elimination of suffering and bringing of bliss," and saw it as the ideal in life to come, by assiduous practice of the Nenbutsu, to the "Nenbutsu samādhi:" the experience of the realities implied in the Nenbutsu.

The respondent, Rev. Clark Offner, first asked the questions which any Christian, who comes into contact with Pure Land Buddhism, spontaneously feels arise in him- or herself. Questions that center on the historical "reality" of Dharmākara's Vow: Does a non-historical Vow make sense? From where did the Vow gain its power and efficacy? To whom did Dharmākara vow? He then further brought up several interesting points of discussion. What is the exact relationship between Śākyamuni and Amida, and between Amida and Hōnen or Shinran? (Why are, in Pure Land temples, the Hōnen or Shinran halls bigger than the Amida hall?) Are the Nenbutsu recitations of ordinary believers only acts of thanksgiving, as is stressed in Shinshū doctrine, or are they also petitionary and merit-producing? And, for that matter, why did Hōnen recite the Nenbutsu 60,000 times a day, if salvation is by faith?

Offner ended his intervention with two tantalizing reflections. Shinran is often compared to Luther, but could it not be that Hōnen's religious experience was actually nearer to that of Luther (notwithstanding the fact of their contrasting temperaments)? And what would have happened if Francis Xavier had chosen Amida as the name for the Christian God instead of Dainichi Nyorai, as he actually did but soon had to abandon?

In the ensuing discussion, the speaker, Professor Fujimoto, first

clarified a few points. Hōnen's doctrine on the Buddha-bodies is a relatively simple one: He concentrates on the reward body and does not have T'an-luan's and Shinran's distinction of "Dharma-body as suchness" and "Dharma-body as compassionate means." The idea of sin in Pure Land thought is different from the Christian one with its stress on human acts and responsibility; it rather denotes the ontological fact of "sinful existence in the birth-death cycle." In the relative size of the Amida hall and the Hōnen or Shinran hall, the typically Japanese "founder cult" plays a big role.

The further discussion then focused mainly on two points:

*1. The "Non-historicity" of Dharmākara, or the Role of Historicity in Religion.*

On this point one could feel the dialogue partners grope, as it were, for one another's "universe of meaning." From the Buddhist side it was pointed out that the usual (Western) idea of history cannot be the yardstick here, because it is narrowly anthropocentric and limits the content of history to "events within space and time," while there may be foundations of history that do not lie within time. The Dharmākara story of the Larger Sūtra precisely points to a supra-historical basis of history, so that, in a sense, the Larger Sūtra makes it possible for us to speak of the "historicity" of the Pure Land path. A different panelist explained that for Shinran the tale of Dharmākara signified the infinite net of causes and conditions needed to come to faith. From a somewhat different angle it was then said that for Mahāyāna Buddhism it does not matter whether or not it is based on words of the historical Buddha, since Buddhism does not necessarily mean "the doctrine of Śākyamuni."

It was then the turn of the Buddhist representatives to probe what the historicity of Christ exactly means for Christianity. But, as can be surmised from the report on Session Two, the Christian answer was not a monolithic one either. One theologian stressed the importance of the fact that revelation and salvation are really historically given: "Jesus' death and resurrection can be the basis of salvation only if they happened objectively, in space and time." And even John's gospel, while not to be relied on for historical data, carries the message: We meet God in Christ, the historical person of Jesus. Another theologian, while admitting that factuality is important, rather stressed the wisdom of not basing one's faith too much on factuality, since its historicity involves Christianity in many problems and, with regard to Christian-

ity, historicity cannot be taken in any positivistic sense. A third Christian participant then observed that, for him, the value of the historicity of the saving events lies in the utter facticity this implies: something not deducible or foreseeable by us humans and thus signifying an utterly gratuitous break-through of the divine into our human world (*zettai tariki*, absolute Other-Power).

