

Takamichi TAKAHATAKE, *Young Man Shinran: A Reappraisal of Shinran's Life* (SR Supplements 18). Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1987. xv + 228 pp., with an index and glossary. Paperback.

In view of the scarcity of literature on Shinran and his Shinshū School in non-Japanese languages, the author must be commended for writing this book in English and the Canadian Federation for the Humanities for providing funds for its publication. In this connection, it must be immediately remarked, however, that the author nowhere mentions any intention of wanting to introduce Shinran to a Western audience, and rather gives the impression of seeing his work, although written in English, directly in the context of current Shinran studies, which are still for 99 percent conducted in Japanese. This may account also for the fact that he does not quote the already existing biography of Shinran in English by Alfred Bloom (1968).

The most admirable trait of this volume is its very instructive final section, entitled "Glossary, Bibliography, Appendix and Index" and comprising more than one third of its pages (pp. 147–228). This is an exemplary piece of conscientious scholarship which puts the non-Japanese reader squarely in the author's debt, since he provides us here with a generally very reliable guide to Japanese readings and writings of this tricky Buddhist material. This may be the main value even of the extensive bibliography which, by itself, has the disadvantage of putting works on Shinran together with literature of a more general nature and, on the other hand, is far from exhaustive with regard to literature on Shinran in Western languages. For the Appendix, which offers "An Annotated Chronological Table of Shinran's Life" and further useful tables on Shinran's writings, Shinran's contemporaries, etc., I have nothing but grateful praise.

It is, however, this same Chronological Table that puts in evidence the almost insurmountable difficulty of the main task the author has set himself: to write a credible story of Shinran's life up to his 42nd year (1214, the year Shinran moves from the Okuriku to the Kantō area). The more or less reliable data on this period fill, namely, only three of the nineteen pages of the Chronological Table. This invites a closer look at what the author wants to accomplish.

Takahatake states that he wants to make a contribution to the study of Shinran's personality by overcoming the traditional dichotomy of purely historical and purely religious-philosophical studies, and by focusing on "Young Man Shinran." He deplors the fact that the Shin tradition has "concentrated its efforts on the study and transmission of Shinran's mature thought," with neglect of "Shinran's early life as the formative years in the history of a religious leader" (p. xii). In view of the fruitfulness of the post-war plethora of studies on the young Hegel, the young Marx, etc., we must applaud this intention. It can be inferred that it was mainly E. Erikson's *Young Man Luther* that stood as a model, not only from the title but also from the Conclusion where, with special reference to Erikson, Shinran's family background is stressed as his "curse." The problem is, of course, whether the scarce historical data

suffice to carry such analysis.

While it may be true that Takahatake's book does not break much new ground in the biographical study of Shinran, the fact remains that he provides the reader of English with a view into the state of these studies and with many details not offered in Bloom's work. Personally, I especially appreciated his summarizing evaluation of Shinran's personality (p. 123), the stress on Saichō's influence on Shinran (pp. 27–30), the interpretation of Shinran's great devotion to Shōtoku Taishi (pp. 31–32 and 34–38), the comparison of the Kamakura figures, Nichiren, Dōgen, and Hōnen (pp. 114–120) and, no matter how minor this may seem, the insightful remark that "there are no statements in Shinran's works which glorify nature" (p. 91).

Now a word on the "flies in the ointment." There are not a few of them and they can mostly be attributed to the author's imperfect command of English. Rather than trying to list the most annoying examples, which space does not permit, I want to single out as especially regrettable the English translation of titles of some of Shinran's works and of Shinshū terminology in general—a rendering that often does not permit any insight into the meaning of the original. Take for example "opportunity of profound faith" for *ki no jinshin* 機の深心 (p. 101), "true opportunity for the wicked person" for *akunin shōki* 悪入正機 (p. 104) or "Hymns on righteousness, imitative, degenerate" as a translation of Shinran's *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 正像末和讃 (p. 208). It would also have been helpful if the author had told us where the translations of the Shinran quotes come from. This is only to say that, in this reviewer's opinion, the book most certainly deserves a second edition wherein these peccadillos are set right.

REFERENCE

BLOOM, Alfred

1968 *The Life of Shinran Shōnin: The Journey to Self-Acceptance*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

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