## 2. *The Relationship of Hōnen and Shinran.*

Two differences between these two towering Pure Land figures came in for discussion. One: The already mentioned one, namely that Hōnen tends to stress “form” and the personal character of the relationship of Amida and believer, while Shinran tends to lean toward the Mahāyāna stress on the “formless” and the unity of Buddha and sentient being.

Two: While Shinran appears to share with Luther the tendency to put everything in faith and salvation on the side of God or Buddha, and seems anxious to eliminate all collaboration from the side of the mortal, Hōnen does not reduce everything to the working of Amida, but seems to admit collaboration from the human side with Other-Power. In Hōnen’s case, one could even say that, in the call-and-answer exchange between Amida and the *bonpu*, the first call comes from the *bonpu*’s recitation of the Nenbutsu, but for Shinran Amida’s call has absolute priority.

One of the Shinshū panelists then came out strongly in favor of seeing Hōnen and Shinran as fundamentally united in their thinking. In summary, his plea went as follows. In the context of the sectarian divisions in Japanese Buddhism it is customary to stress the differences between the two, most often with the formula, “for Hōnen the Nenbutsu is basic; for Shinran faith is basic.” But I do not believe in that traditional formula. For both of them the Nenbutsu is the right practice, “because corresponding to Amida’s Vow;” their faith is one: “the practice-faith (行信 *gyōshin*) of the Primal Vow;” and their historical achievement must be seen as one: Shinran added only reflective expression to Hōnen’s religious reformation. Thus, in a sense, Hōnen is the greater of the two.

The discussion ended with the suggestion, by a Christian representative, that the two different accents might need one another to keep the Pure Land movement balanced and healthy.

#### Session Four:

#### Momose Fumiaki, "The Understanding of Salvation in Christianity"

Rev. Momose, a Catholic professor of dogmatic theology, was assigned the task of introducing the idea of salvation as it lives in the Christian tradition. His choice of the following four elements from this rather vast subject-matter was determined by the problematics at issue in contemporary Catholic theology and, secondarily, by his surmise about which elements might be most relevant for a comparison with Buddhist ideas on the subject.

##### *1. The "Whereto" of Salvation: The Kingdom of God.*

The Kingdom of God, this central theme of Jesus' preaching, was presented here, with reference to the Jewish-Christian time scheme, as the realization of God's plan in creating the world: God wants his creatures to participate in His own (eternal) life. This is the fundamental Christian idea of salvation. God's Kingdom will be fully and finally realized in the parousia, but it is already here and developing (like a seed). For Christians (differently this time from the Jews), the decisive first fruits of the Kingdom in history and the warrant of its future completion is Christ's death-and-resurrection. In the metamorphosis of the suffering Jesus into the glorious body of the risen Christ the final "re-creation of all things," the general resurrection at the time of the parousia is already anticipated and on the way to realization. The speaker then suggested that this resurrection theme might represent a universal human desire for eternal life beyond death.

##### *2. Final Salvation and Corporeity.*

The resurrection doctrine rests, of course, on the Semitic idea of the intimate unity of body and soul. Eternal life does not mean an eternal soul escaping a mortal body, but a transformation of a natural body into a "spiritual body"—a term used by St. Paul in I Cor.15:44 and denoting precisely the entire human existence as participating in God's eternal life. Between the two bodies there is discontinuity (the "spiritual body" is newly created by God) but also continuity: the "spiritual body" is the fruit of the earthly body, its seed. Momose thereby stressed the positive evaluation of the body and its passions which this doctrine shows: "The body as the pivot of salvation.

### *3. Historicity and Social Character of Salvation.*

The Kingdom of God will be finally realized by God himself but must be prepared by us, human beings, in history. Here below our body is the mediator of our relationship with the world (our *in-der-Welt-sein*) and with the others (our sociality). Likewise, “worldliness” and sociality will be integral interiorized elements of our resurrected body.

### *4. Salvation of the World.*

Christian salvation is not simply an affair of individuals. Salvation of the individual cannot be thought of apart from salvation of humanity and of the world. Just as the resurrected body is prepared by one’s life on earth, so too the completion of God’s Kingdom is prepared by our efforts for the (initial) realization of the Kingdom of God on earth. This implies (and provides the motivation for) a mission of the Christian towards the world, a call to exert oneself for a better, more just, world.

The reaction from the Buddhist side to this Christian message of salvation may have reminded some of the Christians present of the reaction of the Athenians to Paul’s talk on the Areopagus, once he started talking about the resurrection of the dead (Acts 17:32). One Shinshū participant summed it up as follows: “This is a world to which I cannot relate. It sounds so totally alien to me that, on hearing of it, I cannot say anything more than: ‘Ah, is that so?’” The question then seems to be: Wherein does that impassable chasm between “Birth in the Pure Land” and “Eternal Life through Resurrection” lie, in the essence of the thing or merely in the diverging theological adornments? The ensuing discussion did not completely answer this question but the incisive remarks by the commentator, Taitetsu Unno, certainly provided plenty of hints.

Speaking out of his daily experience of the religiously plural world of young people at Smith College, Professor Unno began his comments by asking what was supposed to become of the original Israel once the disciples, gathered in the name of the risen Christ, proclaimed themselves the New Israel. In general, how are people who do not believe in Christ’s resurrection saved and, more specifically, why is dialogue among different branches of monotheism apparently more difficult than between any of them and Buddhism? In spite of the way Momose presented things, is it not true that Christians mostly locate the human dignity in the immortal soul and associate sin with the body, while

Eastern religions allot a greater role to the body in the quest for salvation? Can people today, in this scientific age, really believe in a “heavenly home,” and is not a “No Home” religion more adapted to the mentality of our contemporaries? And, finally, the speaker’s presentation of Christianity as a quest for salvation through a relationship with a transcendent Being situates Christianity in a polar opposition to Buddhism, which is not about relating to a Buddha but about becoming a Buddha, becoming aware of one’s inborn and indestructible Buddha Nature—something which makes dialogue extremely difficult.

In response to Unno’s criticisms, Momose first offered a few clarifications. Although the Church does not identify itself with the Kingdom of God but sees itself as its instrument, belief in having received God’s definitive revelation in Christ makes it difficult, indeed, to fully recognize the other religions. And it is true that the influence of Greek dualism has often led to misinterpretation of Paul’s “the flesh and the spirit,” and given rise to much depreciation of the body in the history of Christianity.

Soon afterwards the sub-theme of the Symposium, “Salvation and Enlightenment,” was explicitly broached for the first time by a Christian participant who wanted to know whether in the Pure Land school one speaks of *satori* or not. This again elicited markedly divergent answers. From the Shinshū side it was remarked that Shinran usually speaks of *shō* ( 証 ), which can also be read *satori* (although it is usually translated as “attainment”), but not in the sense of “obtaining *satori*” but rather of “coming into contact with *satori*,” the working of Amida’s wisdom. Anyway, the *bonpu*’s *avidyā* (basic ignorance) is thereby broken through. Without this implication, salvation by Amida would not be liberation in the Buddhist sense. The Jōdoshū representative, on the other hand, conceded that Amida’s working is one of compassion-qua-wisdom but pointed out that, on the side of the *bonpu*, salvation is rather the privilege of the fool, in accordance with Hōnen’s words: “The Path of Sages is deliverance from *samsāra* by pursuing wisdom to the very end; the Pure Land path is obtaining Birth into the Pure Land by returning to being a fool.”

There followed an inter-Christian intercalation concerning the idea of resurrection in Christianity and in the Greek mystery religions, salvation directly after death or at the general resurrection in the parousia, and the traditionality or newness of the idea that the Chris-



tian must try to change human society and world for the better. Subsequently, the question was brought up whether Pure Land and Kingdom of God could be seen as parallel notions. After a Christian had stressed the point that the Kingdom of God is seen as having the beginning of its realization here on earth, a Buddhist suggested that the Pure Land is thought of as an already perfected land, while the Kingdom of God is conceived dynamically as in the process of being built up.

Three questions, directed at Christianity by the commentator, were then turned back at Pure Land Buddhism. (1) Zen with its idea of Absolute Nothingness may be called a “No Home religion,” but can Amidism with its idea of the Pure Land possibly be considered that way? To which Unno’s answer: “For me the Pure Land is Absolute Nothingness; it exists only where and when the Nenbutsu is recited.” (2) Zen and Yoga certainly give the body a lion’s share in their spiritual path but is this not absent precisely from Pure Land Buddhism? This point was conceded. (3) Does not the Pure Land doctrine have the same difficulty with the salvation of the non-believer as Christianity? In other words: Can I be saved? The answer, in a nutshell, was the following: Indeed, there is no salvation without a positive relationship (*en*) with the Nenbutsu, but at some time in the future everybody will obtain that. In the Buddhist “long view” of time with its many rebirths, there is no need to get tense about the salvation of others, although for oneself one must share Hōnen’s view: “I must find salvation quickly, now!”

This answer then triggered the question in how far the Japanese really share that Indian long view of time. One answer was that Shinran does not speak of *rinne* (rebirths in the six realms), but of *ruten* (流転): floating in a world of illusion and sin, where one has no place to stand. Thereupon a Christian participant reflected, in turn, on how alien this view—a “defiled” world without true reality; a world that cannot be made better, but which one is able to endure thanks to the Nenbutsu—is to the biblical view of history.

#### Session Five:

#### Terakawa Shunshō, “The Meaning of Salvation in Shinran”

With this final paper by Professor Terakawa, the representative of the Higashi Honganji Branch, we returned to the topic already treated for us in the first session by Professor Shigaraki of the Nishi Honganji. It

is significant, then, that Terakawa's presentation, while not reduplicating in the least the contents of Shigaraki's paper, evinced a fundamentally identical line of interpretation of Shinran's religiosity – a line of interpretation which is probably the most influential one at present in both Nishi and Higashi and which found a suggestive expression in a casual reflection by Terakawa: "I feel unhappy with the characterization of Shinran's religion as a doctrine of salvation" (understood: "in view of the fact, so clear to me, that Shinran self-consciously stood in the mainline of Mahāyāna Buddhism").

Terakawa started out with the philological remark that Shinran seldom uses the word which may most closely correspond to the Western world "salvation," namely *kyūsai* (救済, also pronounced as *kusai* in the Buddhist context), and that among Shinran's terms the one that comes closest to it is *sesshu fusha* (摂取不捨 being grasped never to be abandoned).

From there Terakawa turned to Shinran's decisive "salvation" experience, his "conversion" when, at age 29 and after a 100-day struggle with himself at the Rokkakudō, he encountered Hōnen and surrendered to his Nenbutsu doctrine – or, more exactly, when he met with Amida's Primal Vow and entrusted himself to it. For him "conversion" thus meant, not the change from a morally sinful life to a "good life," nor from a worldly pattern of life to a spiritual one, but the turn-about from reliance on his own powers and on the merits of all kinds of religious practices to total reliance on the Power of the Primal Vow, as embodied in the Nenbutsu practice. This corresponds to the traditional Buddhist idea of *Tenne* (転依): a turn-about of one's standpoint in life (that whereon one bases one's life). Shinran thus awakened to the reality of the Primal Vow and felt his own reality being brought to life by the Power of the Vow. From that moment on, the meaning of life became "being born in the Pure Land" (*ōjō*), in other words, "living in the awareness that one will certainly be born in the Pure Land."

During his exile in Echigo province (1207-1214; from age 35 to 42), Shinran's spirituality deepened very much by sharing the life of the common people of that outlying province. He now turns more and more from the doctrine of the Meditation Sūtra and Shan-tao to that of the Larger Sūtra-Vasubandhu-T'an-luan line, and thereby the following tendency becomes very pronounced: rather than of salvation, he speaks of awakening to the fact of being given life by the Power of

the Vow; rather than of the Pure Land, he now speaks of *Nirvāṇa* (which he translates as “purity” and “truth”). And he now comes to see the Nenbutsu as the *Ur-word*: the only word, among all the illusory human words, that reveals reality and opens up the world of truth of Buddhism.

Professor Terakawa’s conclusion could be rendered as follows: Rather than simply standing in the Pure Land tradition, Shinran revises that tradition and endeavors to base himself on the true basic spirit of Mahāyāna Buddhism. With regard to salvation, then, rather than the special Pure Land characteristics (and terminology), the general Mahāyāna notion of “entering the number of those who are in the state of non-retrogression” is stressed.

The commentator, Professor Kokubu Keiji, clearly wanted to confront his understanding of Shinshū – an understanding gathered by a life-long study of Shinshū texts and association with Shinshū priests and believers – with that of Professor Terakawa. He argued that, from the way the Pure Land School defines itself, over against the “Path of Sages,” the path of enlightenment, as the easy path, the path of the *bonpu*, the Path of Other-Power, the idea of salvation must necessarily be the central notion for it. The difference between the two schools is based on their different views of the human being. For the Pure Land School, the human being is essentially a sinful being unable to work its own liberation and thus a “being to be saved.”

Salvation in the Pure Land School is ordinarily presented as obtainable through a relationship of “empathic correspondence” with Amida. This is expressed, for instance, in Shan-tao’s doctrine of the “three relationships” and is experienced in the Nenbutsu *samādhi*, but Terakawa appears to reject all that and to want to see the “great benefit” of faith in this life solely as the awareness of being in the Right Settled State (*shōjōju*). By the way, what does this exactly mean? Is it simply being promised Birth in the Pure Land or is it more than that?

And cannot *ōsō* and *gensō* be seen as logically distinguishable but one and the same in reality? Would not the “constant practice of Great Mercy” (one of the earthly benefits of a life of faith) fit in better in that case? And if *gensō* is to be seen as a grace after death, cannot “death” then be interpreted in a spiritual sense as the moment of faith?

The remaining time was taken up by Terakawa’s answers to Kokubu’s questions, so that no general discussion took place. Fundamentally, Terakawa reassured Kokubu that his view of Shinshū relig-

iosity cannot be called mistaken, since it mostly corresponds to the traditional interpretation within Shinshū itself. His answer mainly focused on two points:

*1. The Nature of the Right Settled State.*

In the younger Shinran this must have meant that “one’s Birth in the Pure Land is settled,” but for the older Shinran it clearly means “being settled in the realization (self-awareness) of Great *Nirvāṇa*,” of standing on the path to *Nirvāṇa*. As to the expression, “becoming a Buddha” (*jōbutsu* 成仏), in Shinran’s works it appears only in quotations and in the Tannishō.

*2. The relationship of ōsō and gensō ekō (outgoing and returning merit-transference).*

*Ekō* can be seen as another term corresponding to some extent to the idea of salvation. It means the concrete shape that Amida’s Mercy toward us takes. On this point too Kokubu follows a current interpretation which, however, cannot be substantiated by Shinran’s texts. Shinran sees both form of *ekō* as Amida’s grace to lead us from this world of suffering to *Nirvāṇa*. However, he never sees the two as one, but as two distinct workings of Amida’s grace. And taking “death” in a figurative sense is a modern *hineinlesen* into the texts. For Shinran himself, Birth happens after the literal death of the body. Only then one obtains the privileges of a Buddha, one of which is the playful but efficient use of expedient means to really benefit others. But, on the other hand, Shinran sees “constant practice of Great Mercy” and efforts to “teach others” (*geke shujō* 不化衆生) as attributes of the true disciple of the Buddha and as given by *ōsō ekō*. It thus seems clear that the subject of *gensō* cannot be the I, but must rather be one’s *zenjishiki* (善知識, precursors in faith).

### Session Six: General Discussion

I have the impression that this general discussion was especially rich in content. At the risk of becoming somewhat long-winded, therefore, I shall endeavor to include in this summary all the points taken up in this discussion.

At the beginning, the chairperson, Yagi Seiichi, asked the panelists for some more reflection on two points which had not received their

due share of attention in the earlier sessions: The nature of the situation to be saved from, and the role of awakening in faith. He himself then started the ball rolling by sketching for us the notions of sin and salvation in St. Paul. A first layer of the meaning of sin is a rather legal one: Transgression of the Law, failure to fulfill the obligations taken up in the Covenant with the just God. Further, however, faith becomes central in Paul's thought. What God asks from his people in his new Covenant with the people in Christ is faith: Awakening to the fact that one is risen to a new life in Christ, and giving up all self-justification to leave it in the hands of Christ. From the standpoint of such faith, Paul came to see his earlier concern with keeping the Law as self-affirming "miscellaneous practice," that draws one deeper and deeper into the power of sin and death. Therein a new concept of sin arises: Self-affirmation of the ego in blindness to the new life one received—something which might be close to Shinran's idea of sin.

Momose then complemented that picture of the idea of sin in Christianity, by pointing out that in the Jewish-Christian ideas of sin and salvation the stress is on society rather than on the individual, on the power of evil whereby society as a whole is wounded and which reveals itself especially as idolatry (absolutizing relative things) in the society's value judgments, as loss of community (so that salvation appears as recuperation of *koinonia*, the centrality of love), and as death (whereby salvation is seen as life beyond death).

Fujimoto remarked that, in the Pure Land tradition, the stress is on the sinfulness of the *bonpu* rather than on ignorance (as in general Buddhism), but that this sin-laden *bonpu* appears against the backdrop of more-than-individual evil, an "evil world," so that salvation is seen as a Pure "Land." He further pointed out that, in religion, "death" has two aspects: The borderline between this life and the after-life (strongly stressed in Hōnen) and dying and coming to life at each moment (also present in Hōnen in his stress on the importance of every moment of the everyday).

Terakawa first told us how he had been struck this time by the difference in the view of humanity between the Judaeo-Christian tradition, which sees it as a "people," and Buddhism which sees it as part of a limitless "sea of birth-and-death." He then remarked that Shinran defines the *bonpu* also as *ishō* (異生 a being separated from the others). Salvation then means being brought over from a life of

isolation and loneliness into the “House of the Buddha,” the “Family of the Pure Land.” A life of faith is essentially a life of *dōbō* ( 同朋 companions on the way). Still, there is a dialectics in the religious life between, on the one hand, “I am a sinner among sinners, saved together with them all” and, on the other, “Amida’s Vow is for me alone,” whereby I feel all sinners within myself, so that nobody is saved if I am not saved.

Finally, Unno stressed that in Buddhism salvation and awakening are the same: One is saved from perverted views, warped by the ego (called *hakarai* [contrivance] in Shinran) toward seeing things as they really are (and oneself as the impotent sinner one is).

Thereupon Ōmine steered the conversation in a different direction by asking another philosophical question: Where does the idea of salvation come from? For it is not a self-evident notion, especially not for people today who do not seem to feel the need for salvation. Another panelist then remarked that “salvation” is a very dialectic concept that implies the consciousness of human misery (a privation or anomaly in the human situation), which however can be had only over against the image of an ideal situation or belief in a high destiny of man. Could it be that the fact that our contemporaries do not feel the need for salvation indicates, not that they would feel no real human misery, but that they stopped believing in a high human destiny? Two participants then suggested that our ego-centered, information-centered civilization conceals the dimension of salvation from people’s eyes. Another one, however, opined that people still feel the need for salvation, the desire to be saved from meaninglessness, but have lost the sense for the words of salvation that originated in olden times and are repeated by the religious traditions. He concluded that we have to find new words with evocative power.

When Ōmine expressed his agreement with this last statement and iterated his conviction that the problem of religion is fundamentally one of language, he was asked to elaborate a bit more on his views about the salvific power of the Nenbutsu. This time he reminded us of Shan-tao’s parable of the “White Path between Two Rivers,” with the voice of Śākyamuni prompting the pilgrim from behind to go on and, up in front, the voice of Amida calling the pilgrim to him. He then posed the question: What is the relationship between these two voices? And answered himself as follows: Śākyamuni’s voice is the doctrine (human, expressive and informative language); Amida’s voice, below

it, is a primeval, originating word, that lies at the bottom of all language and makes it possible—a dimension which in Zen would be said to lie “beyond words,” and wherein there is no duality anymore between the word and what is expressed by it.

Terakawa then fell in with Ōmine, by pointing out that Buddhism traditionally distinguishes between profane language (words that pull us deeper and deeper into *samsāra*) and doctrine (words that prompt us toward *nirvāṇa*, words wherein the formless takes on form). Also, to the question why we are saved by listening to Śākyamuni’s words, the answer in the Jōdo School is: Because in them we listen to the direct voice of Amida. Pure Land faith is essentially the belief that such direct voice exists. Kokubu then suggested that, in Christianity, something similar could be expressed by saying: Hearing Christ’s voice in Jesus’ (human) words.

From the Christian side it was then pointed out that there appears to be a certain ambiguity in Shinran with regard to the human impotent sinfulness. Is this due to human nature or to the fact of living in this degenerate age (*mappō*)? In other words, did people in olden times have the power to liberate themselves, or was even Śākyamuni saved by Amida? The answer from the philosopher in the group was: It is a question of the unity of essence (eternity) and history (time); the essential sinfulness of human beings has become manifest historically in the *mappō*. From a more directly Buddhist point of view we were then referred to Śākyamuni’s words, “Rely on yourself; rely on the Dharma.” Whatever is exactly meant there by “Dharma,” it is in any event different from the self and can be interpreted as Other-Power. Even in Śākyamuni’s case, rather than saying that he grasped the truth, it is more fitting to say that the Dharma revealed itself in him. To present Śākyamuni as a solitary self (without a background) who got insight into the *pratītya-samutpāda* is making the Buddha very small. No, Buddhism cannot exist as a self-power path. Even for Zen there is no liberation by self-power, if this is understood as power of the ego.

The question of the difference between Hōnen and Shinran was then taken up again, *via* the general question: In how far is “setting up form” necessary for religion, especially religion of the *bonpu*? On this point Hōnen and Shinran appear to show opposite tendencies. Shinran appears to do away, as far as possible, with form, the personal and interpersonal (not to speak of folk-religious elements). How does this go together with Shinran wanting a religion for the *bonpu*?

The Hōnen representative first remarked that Hōnen, indeed, stressed form, but that he was at the same time very conscious that it must be form set up by Amida's Vow, and that form implies the danger that one sticks to it and does not see through it to the essence. From the Shinshū side it was then said that, fundamentally, also Shinran stands on the side of form, in contradistinction to the "no-form" of Zen, but is against Shan-tao's *shihō-rissō*, in so far as this implies substantialization of Amida and the Pure Land. For him, the Pure Land is a borderless land: it is there where actually *nirvāṇa* is at work and *avidyā* is broken through by a true word. The concrete images are then rather a hindrance.

A final question then came from the Christian side: Does Nenbutsu practice, the only Pure Land practice, involve any stepping from the religious into the profane world? The answer from the Shinsū side was: Nenbutsu practice implies awakening others to Amida's power and mercy, but it is not clear that profane reality is also involved therein. However, the real desire for Birth in the Pure Land implies the desire to return to a Buddha-less land to practice works of mercy there.